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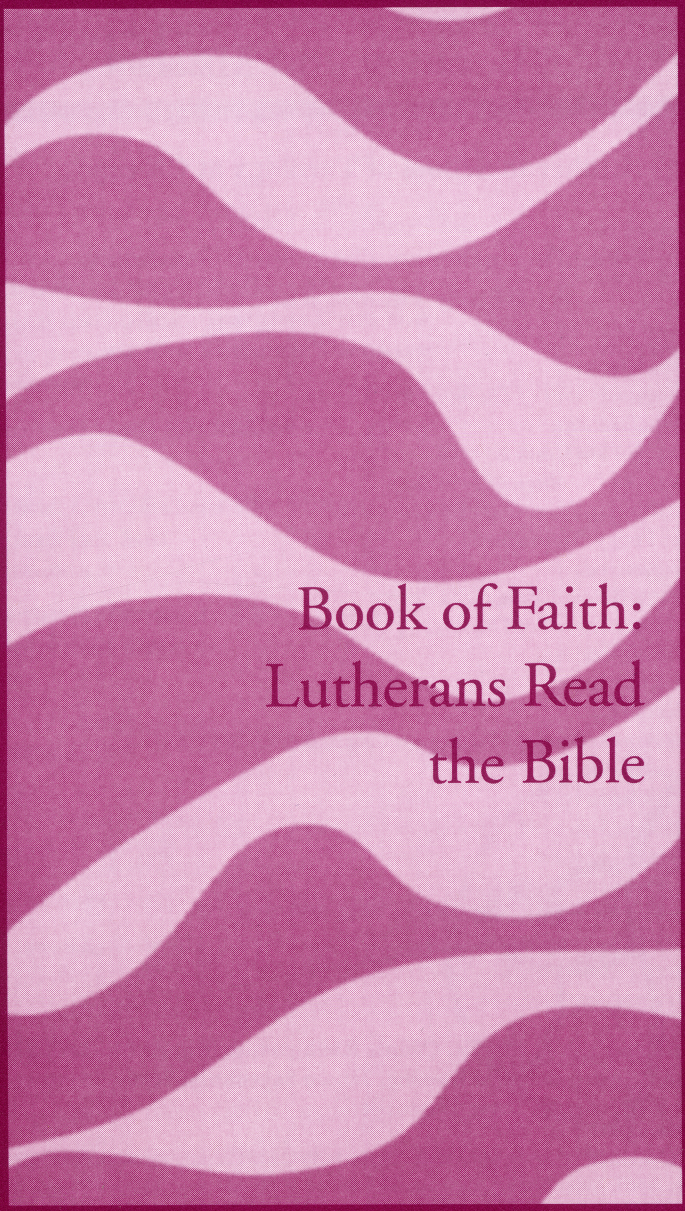

Book of Faith: Lutherans Read the Bible

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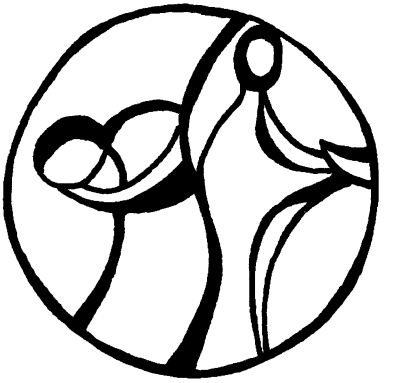
Contents

Drawings by Sara Olson-Smith



Book of Faith: Lutherans Read the Bible

I was part of an ELCA consultation in January on the above-mentioned topic. This initiative is in response to a memorial from the North Carolina Synod and also responds in part to the divergent and puzzling ways in which ELCA Lutherans read the Bible in the recent debates about homosexuality. There were sixty or more of us there—pastors, teachers, associates in ministry, churchwide officials, Augsburg Fortress representatives, and lay people—tossing around ideas about Lutheran hermeneutics, the Bible in worship and preaching, the Bible in the training of the young, and the like. It was a warm-up for a five-year initiative aimed to foster Bible reading in the ELCA and to clarify how we might read the Bible for and from its center. So: Lutherans, read the Bible! And: Here's how Lutherans should read the Bible! The articles in this issue focus on how Luther read the Bible to construct his theology and on the Bible itself.

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen explains in detail the new perspective on Luther developed by Tuomo Mannerma and other Finnish theologians. Luther's understanding of salvation, in this view, can be expressed not only in terms of the doctrine of justification but also in terms of Christ's real presence in us. Justification for Luther means a "real-ontic" participation in God through the indwelling of Christ in the heart of the believer through the Spirit. Luther himself did not make a distinction between forensic and effective justification, but he argued that justification includes both. Through grace the sinner is declared righteous, and through "gift" a person is made righteous. Therefore, justification means not only sanctification but also good works. The new perspective on Luther has helped recover pneumatological resources in the Reformer's theology. Hence spirituality is an essential part of Lutheran theology and piety. Because Christians are living in the world they are involved with people who are sinful and less than perfect. Therefore, the church of Christ in the world cannot be anything else except a hospital for the incurably sick.

In response to Kärkkäinen's address, given at the 2006 Leadership Conference at LSTC, **Lisa Dahill** notes that many people interested in spirituality do not turn first to Luther. Lutheran theology and spirituality since the Reformation have shunned pieties of glory, reminding other Christians that the

greatest saint is still always a sinner. But the Finnish Luther research allows Lutherans to speak from the heart of our own tradition about sanctification, participation in the very life of God, and union with the indwelling Christ. The primary gift of this approach is a renewed and robust Lutheran conception of the relationship between the believer and Jesus Christ. Jesus intends our union with himself to be a love pervading our entire being. This response to Kärkkäinen, however, challenges the idea that every person already knows how to love oneself. It is because of a lack of authentic self-love that people fall into the compulsion of narcissism. We are unable to pay attention to Jesus in our own experience because we think we should transcend ourselves and be solely oriented to others' needs. The heart of the practice of discernment is radical: God's deepest desire is always my health, liberation, and salvation—and that of the world.

Richard D. Swanson retells the infancy narratives of Jesus, drawing on his own experience of performing the Gospel of Luke and endeavoring to reconstruct these stories in their Jewish milieu. Name etymologies play a role in understanding Jewish names in the story (note the spellings Mariam for Mary and Elisheva for Elizabeth), as do kinship, seen through the lens of Native American culture. What would Mary say were she to look on the ways we have accommodated our hopes to a world that insists on remaining upside down? Luke knew that the messiah could be born only in the depths of disaster. The story of Mary and Elizabeth invents us as people who have a family that holds us as we demand that God's promises be kept, waits with us as we wait, and works with us as we work to turn whatever we can right side up.

Jeffrey K. Mann investigates Luther's treatment of the Holy Spirit in regard to justification and sanctification. Faith is something done for us and within us by the Spirit of God, but the believer is not a passive agent. Faith does not save, but it is the means through which God grants salvation. The *grace* one receives from God is the change in one's status before God. The *gift* is the internal change, through faith, which assists the person in overcoming sin. It is gratitude to God for what Christ did on Calvary that is the basis of sanctification. Luther was convinced that a religious message that did not proclaim the complete forgiveness of sins without any human work or merit could not produce the genuine and free acts of love that come from believing the gospel. Luther's desire to glorify God in his discussion of sanctification has been used to justify moral apathy or quietism among some of his followers. Luther told his congregation in Wittenberg that he would stop preaching in their church if he did not witness greater fruit among the faithful. There is a danger that the law will lose its accusing nature and simply become advocacy for the social agenda of the church.

Paul S. Chung discusses the relationship between Christian mission and non-Christian cultures and religions and the need for a new mission paradigm. For Luther the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit are the basis for the mission of the Son and the Spirit for the world. Luther's Trinitarian theology calls for prophetic *diakonia,* discipleship, and willingness to conform to the prophetic way of Jesus Christ in the world. Luther's understanding of people as the created coworkers of God encourages us to take seriously the liberating dimension of Christian mission by challenging the injustice of the socioeconomic order. God cooperates with human beings for the preservation of creation while rejecting this cooperation in regard to justification. In modern mission studies, the relationship between Christianity and world religions has become a major topic. Several proposals on this question suggest a universal relativizing of all different religions and faith orientations. Luther reflected on the irregular grace of God as seen in the other. Christian mission is ultimately a witness to the work of the Triune God in Jesus Christ for the sake of the world. Within the framework of God's mission, the other religions should be recognized as signposts in preparation for the coming of God's eschatological salvation announced by the gospel of Jesus Christ. God's irregular voice from religious others helps enrich and deepen the universal message of the gospel.

As several pointed out at the ELCA consultation, a five-year initiative on the Bible does not mean that we should stop reading the Bible after five years. Gerhard Ebeling once pointed out that church history is in many respects a history of how the church has interpreted the Bible. Future church history will be shaped by the same question—how we interpret the Bible and how often we read it. Henry David Thoreau remarked that he knew of no book that had such universal favor and so few readers. We hope and expect that writers in *Currents* in the next five years will have much to say on the topic "Bible: Book of Faith." Consider this an invitation to you loyal readers to join the discussion on these pages.

Ralph W. Klein, Editor

"Drinking from the Same Wells with Orthodox and Catholics": Insights from the Finnish Interpretation of Luther's Theology

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A new perspective on the Lutheran doctrine of justification

Traditionally, it has been claimed that the main dividing issue between Roman Catholics and Lutherans is the differing interpretation of the doctrine of justification by faith, and between Western Churches (both Roman Catholic and Lutheran) and Eastern churches the irreconcilable breach between understanding salvation in terms of justification and *theosis* respectively.

With regard to the first conflict, it has become a mantra that for Lutherans justification is a forensic action, God declaring the sinner righteous in God's sight, whereas for Roman Catholics it is making the person righteous. With regard to the latter impasse, textbooks argue that for Lutherans the concept of *theosis* is almost blasphemous: first, it comes close to a "theology of glory," second, it entertains the problematic view of human-divine synergy, and third, it champions the idea of the freedom of will. For Catholics, traditionally, the concept of *theosis* has been more acceptable for the simple reason that their understanding of salvation includes becoming righteous (sanctification), and they have never eschewed talk about good works as an integral part of salvation.

Beginning in the late 1970s, under the leadership of Tuomo Mannermaa, now emeritus professor of ecumenics at the University of Helsinki, the Mannermaa School has offered an alternative reading of Luther's theology. Significantly, the impetus for this new reading of Luther's theology came as a result of the dialogue between the Lutheran and Eastern Orthodox churches, or, more precisely, between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Lutheran Church of Finland. This new paradigm has also been influential in the longstanding Roman Catholic–Lutheran conversations on justification and the resulting Joint Declaration (1999).[1]

1. The publications of the Mannermaa School are written mainly in German (and Scandinavian languages). Not until 1998 was the first English monograph, a collection of essays by Finnish Luther scholars edited by two leading American Lutheran experts, offered to the English-speaking world. It was

To get a better understanding of what some of the key ideas of the new perspective on Luther are, let me just list the basic theses as I understand them.

1. Luther's understanding of salvation can be expressed not only in terms of the doctrine of justification but also in terms of Christ's real presence in us or, with the help of the ancient concept of *theosis*, deification. Thus, while there are differences between the Eastern and Lutheran understandings of soteriology, over questions such as free will and understandings of the effects of the Fall, Luther's own theology cannot be set in opposition to the ancient Eastern idea of deification.

2. For Luther, the main idea of justification is Christ present in faith (*in ipsa fide Christus adest*). Justification for Luther means a "real-ontic" participation in God through the indwelling of Christ in the heart of the believer through the Spirit.

3. In contrast to the theology of the Lutheran Confessions, Luther does not make a distinction between forensic and effective justification but rather argues that justification includes both. In other words, in line with Catholic theology, justification means both declaring righteous and making righteous.

4. Therefore, justification means not only sanctification but also good works, since Christ present in faith makes the Christian "a christ to the neighbor" as Luther puts it. In a real sense, Luther can be regarded as a theologian of *love*, not only of faith (and justification).

5. While there is no denying the importance of Christology and Trinity to Luther's doctrine of justification, the new perspective has also helped recover pneumatological resources in the Reformer's theology that are not usually acknowledged. In other words, spirituality is an essential part of Lutheran theology and piety.

An important methodological remark needs to be made here. For the Mannermaa school, the distinction between "Luther's theology" (the theology of the Reformer himself) and "Lutheran theology" (the subsequent theology of the Confessional Documents of the Lutheran Church, as drafted under the leadership of Philip Melanchthon) is vital. Finnish scholars argue that one of the weaknesses of the older Luther research, as conducted mainly in the German academy, is the neglect of this vital distinction. Indeed, one of the main motifs of the new perspective is to dig into core themes of Martin Luther's own theology and not hasten to read Luther in light of his later interpreters or *vice versa*.

My purpose in this presentation is twofold. First, I offer an exposition of key ideas of the new perspective on Luther's theology as advocated by the Finnish school and suggest an ecumenically more fruitful approach to the question of salvation based on the new perspective. Second, I reflect on some important implications for spirituality and faith from this new outlook, focusing on two main issues, mentioned under points 4 and 5 above: the implications of Luther's theology for practical Christian life, including the love of the neighbor and Christian community, and the significance of the pneumatological orientation.

Let me add an autobiographical note. I was trained theologically by Professor Mannermaa and his students, many of whom have become well-known theologians especially in German-speaking academia but more recently also in the English-speaking world. However, I am not a member at the Mannermaa school even though I serve at the University of Helsinki in the capacity of Privatdozent of Ecumenics. My main research interests lie elsewhere. Yet, I remain an interested observer and a friendly critic of developments in Luther studies.[2]

Justification as participation in God and the presence of Christ in the Spirit

In the new interpretation of Luther's theology, justification may be described in at least three interrelated ways: participation in God, the presence of Christ, and *theosis*. Luther also occasionally used other images such as "union with God," *perichoresis*, the famous Eastern term, and others.

Christ's real presence in a believer is the leading motif in Luther's soteriology. A classic formulation can be found in his *Lectures on Galatians* (1535; *WA* 40:228–29). Speaking about "true faith," Luther says, "it takes hold of Christ in such a way that Christ is the object of faith, or rather not the object, but so to speak, the One who is present in the faith itself. . . . Therefore faith justifies because it takes hold of and possesses this treasure, the present Christ." For the Mannermaa school, the leading idea in Luther's theology of salvation and justification is Luther's insistence on "Christ present in faith"—that Christ in both his person and his work is present in faith and is through this presence identical with the righteousness of faith. The Lutheran tradition holds to the idea of God living in the believer (*inhabitatio Dei*).

Justification for Luther means primarily participation in God through the indwelling of Christ in the heart through the Spirit. Through faith, a human being also participates in the characteristics of God, or, as Luther often says, of the Word of God. This participation means putting down those human traits that are contrary to the righteousness of God and participating instead in the goodness, wisdom, truthfulness, and other characteristics of God. Luther expresses this truth by saying that God becomes truthful, good, and just in the person when God makes the person truthful, good, and just. Never is there reason to boast, though, since even the presence of Christ and its consequences are always hidden in the Christian.

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titled *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998). 2005 saw the publication of the English translation of the groundbreaking work by Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005; orig. 1979 in Finnish and later in German). A succinct introduction to the methodological orientations and the main results of the Mannermaa school can be found in Mannermaa's essay "Why is Luther so Fascinating? Modern Finnish Luther Research," in *Union with Christ*, 1–20. For a synopsis, see also Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2004), chap. 4.

2. For more of my critical comments on some of the issues discussed here see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "Salvation as Justification and *Theosis*: The Contribution of the New Finnish Luther Interpretation to Our Ecumenical Future," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 45 (Spring 2006): 74–82. For my contributions on the various aspects of the topic with detailed bibliographical notes, see Kärkkäinen, *One With God*; "Justification as Forgiveness of Sins and Making Righteous: The Ecumenical Promise of a New Interpretation of Luther," *One in Christ* 37 (April 2002): 32–45; "The Ecumenical Potential of Theosis: Emerging Convergences between Eastern Orthodox, Protestant, and Pentecostal Soteriologies," *Sobornost/Eastern Churches Review* 23, no. 2 (2002): 45–77; "The Holy Spirit and Justification: The Ecumenical Significance of Luther's Doctrine of Justification," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 24 (2002): 26–39; "Salvation as Justification and Deification: The Ecumenical Potential of a New Perspective on Luther," in *Theology between West and East: Honoring the Radical Legacy of Professor Dr. Jan M. Lochman*, ed. Frank Macchia and Paul Chung (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002), 59–76.

Justification as *theosis*

Luther's view of justification can be called *theosis,* according to the ancient doctrine of the Fathers with whom Luther agreed. Justification and deification mean the "participation" of the believer in Christ, which, because Christ is God, is also a participation in God. This participation is the result of God's love. Human beings cannot participate in God on the basis of their own love; rather, God's love effects their deification. Christian participation in Christ thus is the result of the divine presence in the believer as love. Following Athanasius and others, this is a participation in the very *ousia* of God. There is what the Mannermaa school calls a "real-ontic" unity between Christ and the Christian, although the substances themselves do not change into something else. What makes the claim of this new paradigm unique—and controversial

especially with regard to the established canons of German Luther interpretation—is that the idea of Christ's presence is "real-ontic," not just a subjective experience or God's "effect" on the believer, as the neo-Protestant school has exclusively held.

Finnish scholar Simo Peura, who has written a full-scale monograph on the idea of deification in Luther, shows that deification is an integral motif of Luther's theology. One explicit passage comes from Luther's *Sermon on the Day of St. Peter and St. Paul* (1519; *WA* 2:247–48): "For it is true that a man helped by grace is more than a man; indeed, the grace of God gives him the form of God and deifies him, so that even the Scriptures call him 'God' and 'God's son.'" Another example is in Luther's Christmas sermon of 1514 (*WA* 1, 28, 25–32): "Just as the word of God became flesh, so it is certainly also necessary that the flesh become word. For the word becomes flesh precisely so that the flesh may become word. In other words: God becomes man so that man may become God. Thus power becomes powerless so that weakness may become powerful. The logos puts on our form and manner."

Another way to look at the doctrine of justification and its parallels with the Eastern doctrine of *theosis* in Luther is to focus on Luther's doctrine of God. Highly significant is the fact that for Luther the divinity of the Triune God consists in that "God gives" himself. The essence of God, then, is identical with the essential divine properties in which he gives of himself, called the "names" of God: Word, justice, truth, wisdom, love, goodness, eternal life, and so forth. As Mannermaa describes it, "The *theosis* of the believer is initiated when God bestows on the believer God's essential properties; that is, what God gives of himself to humans is nothing separate from God himself."[3] A Christian is saved when the "spiritual goods" or the names of God are given to her. God is, as Luther says, the whole beatitude of his saints; the name of God donates God's goodness, God himself, to the Christian; the spiritual goods are

3. Mannermaa, "Why is Luther so Fascinating?" 10.

God's gifts in the Christian. Not only is the human being saved when God gives himself to the Christian; in that very same act, God proves to be the real God when he donates his own being to humanity. In the words of Peura, "Thus, God realizes himself and his own nature when he gives his wisdom, goodness, virtue, beatitude, and all of his riches to the Christian, and when a Christian receives all that he gives."[4]

Christ as grace and gift: justification as declaring righteous and making righteous

In light of these interpretations of Luther's theology, it will not come as a surprise that the Mannermaa school posits a radical difference between Luther's own theology and that of subsequent Lutheranism. Their thesis is that Luther's own theology has the potential of creating a common foundation in relation to both Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. Peura puts it succinctly:

> [The Formula of Concord] and modern Lutheran theology have not correctly communicated Luther's view of grace and gift . . . justification includes gift in its broader sense, that is, in its effective aspect as the renewal of the sinner (*renovatio*). This aspect belongs integrally to Luther's view of justification, and it is not a mere consequence of forensic imputation. Justification is not a change of self-understanding, a new relation to God, or a new ethos of love. God changes the sinner ontologically in the sense that he or she participates in God and in his divine nature, being made righteous and "a god."[5]

The relationship between effective and forensic justification comes to light in Luther's theology in his usage of the two classic concepts of "grace" (*gratia,* favor) and "gift" (*donum*). The former denotes that the sinner is declared righteous (the forensic aspect) and the latter that the person is made righteous (the effective aspect). Even at the beginning of his career, in his Lectures on Romans (1515/16), this distinction appears. Following the terminology of Augustine and the medieval tradition, on the basis of Romans 5:15, Luther expresses the opinion that is totally in line with the mainline Roman Catholic teaching but that has been lost sight of in later Lutheranism (*LW* 25:306; *WA* 56, 318, 28–29): "But 'the grace of God' and the 'gift' are the same thing, namely, the very righteousness which is freely given to us through Christ." In other words, Luther found it most important already in those early years to relate grace and gift closely to each other and to understand them both as given to the Christian through Christ. Thus we can see that grace and gift together constitute the donated righteousness of a Christian.

Furthermore, grace and gift are given not only through Christ but in Christ and with Christ. Even when he conceptually makes a distinction between the grace and the gift, Luther always keeps them together. He maintains that grace and gift are in Christ and that they become ours when Christ is "poured" into us: "Grace actually means God's favor, or the good will which in himself he bears toward us, by which he is disposed to pour Christ and the Holy Spirit with his gifts into us" (*WA DB* 7, 9, 10–14).

Consequently, for Luther, the distinction between effective and forensic righteousness is not an issue as it has been in subsequent Lutheran doctrine. What is

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4. Simo Peura, "Christ as Favor and Gift: The Challenge of Luther's Understanding of Justification," in *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 50; *WA* 4, 278, 24–35.

5. Peura, "Christ as Favor and Gift," 47–48.

crucial to Luther's own doctrine of justification is the distinction between two kinds of righteousness—the righteousness of Christ and the righteousness of the human being. The first type Luther defines as the alien righteousness that is being infused to us from outside; it is that kind of righteousness that Christ is in himself, and it is the righteousness of faith. This righteousness of Christ is what makes the human being just. Furthermore, this first type is given without our own works, solely on the basis of grace—the famous *sola gratia*. Human activity is completely excluded in this process. The infusion of this righteousness is more than mere forensic imputation, though. It also means the realization of the righteousness of Christ in the believer.

The other kind of righteousness is given righteousness, in this sense human righteousness. Luther calls it "our" righteousness. It is a result of the first kind and makes it effective, "perfects" it. Even though it is called "our" righteousness, its origin and source are outside the human being, in the righteousness of Christ. Christ's righteousness is the foundation, cause, and origin of human righteousness. Christ present in faith "absorbs all sin in a moment," since the righteousness of Christ infused into the human heart is "infinite"; still, the power of sin and death is deteriorating day by day but is not fully deteriorated until death.

The infusion of Christ's righteousness into the heart of the believer begins the process of nullifying the power of sin and transforming the fallen nature. The emerging good deeds have nothing to do with salvation because the believer is already justified. The only purpose of the good deeds now is the good of fellow people. This puts the role of good works in proper light and brings us to the importance of love in Luther's theology.

Luther as the theologian of love

So far I have established that, according to the Helsinki school, the leading idea in Luther's theology is his insistence on "Christ present in faith." Justification or deification means the participation of the believer in Christ, which, because Christ is God, is also participation in God.

This can be expressed also in another way in light of Luther's overall theology: Christian participation in Christ is the result of the divine presence in the believer as *love*. This insight takes us into a very important practical implication having to do with the centrality of the notion of love in Luther's theology. His understanding of the nature of God's love and his view of the real presence of Christ in the believer reveal his understanding of neighbor love and the nature of Christian community. Insofar as the relationship to God is based not on human love but on the reception of God's love in faith, works of love are released to serve the needs of other people.

In order to grasp the meaning of this, we need to revisit the question of the center of Luther's theological and spiritual thinking. Usually, Luther is looked upon as the theologian of justification by *faith*, and the fact is often neglected that he was also a theologian of *love*, both divine and human. His distinctive understanding of the nature of God's love and the power of the love poured into the believer's heart as a result of Christ's real presence in the Christian offers an exciting perspective on human relationships and neighbor love.

What also makes his view so appealing is that Luther's understanding of neighbor love is integrally connected with his theology, especially the doctrine of salvation and Christology. Whereas in current systematic theology ethics and theology

have drifted apart, in Luther ethics, social life, and neighbor love can never be divorced from the core of his theology. He says:

> All works except for faith have to be directed to the neighbor. For God does not require of us any works with regard to himself, only faith through Christ. That is more than enough for him; that is the right way to give honor to God as God, who is gracious, merciful, wise and truthful. Thereafter, think nothing else than that you do to your neighbor as Christ has done to you. Let all your work and all your life be turned to your neighbor. Seek the poor, sick, and all kinds of wretched people; render your help to those; surrender your life in various kinds of exercises. Let those who really need you enjoy you, insofar that is possible with regard to your body, possessions, and honor. (*WA* 10 I, 2, 168, 18–26, Advent Postil, 1522; my translation)

It can legitimately be said that the leading motif of Luther's theology can be found in the last thesis of his *Heidelberg Disputation* (*HDT*) in which he outlines his "theology of the cross." The leading idea there, and in much of Luther's theology, is the difference between two kinds of love: *amor Dei* and *amor hominis,* God's love and human love. The 28 theses, in fact, culminate in this distinction. Human love is always basically selfish, and it fools men and women to seek God with good works and human wisdom. This perverted love in the final analysis renders men and women incapable of receiving God's grace.

Human love is oriented toward objects that are inherently good, where self-love defines the content and the object of the love. Men and women love something that they believe they can enjoy. For Luther, love as defined by medieval scholastic theology provided an example of this kind of love.

God loves in a way opposite to human love: "The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it . . . Rather than seeking its own good, the love of God flows forth and bestows good" (*HDT* 28). Luther sometimes calls God's love *amor crucis:* "This is the love of the cross, born of the cross, which turns in the direction where it does not find good which it may enjoy, but where it may confer good upon the bad and needy person" (*HDT* 28). It is born out of the cross of Christ and is manifested through God's gracious works in the world.

Christian as "Christ" to the neighbor

Now, to the implications for neighbor love. According to Luther, we can of course do nothing for our salvation, but our neighbors need our work, that is, our love: "Every man is created and born for the sake of others" (*WA* 21, 346). For if I do not use everything that I have to serve my neighbor, I rob him of what I owe him according to God's will. A Christian, then, becomes a "work of Christ," and even more, a "Christ" to the neighbor; the Christian does what Christ does. The Christian identifies with the suffering of his or her neighbor. Christ is the subject of good works—in other words, the real presence of Christ in the believer.

The presence of Christ for Luther is not only "spiritual," or *extra nos* (outside of us), but also *in nobis* ([with]in us), in the language of the Mannermaa school, in a "real-ontic" way. In fact, Luther says: "If Christ abides in us through faith, then we are one with him" (*HDT* 26) and "Christ lives in us through faith" (*HDT* 27).

According to Luther, "since Christ lives in us through faith . . . he arouses us to do good works through that living faith in his work, for the works which he does are the fulfillment of the commands of God given us through faith" (*HDT* 27). The Christian identifies with the suffering of the neighbor. As *donum* (gift) Christ gives himself

in a real way to the Christian to make him or her participate in the divine nature. To emphasize the union between Christ and the Christian, Luther sometimes even borrows expressions from the mystics, as in his reference to the Song of Songs in the Heidelberg Thesis 27.

For Luther the Golden Rule, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you" (Mt 7:12 NIV) is both a natural law and the principle of Scripture. As a natural law, it is also a spiritual law. The Golden Rule is the guiding principle of our relationship both to God and to other persons. The requirement of the Golden Rule with regard to God means giving God all the honor and praise that God deserves and wills—in other words, returning to God that which fallen human nature wants to rob of God. Thereafter the human being is ready to give the neighbor what she also wants herself.

For a human being it is not possible to fulfill the requirements of the law. Christ is the one who fulfills the law. All of the commandments of the Second Tablet are to be found in love:

> Love is the common virtue of all virtues, their fulfillment and source. Love feeds, gives drink, clothes, consoles, prays, makes free, helps, and saves. What do we say then? It gives itself, body and life, possessions and honor and all its power internally and externally to meet the desperate need of the neighbor for his benefit. It does not hold back anything either from a friend or fiend with which it can serve other people. Therefore, no virtue can be compared to it, neither is it possible to describe or name any specific work for it as with regard to other virtues, which are actually partial virtues, such as purity, charity, patience, and goodwill, etc. Love does everything . . . so much so that Saint Paul says that all the commandments are included in this summa: love your neighbor. (*WA* 17 II, 100, 26–101, 4, *Lent Postil,* 1525; my translation)

Luther is critical of an interpretation of the Golden Rule that exhorts one to love oneself first in order to be able to love another. On the contrary, Luther believes that every person already knows how to love himself; what is lacking is the capacity and desire to love another person, especially when nothing good is to be expected in return. The natural tendency of human love is to look for good things for oneself rather than for others. According to Luther, the commandment to love oneself first as a presupposition of love toward one's neighbor "is one of the things by which we are led away from love as long as we do not fully understand it. For as long as we first use each good for ourselves, we are not concerned about our neighbor" (*LW* 25:512).

Against the tradition, Luther also maintains that good motives are not enough for true neighbor love. Love has to take a practical form. The criterion for true love of the neighbor is nothing short of the need of that person. According to the Golden Rule, each and every person is capable in principle of knowing what the other person needs by placing herself in that other person's situation and thinking of what she would want others to do for her. Consequently, it is not enough to have the right motivation if the appropriate act of love is missing. Luther states two requirements for a loving deed: the person of the doer should be good, and the need of the receiver has to be fulfilled. In the final analysis, they merge into a single principle, because the goodness of the deed always depends on whether it is helpful to the other person and is not motivated by selfish purposes. Also, Luther maintains, the spiritual law requires us to love both God and our neighbor with a wholehearted love.

A test for genuine love is the willingness to love sinners. In Luther's theology, in contradistinction to later Lutheranism, love toward the sinner is a leading theme. Luther expresses this by arguing that, as

good as it is to help the neighbor, loving the sinner and covering his sins with righteousness is even more valuable:

External work of love is very good, when we give away our possessions to another person and become servants. Greatest, however, is to give away my own righteousness and let it serve a sinning neighbor. For in the external service and aid with the help of one's possessions, love is only in the external, but to share one's righteousness is great and it is to be found in the internal: I have to be a friend to the sinner. . . . I have to regard himself so dear that I seek for him and become like a shepherd who is looking for a lamb, or the woman who was seeking for the lost coin. Therefore, we want to speak of the high work of love according to which the righteous man has an obligation to defend with his righteousness the sinner; a pious woman likewise is obliged to share her honor with the worst whore. For the world or the reason does not do works like this. (*WA* 10 III, 217, 13–18; 22–30; *Sermon,* 1522)

The church as hospital and as mother

Luther's understanding of God's love and love toward neighbor also has important ecclesiological implications. Since Christians are living in the world they are involved with people who are both sinful and less than perfect. Therefore, the church of Christ in the world cannot be anything else except a hospital for the incurably sick. The *summa* of the Christian life is to bear the burden of one's neighbor; consequently, the task of the bishops and pastors is to act as if their dioceses were hospitals and their church members were in need of medical treatment:

This is the *summa* of the Gospel: The kingdom of Christ is a kingdom of mercy and grace. It is nothing else than continuous bearing of [each other's] burdens. Christ bears our wretchedness and sicknesses. Our sins he will take upon himself and he is patient when we are going astray. Even now and forever he carries us on his shoulders and never tires of carrying us. . . . The task of the preachers in this kingdom is to console consciences, associate in a friendly spirit with the people, feed them with the nourishment of the Gospel, carry the weak, heal the sick, and take care of everybody according to their need. That is also the proper ministry for every bishop and pastor. (*WA* 10 I, 2; 366, 18–34; *Summer Postil,* 1526, my translation)

The theological basis for this kind of caring attitude is Luther's idea of church members as "Christs" to each other. This comes into focus in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. As Christ has given himself to the Christians in the bread and wine, so also do Christians form a single bread and drink as they participate in the Eucharist. The Christian is bread to feed the hungry neighbor and drink to quench the thirst: "Also with us it happens so that we all become one cake and we eat each other" (*WA* 12, 489, 9–490, 5). Luther compares the eucharistic eating to the baking of bread in which the ingredients get totally mixed without being able to be distinguished from each other, or to the preparation of wine in which the grapes are mashed.

Luther also knows the beautiful ancient symbol of the church as mother. In fact, he compares the church with the physical womb of the mother to deliver a baby. The task of the church is noble: "The church namely teaches, cherishes us warmly, carries us in her womb and lap and arms, shapes us and makes us perfect according to the form of Christ until we grow to become perfect men" (*WA* 40 I, 665, 13–17).

The pneumatological potential of Luther's theology

Generally speaking, Reformation theology viewed faith as the decisive work of the Holy Spirit, as the familiar quotation from Luther (repeated in the Lutheran Confessions) clearly shows: "I believe that I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him, of my own reason or power, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the

The forensic doctrine of justification by faith as articulated by later confessional writings does not easily lean toward a dynamic pneumatological spirituality.

gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and upheld me in true faith" (*WA* 30, 1, 367–68). Luther's exposition of the Third Article of the Creed in the 1531 Small Catechism understands faith as a gift of the Holy Spirit.

However, the later development of Reformation soteriology, especially in the Lutheran tradition, came to be expressed in more Christological than pneumatological terms. The commonly held forensic doctrine of justification by faith as articulated by later confessional writings does not easily lean toward a dynamic pneumatological spirituality. The ecumenical encounter with the Eastern Orthodox Church, with its emphasis on the Holy Spirit in salvation and liturgy, has helped Lutherans to rediscover some of their own pneumatological treasures. The pneumatological orientation was acknowledged early in the Lutheran–Orthodox conversations. Defining "the new road leading to deification" as a "process of growing in holiness," the joint document cites two important Pauline texts: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor 3:18), and deification takes place under the influence of the grace of the Holy Spirit by a deep and sincere faith, together with hope and permeated by love (1 Cor 13:13).

Pneumatological implications of the new interpretation are obvious. The leading idea, Christ present through faith, can also be expressed pneumatically: It is through the Spirit of Christ that the mediation of salvatory gifts is accomplished. Participation in God is possible only through the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of adoption. As the American Lutheran theologian Kenneth L. Bakken puts it, "There is no justification by faith without the Holy Spirit. Justifying faith is itself the experience that the love of God has been poured into our hearts 'through the Holy Spirit' (Rom 5:5)."[6]

In a monograph published by the Finnish Lutheran theologian Markku Antola, another student of Mannermaa, charismatic Lutheran theology is connected with mainstream Lutheranism via the key idea of the "Charismatic Experience as the Presence of Christ in Faith."[7] Based on the theological proceedings of a work of an international team of more than twenty Lutheran theologians titled *Welcome, Holy Spirit*[8] (*WHS*), Antola discusses the new perspective in relation to key emphases of charismatic Lutheran theology and renewal. In

6. Kenneth L. Bakken, "Holy Spirit and Theosis: Toward a Lutheran Theology of Healing," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38:4 (1994), 410.

7. Subheading in Markku Antola, *The Experience of Christ's Real Presence in Faith: An Analysis on the Christ-Presence-Motif in the Lutheran Charismatic Renewal.* Schriften der Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft 43 (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 1998), 56.

8. *Welcome, Holy Spirit*, ed. Larry Christenson (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987).

keeping with Luther's own view, the charismatic theology of Lutheranism describes charismatic experience as the presence of the Triune God through the Spirit. The purpose of the Spirit's work is to create faith in Christ and lead the believer into a "living union" with Christ.

> But the Holy Spirit alone creates true faith, whereby one is actually united with the living Christ as the present and redeeming Lord. (*WHS*, 141)

> "If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). The newness is not simply the fact that human nature has been forgiven and cleansed. That is, in a sense, preparation. The newness goes deeper: a person now lives in union with the risen Christ. That which has been created, the "new creation," is precisely the reality of the indwelling Spirit establishing and maintaining the risen Christ and the believer in a living union. Every believer must experience the reality of the indwelling Christ. (*WHS*, 57)

> Faith describes the whole action by which the Holy Spirit brings the living, redeeming presence of Christ into a living union with a human being. The initiative and the power to accomplish this lies with the Spirit. (*WHS*, 69).

Salvation and spirituality

The Reformed theologian Jürgen Moltmann has a helpful section on soteriology in his *Spirit of Life*[9] where he criticizes the traditional Reformation/Lutheran view for not paying due attention to the role of the Spirit in salvation and consequently being weak on spirituality. Referring to passages such as Titus 3:5–7, which speaks about the "washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly," Moltmann emphasizes that "'regeneration' as 'renewal'" comes about through the Holy Spirit when the "Spirit is 'poured out'" (p. 146). By making further reference to John 4:14, the metaphor of the divine wellspring of life that begins to flow in a human being, he contends that "through this experience of the Spirit, who comes upon us from the Father through the Son, we become 'justified through grace'" (p. 146).

Moltmann writes that "in order to present regeneration of men and women as their justification, the Reformation doctrine of justification has to be expanded" in three interrelated directions (p. 411). First, it must show the saving significance of Christ's death and resurrection. Second, it must from the outset be presented pneumatologically as experience of the Spirit. Third, it must be eschatologically oriented. This is clearly happening in the widely acknowledged—and widely debated—Joint Declaration between Catholics and Lutherans. In a most helpful way it highlights the dynamic and elastic nature of the doctrine of salvation, including the concept of justification. There are a number of metaphors and images available in the Christian canon:

> Justification is the forgiveness of sins (cf. Rom 3:23–25; Acts 13:39; Luke 18:14), liberation from the dominating power of sin and death (Rom 5:12–21) and from the curse of the law (Gal 3:10–14). It is acceptance into communion with God: already now, but then fully in God's coming kingdom (Rom 5:1–2). It unites with Christ and with his death and resurrection (Rom 6:5). (Joint Declaration #11)

Sticking to only one definition, say, forensic, is not only biblically and theologically misguided but also reductionistic in terms of spirituality and spiritual life. Under the subheading "Justification as Forgiveness of Sins and Making Righteous" the document says: "These two aspects of God's gracious action are not to be separated, for

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9. Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life. A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1992).

persons are by faith united with Christ, who in his person is our righteousness (1 Cor 1:30): both the forgiveness of sin and the saving presence of God himself" (#22).

These emphases are in keeping with the new perspective on Luther's theology. Quoting Moltmann again,

> The operation of the Spirit as we experience it is therefore a double one: it is the justification of the godless out of grace, and their rebirth to a living hope through their installation in their right to inherit God's future. The justification of the godless is the initial operation of the outpouring of the Spirit. . . ." (p. 146–47)

No wonder that one of the most recent publications of the Helsinki school, a collection of essays, focuses on Lutheran spirituality, asking the question we are asking in this occasion—namely, What are the resources in Lutheran theology and faith to a renewed spirituality and spiritual life? Unfortunately, that book is written only in Finnish, making it inaccessible to most of us. Yet, the rich resources in Luther's own writings as well as in the Lutheran traditions are accessible. The new interpretation is but one way to help rediscover and reappropriate that spiritual heritage.

Finally, the ecumenical discussion of the doctrine of salvation is urgent not only for the sake of Christian unity but also in light of the relation of Christian faith to other religions. The theology-of-religions question may open up new vistas for reconsidering ancient Christian doctrines and help us move beyond the ecumenical impasse. What if the doctrine of divinization were a viable candidate for all Christians to talk about salvation in relation to other religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism and African spiritualities? The relevance and accuracy of soteriological discourse should also be studied in relation to other cultures, where the questions of "salvation" come from yet other angles.[10] Little work has been done in these areas specifically. This is a call for all of us, regardless of our respective traditions.

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10. See *Justification in the World's Context*, ed. Wolfgang Grieve. Documentation 45 (Geneva: LWF, 2000).

Christ in Us: A Response to Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen

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Jesus says, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. . . . Abide in me and I in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers. . . . My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love. . . . I have said these things to you that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." (John 15:1, 4–6a, 8–9, 11)

Will you love the you you hide if I but call your name? . . . Will you let my love be grown in you, and you in me? ("The Summons," *ELW* #798, from vv. 4 and 1).

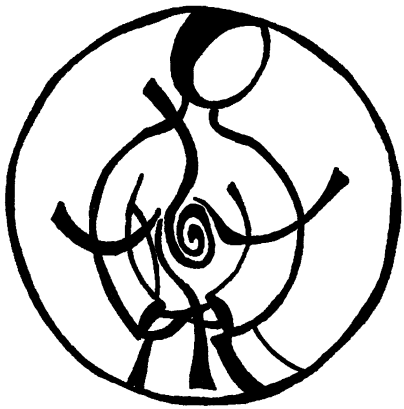
From the Song of Songs to the Gospel of John, from the passionate mysticism of the Middle Ages to the contemplative sung prayer of the Iona Community, lovers of God have used images of the most intimate possible union to trace the sweet reaches of desire, longing, and fulfillment: that astonishing abiding of love itself: *you in me and I in you. . . .*

Those who wish to plumb the farthest reaches, the most sensual interiority, of an affective Christian spirituality do not, however, always think to turn to Martin Luther. Luther's heritage has come down to us typically clothed in images of grace and freedom, steadfastness against religious tyranny, a righteousness not our own imputed in the cosmic courtroom drama of our acquittal through Christ. Perhaps we remember the paradox and complexity at this tradition's center: the *simul* grounding all human reality, the great *capax* at the heart of its sacramentality. Chances are when most people think of Luther they do not think of that intimate union with Jesus Christ sung by mystics throughout the ages. The language of personal participation in the very being of God is not what first springs to mind.

And they certainly don't think of *deification.* Luther himself was suspicious of mystical ladders, spiritualities of ascent, theologies of glory—anything that would seek to remove a person from the body, the neighbor, the suffering world: the places we meet the Crucified One. Lutheran theology and spirituality since the Reformation have shunned pieties of glory, reminding other Christians that, however intoxicating one's spiritual experiences may be, even the greatest saint is still a sinner always. To speak of divinization, of becoming not just sanctified but deified, seems utterly alien to the Lutheran way.

Yet the Finnish school of Luther research, beautifully drawn in Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's essay, finds this motif of theosis played out in Luther, and not simply in obscure or incidental references but at the very heart of his vision. They assert

that framing Luther's legacy primarily in forensic terms derives not from Luther's own thinking but from readings of his thought, especially after the Enlightenment and Kant, that suppressed what they call Luther's "real-ontic" notions of the Christian's participation in Jesus Christ himself and, thus, in God. The Finns claim that limited modernist epistemology prevented



the great twentieth-century Luther scholars from grasping the power and depth of Luther's thinking on such central Lutheran topics as faith or justification. Those scholars were blind to the ways Luther himself does speak of justification as a real impartation, for instance, or of the real presence of Christ in faith, and thus skewed not only contemporary appropriation of Luther but also the capacity of Lutherans to enter into dialogue with Christians of other faith traditions. The Finns challenge the neo-Kantian bondage of modern Luther research and open up more expansive conversation with the Reformer, allowing Lutherans to speak from the heart of our own tradition about such matters as sanctification, participation in the very life and being of God, and union with the indwelling Christ.

Kärkkäinen's essay provides a marvelous introduction to the revolution in Luther studies that the Finns are pioneering. We could spend hours exploring the implications of this approach; many wonderful books are already doing so. I will point to one gift, one concern, and one wish emerging for me from Kärkkäinen's compelling and grace-full paper.

"Abide in me and I in you." The primary *gift* I would note began this response: the space this Finnish approach opens for a transforming and frankly unitive Lutheran conception of the relationship between the believer and Jesus Christ. Of course, these themes have been present in the Lutheran tradition all along. From Luther's well-developed bridal mysticism to his theology of the Happy Exchange between Jesus and the believer, from Gerhardt's hymnody to Bach's cantatas and the sheer sweet rapture of intimate union with the Beloved, Lutheranism has a strong tradition of transforming I-Thou mysticism played out often in explicitly erotic metaphors (at least in the original texts). Yet because this affective and intimate unitive stream of the tradition was largely unintegrated with its increasingly rationalistic and forensically framed theological core, Lutherans have had trouble inhabiting and communicating a robust spirituality that is simultaneously theological and affective, intimate and transforming. When it comes down to it, we waffle: We are saved by grace but not really *changed.* We are joined to Jesus Christ in baptism, but we shrink from radical sanctification that costs everything. We end up in cheap grace, or in fear of shallow Jesus-and-me pieties. In either case, to speak of the *transformation* of our lives would seem un-Lutheran.

If justification is merely God's covering of a static, sinful state, language of

transformation must indeed be rejected. But if the Finns are right, if Luther intended justification to mean the Christian's actual participation in the very being and reality of Jesus Christ, and thereby of God, in such a way that human sinfulness is taken entirely into Jesus and divine life poured without reserve into the finite creature, then surely Jesus truly intended for us to abide in him and he in us. Surely he intends that we not remain forever alienated from his life. This mutual abiding means a transformed life: the Way that he *is*, the life he pours through our veins through faith. Surely he intends, in fact, our union with himself to be a love pervading our entire being: like vine and branches, lover and beloved, I in you and you in me. The Finns help open a theology profoundly Lutheran *and* deeply prayable. Pray it! See where it leads. It is a gift.

"Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers. . . . As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love." The concern I note here is broader than Kärkkäinen's presentation, although it is found there; fundamentally it is located in Luther himself. It has to do with a curious blind spot at the center of Lutheranism regarding the relation of self, other, and God. The paper states, "Luther believes that every person already knows how to love himself; what is lacking is the capacity and desire to love another person" (p. 92). Of course the gift of the neighbor is a signal breakthrough of the Reformation, replacing pieties obsessed with a narrow "religious" orientation of punishing service to God with the radical freedom to trust God's astonishing, unending love and serve the human other in need. Our culture does not obsess endlessly about pleasing God like Luther's did, but it does obsess endlessly about self-presentation via perfection of hair, face, body, clothes, career, family, promising unending wealth, luxury, and gratification—and never mind the poor. We still need Luther's invitation to forget the obsession with fighting our way up some ladder of perfection and be freed to devote our entire energy and passion to the life of the poor, the life of the world, the life of the earth.

Yet it is not true that "every person already knows how to love himself." In fact, it's from a *lack* of authentic self-love, not from too much, that people fall into that ugly, brittle compulsion of narcissism. If the narcissists and celebrities and megalomaniacs of our world don't know how to love themselves, neither do the hordes trying to consume their way into the authenticity of life they crave. Nor again do those (a large percentage of our congregations) whose selves have been formed in situations of abuse. For Luther it may truly have been inconceivable that a person would not know how to love himself, but for many people this is precisely the case.

Those who grow up in addictive families believe from before memory begins that they are worthless; they learn that their survival depends on their ability to suppress their own needs and desires and attend always to the demands of some other. Even as adults they may still believe that they are worthless, their needs and desires of no value to God or anyone else and their survival dependent on the suppression of themselves and orientation to others. They sit in our pews week after week; they are sitting right here in this room. The ranks of clergy are full of those conditioned, out of childhood systems or good Christian motives, to suppress our needs and attend primarily to the needs and desires of others. To them too Luther's sole orientation to the other does not translate as liberating. It is a recipe for burnout, for professional disaster, for spiritual suicide.

Of course, we know that Luther is not actually saying that people should submit to abuse. We know how to care for ourselves—don't we?—and let God love us so utterly that we are totally free for others. We know how to be a little Christ without crossing that delicate line into being the resident Messiah, indispensable and idolized—Don't we?

I think that we don't know these things very well. What may sound good in theory —to equate self-love with sin and other-orientation with virtue—is dangerous, even disastrous, in real life. It also is so simplistic that we would never tolerate it theologically. Yet somehow spiritually we often live in a preconscious dualism between self and other, unable to look in and beyond both to the presence and call of God. As Lutherans we have so taken for granted that God frees us from paying attention to ourselves (since "every person already knows how to love himself")—that we have neglected the necessity at the heart of the Christian gospel to learn practices of discernment. The suspicion of the self and the absence of attention to discernment go together. We are unable to pay attention to Jesus in our experience—our own feelings and needs and desires—because we think we should transcend ourselves and be solely oriented to *others'* needs and feelings and desires. Yet discernment requires sustained attention to one's own experience and invites us into a divine love and mercy enveloping even (or especially) our hidden, shadowy, or shameful places that is astonishing—that transforming healing that *is* Jesus' living presence in us.

Similarly, we are unable to help one another follow Jesus wherever he leads because we think the long-term, difficult practice of learning to attend to Christ alone in love is a selfish distraction from the burning needs of the world rather than an invitation into them with him. The heart of the practice of discernment is radical: the faith conviction and ongoing experience that God's deepest desire is *always* my health, liberation, and salvation and that of the world. Practices of discernment invite us to abide in Christ and follow wherever he leads, whatever the cost. This is radical trust. This is faith—faith as participation in love in the reality of Jesus Christ in us.

The Finnish scholars show us the way into a richer Luther. The vision they have restored of justification as real, intimate, and transforming participation in Jesus Christ invites us into a world where both self and other can be loved, in ways that draw us into the very life of Christ poured out. We never leave the Vine, or we really will wither and burn out; we never cease needing to be loved and to abide in that love. This Finnish notion of justification as theosis deepens the Johannine element of Martin Luther's theology and makes possible an abiding in the very being of Jesus—of God—in a new reality of love embracing us and the world, for the One into whom we are grafted is the Life of the world, and his healing will always invite us into lives of the most audacious worldly courage and service, like Luther's.

"I have said these things that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." We learn to abide in the Beloved, now and always, to be his Body in the heart of the world. It's all grace, the fullest possible intimacy and transforming participation in the being and heart of Jesus Christ.

I want to learn more! And so a wish ends this response, a wish that Professor Kärkkäinen may translate that Finnish book on Lutheran spirituality, and also that he and others may explore the links between the pneumatological dimension his paper traces in Luther and the practice of discernment.

Magnificat and Crucifixion: The Story of Mariam and her Son

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Raymond Brown, in his marvelous and massive study of the birth of Jesus,[1] asserts that the infancy stories in the Gospel of Luke have no "major influence" on the rest of Luke's story. While I understand that he is pointing to the lack of explicit reference back to the shepherds, Gabriel, or the other major players in Luke's first scenes, my work with storytellers and actors has taught me to distrust the notion that *any* part of *any* story is unrelated to the rest of the story.[2]

In this essay I explore the tension created between the song sung by Jesus' mother at the beginning of the story and the death suffered by her son at the end.

"Mariam ran"

Standard readings of Mary's visit to Elizabeth in Luke 1:39–56 focus on its uplifting content and forget that we are dealing, here as everywhere in the Bible, with a human story full of pull and push, delight and fear. At the beginning of this scene, Mariam[3] runs away (1:39). Why?

If this is a human story full of pull and push, the laws of physics must be obeyed. There must be something that impels her to run. If you see someone running down the street, you assess the probabilities. Is this a fugitive or a jogger? Human life is full of such hypotheses. We have to treat Mariam the same way. Why is she running? She could be excited to tell her kin about her pregnancy, but she could have done that from home, without departing for the hill country. "Heading for the hills" means something in any language, in any story. Mariam ran, perhaps in flight. But from what?

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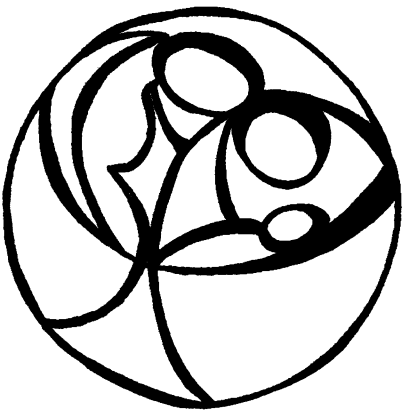
1. Raymond Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (New York: Doubleday, 1979).

2. For a fuller study of Luke as a storytelling text, see my *Provoking the Gospel of Luke: A Storyteller's Commentary* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2006), in which I explore the ways that Luke is and is not a script for performance and offer some hypotheses that might help us understand some of the signal peculiarities of Luke's Gospel. One of the most important things I have learned from nearly a decade of working with actors to explore biblical texts is that the laws of physics must always be obeyed. You cannot play a scene in a story and not have it physically affect the rest of the scenes that are performed. Even if the actors and director establish no link, the audience will insist on the uniform applicability of the laws of physics and will create an interpretive link that shapes the motion of the rest of the story. There is no cause without an effect, and there is no scene without an aftermath.

3. The names in this essay are not what you might expect. In place of Mary you see "Mariam." In place of Elizabeth you see "Elisheva." In place of the LORD you see "haShem." Luke's story has deep Jewish



The scene offers us one distinct possibility: She was untimely pregnant. A person in such a situation might well run away. Tractate Kethuboth 44b–45a in the Talmud lays out some particulars:

> Shila taught: There are three modes [of execution] in the case of a [betrothed] damsel [who played the harlot]. If witnesses appeared against her in the house of her father-in-law [testifying] that she had played the harlot in her father's house she is stoned at the door of her father's house, as if to say, "See the plant that you have reared." If witnesses came [to testify] against her in her father's house that she played the harlot in his house she is stoned at the entrance of the gate of the city. If having committed the offence she eventually attained adolescence she is condemned to strangulation.[4]

If these strictures were in place, Mariam faced grim options: being stoned (in front of her own house or at the gate of the city) or being strangled. Such options amount to a good reason to run away.

Of course, the relationship between text and life is always more complicated than appears at a first reading, so it is not clear that the practices revealed in this much later Tractate would have been in force during her lifetime, nor is it clear that they were ever practiced in the form laid out before us. Of course, ten years ago it was also not clear, at least to me, that honor killing was still practiced in contemporary Turkey and elsewhere.[5] Though it is officially illegal in most places, there are still many cultures in which men feel that their honor is severely damaged by a woman's pregnancy. In such cultures, men sometimes believe that the only adequate response is murder. The woman is called a

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roots. The more I study the story he is telling, the deeper I see the roots running. The names used in this essay are the transliterated Hebrew versions of the names given in Greek in Luke's story. This matters with Mariam and Elisheva especially because their names have implied meanings that come clearer in Hebrew than in English. It matters even more with the name of God. When the original Hebrew has the unpronounceable Divine Name (YHWH), customary English translations use "the LORD" and Greek uses κύριος, both of which translate the Jewish practice of saying "Adonai" (lord) rather than pronouncing the Divine Name. This act of respect for God's name has caused complications for Christian use ever since Christians confessed that "Jesus is the Lord." Ever since then when we hear "the LORD" we hear "Jesus," which is not surprising. But it does obscure some characteristics of the stories that the Gospels tell. We now quickly slide from "the LORD" to "Jesus" and miss the surprises packed into Trinitarian theology. To slow down this slide I use "haShem" (the Name) to translate the Divine Name. This replicates contemporary practice for many Jews and defamiliarizes the language about God for Christian readers. That may help us hear the stories more clearly.

4. This tractate is translated into English. Pages 1–198 are translated by Rabbi Samuel Daiches and pages 198 to the end by Rev. Dr. Israel W. Slotki, under the editorship of Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein. *The Talmud: The Steinsaltz Edition*, trans. Rabbi Israel V. Berman, Vol. X, part 4 (New York: Random House, 1994), also at *http://www.come-and-hear.com/kethuboth/kethuboth_44.html*.

5. This practice has received some coverage in the press over the past decade. A student of mine, Andrea Halverson, prepared a bibliography on honor killing as part of an

whore and the young murderer is called a hero who saved his family's honor. Was this the world Mariam lived in? We do not know. The regulations in Tractate Kethuboth may reflect later practice that was unheard of in Mariam's time. Or they may represent a later restricting of earlier unrestrained violence, in which case Mariam faced much greater danger. Did she flee a brother whom she could not trust, or a community who would not protect her? We are not told. It is clear only that she left in a hurry.

A mother by any other name

Standard readings of this story sometimes forget that Mariam's name has a meaning. In customary translations, she is called Mary, a variant of the name given her in Luke's story, Mariam. Traveling under that much-hailed name, she is the Queen of Heaven, the mother of Jesus, and an object of fascination and devotion and stained glass for millennia. She is the God-bearer, θεοτοκος. She is the namesake of countless towns and hospitals and schools.

Quite apart from all of that, her name means something important—for this scene and for Luke's whole story. Mariam, whose etymology is disputed, may mean "sea of bitterness."[6] That comes as a surprise. Sunday school Christmas pageants and paintings of the Madonna holding her child show her suffused with a deep joy, overwhelmed by the frightful wonder of the Incarnation, or gracefully declining to look the viewer in the face, looking down and away, deferential. But her name may link her with a bitterness that could swamp any floating happiness.

Her name links her also with the ancient stories of the people of God. *Mariam* is a variant form of *Miriam*, and Miriam was a leader, a prophet, from the time of the Exodus from Egypt. When the people barely escaped slaughter on the shores of the sea, this sister of Moses sang the Song at the Sea to celebrate the destruction of Pharaoh's army:

> Sing to haShem
> for he has triumphed gloriously:
> Horse and rider
> he has thrown into the sea. (Exod 15:21)

African American spiritual song remembers this victory as well, and knows the link between Miriam and Mariam:

Honors project at Augustana College. I offer part of it to you for your further research.

Agence France Presse. "Honor Killings, feuds claim nearly 1200 lives in Turkey," *Lexis Nexis* (21 March 2006).

BBC Online: "Survey shows over 35 percent back honor killings in southeastern Turkey" (2005). *Lexis Nexis* (21 March 2006).

Kardam, Filiz, et al. *The Dynamics of Honor Killings in Turkey*. Ankara: United Nations Development Program & United Nations Population Fund, 2005.

Molly Moore, "In Turkey, Honor Killing Follows Families to Cities," Washington Post Foreign Service (2001), *Lexis Nexis* (21 March 2006).

6. It is not clear out of what root the name "Miriam/Mariam" grows. The rabbis hear bitterness in the name. Jerome, drawn aside by the final syllable, *yam*, reads the name as "star of the sea." Contemporary Jewish "Name Your Baby" resources have combined the two and read the name as "sea of bitterness." More recent Christian interpreters, listening hopefully to the *yod* (the *y* sound in *mar-y-am*), have attempted to hear a scrap of the Divine Name. As with all etymology of names, the matter is more to be interpreted than settled. I am intrigued by what the rabbis have heard in the name of Moses' sister (and the name of Jesus' mother) and find that the portrayal of Mary in Luke's story scans best if one notes, with Simeon, that she will have cause for bitterness before the story is over. For a quick sketch of readings of this name, see James F. Ross, "Miriam," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* 3 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962): 402.

Oh, Mary, Don't you weep
Don't you mourn.
Oh, Mary, Don't you weep
Don't you mourn.
Oh, Mary, Don't you weep
Don't you mourn.
Pharaoh's army got drownded.
Oh, Mary, Don't you weep.

This seamless bridge from one age to another, from an earlier rescue to a hoped-for rescue, points out the way old stories can set the frame for new experiences, new hope, new disasters.

The role of an auntie

Standard readings of this story often focus on the words spoken by the women in the scene and too seldom explore the relationship between them. The words are crucial, and we will get to them, but the *relationship* is why Mariam went to see Elisheva. They are kinswomen, as Luke tells us. It is not clear exactly how they are related, but Mariam knows in time of trouble to run to her own.

A Native American friend, Martin Brokenleg, tells a story from his days in college. He was driving home from school in a rickety old car, and in the middle of South Dakota a tire blew. The spare was in worse shape than the flat, so he walked toward the nearest small town. When he got to a phone booth, he called his mother.

"It's good you are where you are!" she said. "You have an auntie in that town."

This came as something of a surprise to Martin. The last he knew, he was in a small town all alone.

"You just call up your auntie and tell her what happened," said his mother.

Martin wrote down the number and made the call.

"Oh, nephew," said his auntie, "I am so glad you called. I was just thinking about you." Martin's uncle arrived to pick him up. "You should eat and then tell me stories about your family," said his auntie when they arrived at the house. Cookies and coffee flowed into more cookies and more coffee and then into dinner. "I was wondering who I could cook this for," said his auntie. "Are you sure you can't eat some more? You look skinny to me."

The stories continued to flow, because food and family always bring out the best stories. After the best meal in a long time, and after more stories were told and heard, his uncle drove up in Martin's car. The tire had been fixed. So had the spare. The oil had been changed and all the fluids were topped off. "Nothing's too good for my nephew," said his auntie, whom he had never met until that day. "I was hoping you would come."

In Native American Lakota culture, an auntie is someone who will take you in, feed you, and tell you stories. She will be glad to see you, even if she has never met you. She may be your mother's sister, or not. She may be your cousin, or your father's cousin, or someone else's cousin. She may be related to you in such a complicated way that only your grandmother understands it. She may not fit onto any European-American genealogical chart, but she is an auntie because she acts like an auntie. Martin's mother knew that he had an auntie in that town. Martin discovered it in the food and in the stories and in the fixed car. You learn to trust your mother to know such things.

Elisheva is Mariam's auntie. Perhaps it was Mariam's mother who told her, "Go there, you have an auntie in the hill country." Perhaps Mariam even knew Elisheva beforehand. We do not know, and the text does not tell us. But we do know that when Mariam was in danger and overwhelmed and needed someone to take her in, feed her, and tell her stories that would protect and stabilize her in the coming months and

years, she went to Elisheva, her auntie.

"Oh, niece," cries Elisheva, "I was just thinking about you! I was hoping you would come. Blessed are you among women, blessed is the fruit of your womb. How lucky is it that you should come to me! Godlike in happiness, she who was faithful: There will be a completion to those things spoken to her from haShem."

Daughters of Aaron

Another facet of this story is carried by the fact that Elisheva and Mariam are kin. Elisheva is identified in Luke's story as a "daughter of Aaron" (Lk 1:5).[7] This makes her a member of a priestly family. She is also married to a priest, which is not surprising, because priests in ancient Israel practiced endogamy—that is, priestly families married their children into other priestly families.[8] One result of this practice is the so-called Kohen marker, a genetic marker that travels with descendants of ancient priestly families. The practice of endogamy has another consequence as well. If priestly families practice endogamy for the most part, and if Elisheva is part of a priestly family, and if Mariam is her kinswoman, then Mariam is (very likely) also a member of a priestly family. This means that Jesus comes into Luke's story as a descendant of Aaron and is welcomed into the family of David.[9] Since Luke tells a story of Jesus as messiah, this genealogical connection is important: The Dead Sea Scrolls community expected a messiah who is a son of Aaron and a messiah who is son of David, each with different responsibilities.[10]

If that is the note that Luke means to be sounding, Jesus comes into this story with two families that expect an awful lot out of him and his career. The messiah son of Aaron would teach the people and purify them. The messiah son of David would destroy the Romans. Together they would turn the world right side up. That is a lot to hope for, but that is the working content of the title *messiah.*

Of course, if Mariam was indeed a priest's daughter, she is explicitly at greater risk than just any young woman who turns up pregnant. In the Talmudic Tractate Sanhedrin (9:1), a daughter of a priest who "plays the harlot" is explicitly named as deserving capital punishment by burning.

The movement of God in the world

Elisheva means "God's oath," which is a good name for the person who will provide safe haven for Mariam, the Sea of Bitterness, during the months when she discovers what it means to be pregnant. She arrives to stay with her auntie in the sixth month of Elisheva's own unexpected pregnancy, and the baby leaps in Elisheva's womb. This leaping, in the story, is read as evidence that all of Mariam's extended family, even those members not yet born, jump for joy to know of her pregnancy. It is also possible that this leaping represents the "quickening," the first time Elisheva feels her baby move. This exciting (and much awaited) moment usually arrives be-

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7. And her name is given to her from the wife of Aaron (see Exod 6:23). Two women in the story so far, and each has been given a powerful name from the time of the Exodus.

8. Descendants often share a small set of last names, such as Cohen, Kahane, and Katz.

9. To twist things tighter, David is understood in rabbinic lore to be a descendant of Miriam, the sister of Moses (Sifre, Num. 78; ed. Friedmann, p. 206). This weaves David into a priestly heritage, which matters in a world that finds the center of the world in the Temple. In Luke's story, both David and Jesus are sons of priestly houses.

10. See Community Rule IX, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, trans. Geza Vermes (New York: Penguin, 1962), 87.

tween the eighteenth and twenty-fourth weeks of pregnancy, which would put it sometime in the fifth or sixth month for most women. Maybe the quickening and Mariam's arrival coincided for Elisheva. If so, the story is interpreting the delights and surprises of first-time pregnancies as witnesses to God's goodness. If this is indeed the "quickening," Mariam arrives at a most propitious time. She arrives, pregnant and at risk, at just the moment when Elisheva will be able to let her feel the movement of the baby in her womb, which the story reads as the movement of God in the world.

The courage of Mariam, and her choice

It surprises me that Mariam leaves just before her auntie gives birth. The separation of the two kinswomen at this time could be related to all manner of things unknown because this news comes to us out of a woman's world. We know much more about men's worlds in the past (and the past includes yesterday sometimes) than about women's worlds. There could be well-worn paths that took Mariam home just now. It could have been an odd abandonment of her auntie at a crucial moment. The text does not say. But Mariam goes home just when Elisheva is about to give birth—and just when Mariam would be beginning to show. Maybe that is the point. She headed for the hills when she discovered her pregnancy and knew the risks involved; she went to her auntie, and while she was there she seems to have found her courage.

It is crucial to see Mariam's courage. Otherwise, all we see is the standard reading of her agreement with Gabriel in the scene that immediately precedes this one, the scene in which she identifies herself as the "handmaid of God" (Lk 1:38). When Mariam is understood as the submissive handmaid of God, she is available to be used, and abused, as the template of feminine submission.[11]

The scene can be read that way, but it drains all the blood out of Mariam. "Blessed is the fruit of your womb," says her auntie, putting her hand on Mariam's belly, placing Mariam's hand on her own belly so that she can feel the baby leaping. The terror turns, then, and the women look each other in the eye, and Mariam sees that Elisheva has already understood why she agreed to run the risk, to accept the job offered her by Gabriel who stands before God.

"As deep as the life in my blood," sings Mariam, "as steady as the breath that gives me life and allows me to give life back, birth to birth, that deeply and steadily do I extol God." "Birth to birth," she sings—and Elisheva touches her own belly again as the baby kicks—"and age to age, God has been faithful to the Jews. In a world where power loves abuse because nothing will stop it, in a world so thoroughly upside down, God turns things right side up. God claimed Israel his child, reminding himself of his deeds of mercy, just as he spoke to the ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

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11. See, for instance, Edythe J. Johnson, *Peace, Poise, Power: Meditations for Women Based on the Gospel of Luke* (Rock Island, IL: Augustana, 1959). Johnson prays at the end of one of her meditations, "Forgive many of Thy handmaids for stepping down from the noble path of obedience" (p. 18). Even more disturbing, at least given the focus of this essay, is the comment found in William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953): "Mary's submission is a very lovely thing. 'Whatever God says, I accept.' Mary had learned to forget the world's commonest prayer—'Thy will be changed'—and to pray the world's greatest prayer—'Thy will be done'" (p. 7).

Mariam's song, sung only when she is alone with her auntie (and perhaps with the silent Zechariah), reveals how she understands the task she has taken on. The world is upside down. Her own life may be at risk, and any hope of a stable future may be gone, but the world is upside down, and Mariam will take on the risks she has chosen, not because she is submissive but because she is not. She will never submit to the notion that power, wealth, and haughty abusers should twist the world any way they choose. "It is time for God to remind himself of his deeds of mercy," says Mariam. "I will take on the risks of bearing this child, but only on the ground that this child should turn the world right side up."

This is not Mariam's private hope; it is not even a hope she shares only with her auntie who understands. When the baby is born, shepherds arrive, drawn by an army of angels. When Mariam and her husband bring the boy to the Temple to present him to God, Simeon and Anna look at the boy and see God turning the world right. Jews beyond Luke's story share this same hope. When the sons of Zadok[12] withdrew to the Dead Sea, they dreamed and demanded that God turn the world right. After the Temple was destroyed in 70 C.E., the Jewish communities that produced and remembered 2 Esdras and 2 Baruchwove into those apocalypses a dream/demand that messiah usher in newness, rightness, and exuberant fruitfulness into God's creation. Mariam's hope is not hers alone; neither is her demand. It is shared with Jews in the centuries before and after her life, in the families of great-grandmothers and their great-great-grandchildren. Mariam's hope is not hers alone, but it is indeed hers, and she will demand it.

What did Mariam see?

Mariam's hope, her demand, requires us to ask what she saw when she saw her son, the messiah of David, singled out by the Romans and killed in a murder designed also to kill Jewish faith. That is the meaning of the inscription placed over Jesus when he was executed. "The King of the Jews!" it said, cruelly mocking the faith that expected an anointed king (a messiah) to turn the world right side up, cruelly mocking Mariam's faith. Mariam accepted the birth of the child so that the brutal world could be righted.

Luke's story begins with a powerful recognition of the hopes that flow from Jewish faith, the faith that trains people to demand that the world be turned right side up. Luke's story ends with the world still upside down. Jesus is raised and ascended, to be sure, but Rome still won the first engagement in the fight to right the creation. More significant, I think, is that Luke's story is told in the smoldering aftermath of the First Jewish Revolt against Rome, a revolt that failed miserably. Rome

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12. The Qumran covenanters call themselves "sons of Zadok," a name they would have shared with the Sadducees, as "Zadokite" and "Sadducee" are the same word in Hebrew. Although early scholarship on the Dead Sea Scrolls assumed that the covenanters were Essenes, scholars increasingly have noted the ways that this community does not fit with usual descriptions of Jewish "schools" given by Josephus. Several have noted that the intense interest in matters concerning the Temple, along with the obvious connection through a shared group name, suggest a link to the Sadducees. See Lawrence H. Schiffman, "Origin and Early History of the Qumran Sect," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 58 (1995): 37–48, and Jeffrey Rubenstein, "The Sadducees and the Water Libation," *The Jewish Quarterly Review, New Ser.* 84, no. 4 (1994): 417–44. For an early sketch of this position, see E. J. Pryke, "The Identity of the Qumran Sect: A Reconsideration," *Novum Testamentum* 10 (1968): 43–61.

came against the rebels in force and leveled the Temple. In terms handed on to us by Mariam, the powerful were not put down from their thrones and the rich ones were not sent out and away, empty. The messiah was crucified and the revolt was crushed. The crucifier controlled the world.

Tish'a b'Av and the messiah

As I write this, we are approaching Tish'a b'Av, which comes in 2006 in the first days of August. This ninth day of the month of Av marks the anniversary of the destruction of the Temple. Actually it marks both times the Temple was destroyed, because tradition holds that the two destructions of the Temple happened on the same day, separated by some six hundred years. It marks also the day when Pope Urban declared the First Crusade in 1095. In 1290, Jews were expelled from England on Tish'a b'Av. In 1492, they were expelled from Spain, again on Tish'a b'Av. The killings in Treblinka began on Tish'a b'Av. It was the day that deportations began for Jews confined in the Warsaw ghetto. The day remembers a long string of catastrophes twisted around the Jewish people.

Mariam, Sea of Bitterness, would understand. She took on the risks of an untimely pregnancy, and the risks of staking her hopes to an actual moment in history, in order to turn back the disasters remembered on Tish'a b'Av, and then she saw her son and her hopes crucified at the same time by the Romans.

As I write this, Israel is at war with Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the United States is attempting to end terror through so far unsuccessful military action.

As I write this, my sister can no longer turn the pages of the newspaper. Soon she will be unable to climb the steps in her house. After that she may well lose her ability to speak, and, a little later, to breathe. My sister has Lou Gehrig's disease, ALS. She was diagnosed in February and, at that time, had little annoying weaknesses and an odd twitching that felt like bees crawling under her skin. Now, in July, she uses a walker for any distance longer than a block and often uses a walking stick in the house. She can no longer push the buttons on her stove with her left hand.

It is not just the Romans that hold the world upside down. For every world that we hope to be turned upright, there is a rocket or a bomb waiting, there is terror of all sorts, there is a disease without known cause or cure, all waiting to destroy any sense of orderly hope we might build up. It is not just Mariam who has cause for bitterness. All of us are swept sometime into the sea of bitterness. All of us can taste the bile in the back of our throats every time we see another child caught in the blast of a world upside down.

Standard readings of Jesus' messiahship have made him into a messiah who saves our souls but leaves our bodies to suffer decay. Standard readings make him into a messiah who ushers in the dominion of God, but not in a way that does any good for God's creation this side of death or the eschaton, whichever comes first, or whichever comes at all. Death seems always to arrive first, and the eschaton seems never to arrive, so the dominion of God has its "real" realm only outside of creation. In that realm God is free to forgive sins, collect dead children into his waiting arms, and reign from the heavens without having much effect on the earth.

All the things that Jesus does as the spiritual messiah are important, and they have grown into the center of Christian life and have given us a powerful awareness of the forgiving goodness of God in all things. But any serious reading of the Magnificat requires that we ask what Mariam might

say were she to look at the ways we have accommodated our hopes and faithfulness to a world that insists on remaining upside down. Mariam signed on to the project because she saw her moment in history as the moment when God would both make and keep promises to creation, a moment when God would act in the stories of Jewish faith and in the complexity of Jewish life. And for her trouble Mariam got a crucified son and a messiah who did not transform creation except spiritually. She got a Christian faith that sometimes is only a band-aid for bad feelings. This was not enough, as any serious reading of her song makes clear.

Perhaps Mariam ran to Elisheva because she found herself isolated from her community, an isolation more dangerous if the practice of honor killing was lurking. She ran and found an auntie. After living with her and learning from her, she could return home and face her parents and her community and her husband-to-be, aware that they could now accept the baby growing inside her. She went with her husband-to-be to Bethlehem, his ancestral home and the home of David, the anointed king. That she traveled with him indicates that he did not put her away but brought her to his family and his aunties, in turn. She met members of her fictive family in the Bethlehem shepherds and in Simeon and Anna. In fact, wherever one turns in Luke's story, one meets family or people treating each other as family whether they are related or not: eating together, supporting, caring, following. Even at the end of the story, when the other Gospels emphasize the isolation of Jesus, Luke provides daughters of Jerusalem who follow Jesus weeping. When Jesus dies in Luke's story, he dies surrounded by all of his acquaintances, including the women who followed him from Galilee (Lk 23:49). Family will not reject family, not in Luke's story, not even when the project to turn the world right side up goes woefully wrong.

Mariam may get a reason to be bitter, but she also gets a family, a family that holds on in the midst of disaster.

Tish'a b'Av and resurrection

I approach Tish'a b'Av this year differently than in the past. Israel is at war with Hezbollah. Rockets kill children and bombs kill UN observers. The United States is at war with a shadowy enemy who seems always to evaporate just in time to allow our bombs to hit civilians, including children. My sister is living with a disease that will kill her, perhaps before the next Tish'a b'Av, perhaps not. In all of this I find Mariam becoming an auntie who understands. In all of this I find myself in the company of family, fictive and otherwise, contemporary and otherwise. You cannot understand what is it to live slowly with disaster unless you have staked your life sometime on a moment that was to turn the world right. You cannot understand unless you have seen the world hold itself firmly and easily upside down. Mariam understands that. And so does Luke, telling his story in the ruins of the Temple and the hopes of the Jewish people through the centuries.

Tish'a b'Av is the day that gathers the disasters of history together into one day, one annual focusing of the jagged edges of brokenness. But Tish'a b'Av is also the day on which the rabbis have said messiah would be born, because in the depths of despair the seed of hope germinates.[13]

The longer I read, and interpret, and perform Luke's story, the more it seems to

13. See *A Season of Sorrow and Hope: A Reader for Tish' a b'Av, http://kollel.shul.net/Resources/Pubs/av.pdf.*

me that he knows that messiah can be born only on Tish'a b'Av, in the depths of disaster. It is only in the midst of unyielding disaster that the story of Mariam, and of the resurrection of her son, can be anything other than another flashpoint for wobbly enthusiasm. Where resurrection is read as a cheer for clearly triumphant life, I see a faith being born that has not attended to the depths of the disaster carried by a crucified messiah in a crucified world. When resurrection is read as irrelevant or unreal, I hear a faith gasping.

Mariam will have understood the gasp, as will Elisheva. Did Elisheva die before she saw her son roar into the wilderness to proclaim opposition to the inverted world? Did she live to see her son beheaded? Did she hold her breath, knowing that his enthusiasm would run into implacable opposition? Did she know that God sometimes keeps promises by not keeping promises?

Yochanan ben Zakkai, a rabbi who lived at the time of the destruction of the Temple, judged that Rome would choose to hold the world upside down, and that they would succeed. He chose to try to build a future for the people of God that would survive the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. He helped shape the growth of what become the Judaism we know, the Judaism that survived the crushing of both Jewish Revolts and two millennia of other catastrophes. He is reported to have been asked what he would do if he were told that messiah had come. His answer? He said that if you had a sapling in your hand when you were told that messiah had come, first you should plant the sapling, then you should go see if messiah has come. If messiah has indeed come, he will still be there when you are done planting the tree. If he has (yet again) not come, you are going to need the fruit.

This is true also for Christians. We are the heirs of Mariam's hope and of the wisdom of her auntie. We are animated by hopes that have been trained to demand rightness in creation, and we are tempered by a faith that has learned that demanding that God remember promises is not the same thing as getting those promises delivered. We are members of a family that has learned that the upside-down nature of the world does not make the demands of faith less important. The upside-down world requires family, aunties who will train us to demand and to wait and to demand some more. The story of Mariam and her auntie is a story to shape our waiting and demanding. The story of Miriam and her auntie is a story of what resurrection looks like.

The story of Mariam and her auntie invents us as people who have a family who holds us as we demand that God's promises be kept, waits with us as we wait, and works with us as we work to turn whatever we can right side up. In this demanding, waiting, and turning we become, together, the people of God in the world, and, as such, the promise of messiah in the world. This is very much what it means to be the "body of Christ," a body crucified before it can turn the world right, a body that dies still demanding that God keep his promises, a body that turns things right side up when it can, knowing that we are not obliged to complete the job but that we are obliged to continue it.

Mariam demands a world in which the poor have plenty and the hungry are fed good food. Mariam did not get what she asked for. She got a son who was crucified and raised. From her, we have learned a story that teaches us to expect messiah to be born on Tish'a b'Av, in the depths of complicated disaster and all-too-ordinary catastrophe. In memory of her and in tune with the story of her son, we can find a crucified hope and lift it up, turn it round right.

Luther and the Holy Spirit: Why Pneumatology Still Matters

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The person of the Holy Spirit receives little attention in the life of some churches. For many of us, the Spirit is our focus on Pentecost, and we may speak of the Spirit in a vague way when we address the thorny issue of sanctification, but our theology, teaching, and pondering often focus on the other two persons of the Trinity.

"Charismatics" and "Pentecostals," of course, do not suffer such a deficiency. However, in traditions that are not so oriented toward gifts of the Spirit, there is a noticeable lack of discussion of the work of the Comforter. This lack of attention is unfortunate. The primary work, or office, of the Holy Spirit should not slip from Christian catechesis, preaching, and theological training. In this article I address the role of the Spirit in Martin Luther's theology of justification and sanctification and look at the practical implications for preaching and teaching that follow from his understanding of the Spirit active in faith.

Luther's theology of the Holy Spirit

Luther's understanding of the Spirit's activity was more dynamic and focused than that of Roman Scholasticism. In his discussion of The Third Article in his Small Catechism he writes:

> I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith; in which Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all sins to me and all believers, and will at the Last Day raise up me and all the dead, and give unto me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true.

This short commentary clearly explains the essence of the Holy Spirit's activity: The Spirit creates faith in the sinner. Here we begin to see some of the essential implications of Luther's pneumatology. Indeed, a proper understanding of the work of the Spirit is necessary for a proper understanding of faith. Faith is not a good work undertaken by believers but something done for us and within us by the Spirit of God. "But the real faith, of which we are speaking, cannot be brought into being by our own thoughts. On the contrary, it is entirely God's work in us, without any cooperation on our part."[1]

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1. *D. Martin Luthers Werke.* Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993), 10(3): 285.

The power of the Word is found in the work of the Spirit which accompanies it. Paul Althaus explains, "The fact that the external word enters and overwhelms the heart is therefore not the result of an inherent dynamic which the word possesses in itself. On the contrary, the activity of the Spirit which always occurs through the word, must first be added to the preaching and hearing of the external word."[2]

The Spirit, moreover, enables a person to appropriate the saving message of the gospel. As Luther never tired of explaining, good news is only good news when it exists *pro me*—for me. Althaus clarifies: "This 'for me' is the decisive and essential factor in justifying faith which definitely distinguishes it from everything else which we otherwise call faith and especially from a mere 'historical faith.'"[3]

Although faith is the work of the Holy Spirit within the redeemed, the believer is not a passive agent. A Christian is active in the daily struggles of believing:

> . . . people think: Doing good works is a heavy task, but believing is something that is soon done. To be sure, faith does seem to be an easy matter; but it really is a difficult art. Temptation and experience certainly teach that, on the contrary, we must say that clinging to God's Word so that the heart is not afraid of sins and death but trusts and believes God, is a far more bitter and difficult task than observing all the rules of the Carthusian and monastic orders.[4]

For Luther, a Christian participates in the work of God. This is essential for understanding Luther's theology correctly, especially when we speak of faith and sanctification. The glory may all be due to God, but that does not excuse one from exertion and toil.

The Holy Spirit works in many ways in this world. For Luther, however, there is one proper work of the Comforter. This *Amt* (function or office) of the Holy Spirit, as described in the Small Catechism, is to enable us to believe.[5]

We must be careful not to fall into the trap of saying that the Spirit creates a faith in believers which then saves them. Phrases such as "saving faith" or "saved by faith alone" can be misleading. Preferable to these would be "saved through faith" or "salvation comes by grace through faith alone." The faith does not technically save. It is the means through which God grants salvation, the pipeline through which God's blessings flow. As such, while God's acceptance and redemption of the sinner are one act, Luther can speak of it in two parts. "Christ has purchased two things for us: first *gratiam*, grace; secondly, *donum*, the gift."[6] The grace one receives from God is the change in one's status before God; Christians are viewed no longer as sinners but as holy. The gift is the internal change, through faith, which assists the person in overcoming sin.

Heinrich Bornkamm discusses Luther's understanding of this dual work of God:

> "Grace" means a change in a person's situation toward God, so that grace really reaches the person from without, from God's point of view. . . . "Gift" means the change in a person as accomplished by grace, the inward event in faith and in the attendant overcoming of sin which faith brings about.[7]

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2. Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 38.

3. Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 230.

4. *D. Martin Luthers Werke* 33:283f.

5. See further Rolf Schäfer, "Der Heilige Geist: Eine Betrachtung zu Luthers Erklärung des Dritten Artikels," *Luther* 61 (1990), 3:135–48.

6. *D. Martin Luthers Werke* 49:94f.

7. Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career*, trans. E. Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 186.

Christians are passive recipients of God's grace, but active participants in the gift.

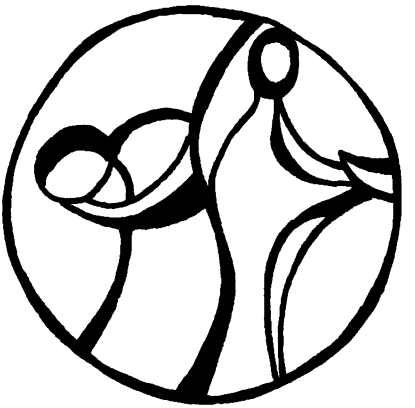
Luther insisted, against the Enthusiasts, that the Spirit works only in conjunction with the Word. While the timing of the Spirit remains a mystery, the location will always be where the Word is preached. "Thus it pleased God not to give the Spirit without the Word, but through the Word, that he might have us as his co-workers, who proclaim *on the outside* what he himself works by the Spirit *within*, wherever he will."[8]

Luther tells us, "Where there is a genuine faith, there good works will certainly follow, too."[9] The key to his understanding of *how* the Spirit is active in sanctification may be summed up in one word: gratitude. Those convinced of their own sinfulness, who then come to believe that Christ suffered and died in their place, cannot but feel gratitude to God. Believers are grateful to God for many things: their families, their jobs, their health. However, it is gratitude to God for what Christ did on Calvary that is the basis of sanctification. In *The Freedom of a Christian,* Luther explains:

Here the works begin; here a man cannot enjoy leisure; here he must indeed take care to discipline his body by fastings, watchings, labors, and other reasonable discipline and to subject it to the Spirit so that it will obey and conform to the inner man and faith and not revolt against faith and hinder the inner man, as it is the nature of the body to do if it is not held in check. The inner man, who by faith is created in the image of God, is both joyful and happy because of Christ in whom so many benefits are conferred upon him; and therefore it is his one occupation to serve God joyfully and without thought of gain, in love that is not constrained.[10]

In his *Treatise on Good Works*, Luther makes use of an analogy that many of his readers would easily understand.

We may see this in an everyday example. When a husband and wife really love one another, have



pleasure in each other, and thoroughly believe in their love, who teaches then how they are to behave one to another, what they are to do or not to do, say or not to say, what they are to think?[11]

On the contrary, he continues, when there is doubt, one acts with "a heavy heart and great disinclination." The Spirit, however, provides faith and dispels doubt so that the believer will naturally respond with all manner of good works. Luther says in his *Lectures on Galatians* of 1535:

In short, whoever knows for sure that Christ is his righteousness not only cheerfully and gladly works in his calling but also submits himself for the sake of love to magistrates. . . . For he knows that God wants this and that this obedience pleases him.[12]

The response of love to God is expressed in good works performed in the world, not out of fear but a desire to please one's creator,

8. *D. Martin Luthers Werke* 18:695.
9. *Luther's Works* (*LW*), ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann, 55 vols. (Philadelphia and St. Louis: Fortress and Concordia, 1955–1986), 21:150.
10. *LW* 31:358f.
11. *LW* 44:26f.
12. *LW* 26:12.

redeemer, and sustainer. Finnish scholar Simon Peura summarizes this idea nicely when he writes, "When Christians love God with the whole heart, they also love what God wills and expects from them."[13]

For Luther, this is more than a simple psychological response. The Spirit is the one working faith in believers, the faith that is the basis for this gratitude. Therefore, Christians cannot take credit for the improvements in their lives; the source and cause is still God's grace. At the same time, this progression is not a mysterious process. It is in faith that one responds in gratitude, and the good works that follow are responses of thankfulness rather than attempts to appease a God who is keeping score.

Luther was convinced that a religious message that did not proclaim the complete forgiveness of sins without any human work or merit could not produce the genuine and free acts of love that come from believing the gospel. Only when a believer has been released from any threat of punishment can there be genuine sanctification. When the fear of doing too little is taken away, as well as the pride of assisting in one's salvation, the believer begins to live a life of genuine love.

This is not to say that acts of charity during this life amount to very much. Luther states in his Table Talk, "this fulfillment (namely, love) is weak in our flesh, that we must struggle daily against the flesh with the help of the Spirit."[14] Likewise, in arguing against Latomus, who wanted to categorize types of sins, Luther insists, "Every good work of the saints while pilgrims in this world is sin."[15] Christians make modest, although real, gains in their sanctification during this life. At times they may not perceive this to be true, but they are called upon to believe it.

Luther's desire to glorify God properly in his discussion of sanctification had some unintended consequences. In giving all the glory and ultimate responsibility to God for sinners' justification and sanctification, and minimizing Christian works of love during the earthly pilgrimage, there were those who used his theology to justify moral apathy or laziness: If God wants to do all the work, we should let him. Paul Tillich suggests that Lutherans forgot to add the "valuation of discipline" into the mix. The result was

> that the ideal of progressive sanctification was taken less seriously and replaced by a great emphasis on the paradoxical character of the Christian life. In the period of orthodoxy, this led Lutheranism to that disintegration of morality and practical religion against which the Pietistic movement arose.[16]

As we shall see, misconstruing Luther's pneumatology runs the same risks.

The consequences of imprecision in pneumatology may lead to a type of Lutheran quietism. Both clergy and laity can easily come to the conclusion that, as long as the Word is preached, the Spirit will be present, and sanctification will follow. They believe that proclaiming the gospel is necessary *and* sufficient for sanctification to take place.

It is true that the Word is required, but human participation as well is required to grow in love. Luther never taught that the life of faith is passive. External righteousness is passive; internal righteousness is

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13. Simon Peura, "What God Gives Man Receives: Luther on Salvation," in *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 94.

14. *LW* 54:234.

15. *LW* 32:159.

16. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* III (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1963): 230.

not. The latter is the "fruit and consequence"[17] of the former, and it is achieved through human cooperation with grace. "'To be led by the Spirit of God' is to put to death our flesh, that is, the old Adam, and to do it freely, promptly, and gladly.... This is not characteristic of our nature, but is a work of the Spirit of God in us."[18] While all the credit goes to God, who empowers believers to cooperate, they are indeed active. There is no sitting and waiting for the Holy Spirit to act magically among the faithful. Luther went so far in 1528 as to tell his congregation in Wittenberg that he would stop preaching in their church if he did not witness greater fruit among the faithful.[19]

Althaus spells this out quite clearly. "The believer does not rest in security on the forgiveness of sins, as though sin were no longer of any consequence, but he is completely involved in fighting to gain the victory over sin every day."[20] Moreover, the failure to participate in the struggle against the Old Adam is correlated with the loss of faith. "Luther repeatedly emphasizes that forgiveness of sins and justification for the sake of Christ are valid for those who fight against sin, and that they are bound to such a struggle."[21]

It is important for the life of sanctification that one safeguard and cherish the gospel message. The word of forgiveness is the font and source of the Christian struggle against sin, and that which casts the gospel in doubt wreaks havoc on the active life of faith. "For when [the Truth] enters the heart, the evil inclination soon departs.... But the devil does not easily let anyone come to the point of taking hold of and enjoying the Word of God; for he knows well what power it has to subdue evil lust and thoughts."[22] One's faith is strengthened for such work by continually returning to the word of God in both law and gospel, allowing the Spirit to fortify this faith for service in the active life.

Implications

Does such theological inquiry serve a purpose greater than mere historical interest? I suggest that there are important implications for clergy and laity alike. While vicious wrangling over theological minutia among Lutherans reached its peak in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, today the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction. For many, theological subtleties are deemed unimportant or not worth understanding. This is unfortunate.

Consider the desire of the clergy and other church workers to improve the moral lives of their parishioners, to see them active beyond the pews in causes of charity. Few concerns are more universal in the church. Admittedly, encouraging piety among Christians is tricky business. It must involve good theology, psychology, public speaking, empathy, and modeling of behavior. This would be true in any religion. In Lutheranism, there is the added theological conundrum of encouraging works while teaching that they do not matter for one's salvation.[23]

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17. *LW* 31:300.
18. *LW* 25:356.
19. See Fred W. Meuser, "Luther as Preacher of the Word of God," *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 146.
20. Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 236.
21. Althaus, 244 n.
22. *LW* 30:41.
23. This perennial issue in the Lutheran Church was the focus of my doctoral dissertation and first book, *Shall We Sin? Responding to the Antinomian Question in Lutheran Theology* (Peter Lang, 2003).

Among certain believers, there has been such a fear of teaching works-righteousness that any meaningful statement of law is quickly followed with the promises of the gospel, as if to say that everything will be all right for those not living righteously anyway. The law is not given opportunity to do its work. Alternatively, those who do seek to balance law and gospel in their sermons often end up preaching *about* the law rather than preaching the law. Law, like gospel, must be *pro me*. The law must be preached so that I feel its accusing finger pointing at me, not as a lesson on human nature. Who will run to a physician who does not first perceive illness?

Moreover, we need to remember that the life of faith involves a lifelong listening to both law and gospel, what Søren Kierkegaard called repetition.[24] The redeemed must remain conscious of their sin through exposure to the law so that they will constantly be driven into the arms of Christ. Luther himself puts it this way, "Therefore, before and after we have become Christians, the Law must in this life constantly be *lex occidens, damnans, accusans* (the slaying, condemning, accusing law), as St Paul and many of our books so frequently teach."[25]

There are also those today, greatly concerned with works of social justice, who can tend to reduce the effects of the work of Christ suffering on the cross to platitudes about God accepting us as we are. With that warm, albeit shallow, reassurance, the congregation is provided with moral guidance and advice. The problem here is that the law often loses its "slaying, condemning, accusing" nature and simply becomes advocacy for the social agenda of the church. The law fails to strike at the heart of those in the pews. Luther's spiritual struggle, his *Anfechtung,* is relegated to the psychology of the sixteenth century and the Spirit becomes a mystical force to make us joyful and loving.

While awareness of one's communal responsibilities is essential in the Christian life, each individual must stand before God alone. The law speaks to the single individual, as does the gospel. Without that individual facing her sin honestly, the gospel message of God suffering in weakness for her becomes quaint rather than life-changing, and the possibility of her tackling the problems of the world will be based on her personal psychology rather than the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Only when the office of the Spirit is understood as the one who works faith in the redeemed do we have the foundation and framework for the entire Christian life. Then faith can mature and we are able to strive to be the people God desires us to be.[26]

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24. Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

25. *D. Martin Luthers Werke,* 51:440f.

26. This article is based on an earlier paper, "Luther, Pneumatology, and Ecumenism: Does Systematic Theology Still Matter?" presented at the American Academy of Religion, Mid-Atlantic Regional Meeting, Baltimore, Maryland, March 17, 2006.

A Theology of Justification and God's Mission

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In our current ecumenical-global context much has been said about the relationship between the Christian mission and the people of non-Christian cultures and religions. How do we ground a theology of mission from a Lutheran perspective? How does the Lutheran witness of justification through God's grace relate to world mission?

Terms like indigenization, enculturation, and contextualization have been thoroughly discussed for years.[1] Since the famous definition of Paul Tillich, "religion is the substance of culture, culture is the form of religion,"[2] scholars and theologians have attempted to prioritize religious significance vis-à-vis human culture. Even Karl Barth argues for the cultural significance of Christian theology in that culture is a parable or witness to God's reign. For Barth it is nonsense to criticize culture in this regard. "The problem of theology and dogmatics can also be seen as wholly set within the framework of the problem of culture."[3]

However, in many places the idea of "Christian mission" arouses a negative image. From the time of the Spanish and Portuguese *conquistadores* in the sixteenth century and in subsequent centuries we notice an alliance between throne and altar. In the history of Christian mission of the nineteenth century there was an unfortunate link between colonial rule and Christian mission. Indigenous cultures and religious spirituality were suppressed, and alien culture was imposed in the name of propagating the gospel. In this process, Western theology tended to lose sight of the differences and distinctive qualities of non-Western cultures in relation to the gospel.

From this point of view, the absoluteness and superiority of Christianity has become more and more dubious in the eyes of the Asian contextual theology of minjung, African liberation and indigenous theology, and Latin American liberation theology. This creates a crisis for a present-day theology of mission, calling for a new paradigm in its witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Interestingly, the term "crisis" in Chinese means danger as well as new opportunity.

Luther did not live in the time of foreign missions. Some scholars in the area of missiology overlook this fact when studying the Reformer and the idea of mission. It has even been charged that Luther lacks a

1. J. Andrew Kirk, *What is Mission? Theological Explorations* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 89–91.

2. Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press), 42.

3. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I (London, New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 1:284.

fundamental affirmation of the missionary duty of the church.[4]

David Bosch, however, insists that Rom 1:16–17 can serve as the missionary text for Luther's theology. Luther's discovery of justification remains foundational for the development of a Christian theology of mission. At the same time, Bosch argues that Luther's understanding of justification by faith has an ambivalent attitude toward mission. While justification is a primal motive for involvement in and commitment to mission, Bosch argues that the doctrine of justification by faith paralyzes missionary effort and passion by remaining quietistic and individualistic.[5] Given this fact, I am concerned with discovering a more radical insight of Lutheran understanding of justification for a theology of mission, as it is seen in Trinitarian, social-ethical, and ecological perspective.

Trinitarian foundation for a theology of mission

Breaking with the Augustinian–Scholastic line of synergism, Luther took his point of departure not as *fides caritate formata* (faith formed by love) but as *fides Christo formata* (faith formed by Christ). For him justification by faith is the article by which the church stands or falls. God in freedom and grace takes the initiative to forgive, justify, and save human beings. The hidden God can be seen adequately and properly only in the revealed God. In this framework Luther's theology of the Trinity can be articulated in missiological perspective.

For Luther, the doctrine of the Trinity is a sublime article of the majesty of God.[6] As far as the Trinity is an article of faith, our talk about God's mystery and freedom adequately occurs only through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus' humanity is eternally bound to the Son of God, so the incarnation presupposes Luther's understanding of the Trinity. The Father is not known except in the Son through the Holy Spirit.[7] For Luther the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit are the basis for the mission of the Son and the Spirit for the world. The Trinity is known only by God's act in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the fact that God is *for us* in Jesus Christ through the Spirit offers a basis for Luther's understanding of *theologia crucis,* theology of the cross.

Jesus Christ as "a mirror of the Father's heart" reveals to us the most profound depths of God's fatherly heart and sheer unutterable love. Apart from Jesus Christ we see in God nothing but an angry and terrible judge.[8] The cross is the theological basis for approaching the Trinity. At this point we see the cross-centered Trinity expressed in God's concern by God sending the Son for the World. The church is also sent into the world and exists for the sake of the world. The church has, essentially, a missiological character and responsibility in respect to the Trinitarian history of mission.

On this basis, I propose Luther's theology of Trinity as a way of grounding Christian missiology in terms of the *missio Trinitatis* (mission of the Trinity). From this perspective, I accept the definition of Bosch, that is, Christian mission "as being derived from the very nature of God" in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity.[9]

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4. David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 244.

5. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 242.

6. "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper," *LW* 37:361.

7. *LW* 1:58.

8. The *Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2000), 419.

Luther's theology has a Trinitarian and missiological direction akin to the Father's sending of the Son and the Spirit to the world. Following in the footsteps of Luther's *theologia crucis,* Jürgen Moltmann proposes a Trinitarian theology of the cross in which an attempt is made "to find the relationship of God to God in the reality of the event of the cross and therefore in our reality."[10] Moltmann's idea of the Father's participation in the death of the Son makes explicit that the Trinity is the form of the crucified Christ. This model of God in the Trinitarian history actualizes Luther's theology of conformity for the sake of justice to victims and perpetrators.[11]

According to Luther, Jesus Christ is the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. He is to be understood as "the exemplary person and the prototype to which they are to be conformed through their experiences and sufferings."[12] Since Christ experienced and suffered our predicaments, we may experience his brotherhood in our midst. Therefore, Luther's Christology of conformity tells us that Christ is with us, namely "the tormented among those who are tormented, the one who suffers injustice among the victims of violence, the forsaken among the forsaken."[13]

Conformity to Christ characterizes our discipleship and participation in the world in willingness to accept God's passion and solidarity in love for the world. This understanding points to ecclesial and missional responsibility for the transformation of human existence, following the gospel of Jesus Christ. Luther's Trinitarian theology calls for prophetic *diakonia,* discipleship, and willingness to conform to the prophetic way of Jesus Christ in the world.

God's justification and justice

A christological approach to the doctrine of the Trinity is compatible with the teaching of justification by faith. Accordingly, for Luther, God's justification has to do with God's justice. Luther's idea of *fides Christo formata* emphasizes human vocation in the secular world. Here he turns upside down medieval economic teaching and its understanding of salvation. For Luther human labor is a divine commission understood in terms of faith. According to the medieval economic teaching, manual labor is devalued and vocation is limited only to the spiritual and ecclesial professions. At the heart of Luther is not self-sanctification or almsgiving but prophetic *diakonia* for the poor and the weak in creating a just and righteous social-economic order and system. Luther's discovery of the significance of the world from the perspective of the gospel of justification led him to challenge the begging of mendicant monks and denounce the issue of usury and the economic practice and disorder of early capitalism.[14]

Luther's reflection on God (the first commandment) is relevant to the economic realm. Luther regards mammon as the chief example of opposition to God. God, who is in contrast to mammon, motivates Luther to fight for the sake of the poor and the needy against the devouring capital

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9. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.

10. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology,* trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 239.

11. Jürgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 44.

12. Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, 48.

13. Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, 48.

14. Cf. Walter Altmann, *Luther and Liberation: A Latin American Perspective*, trans. Mary M. Solberg (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

process and system.[15] At this juncture, Luther's teaching of justification cannot be adequately understood without reference to his reflection on economic justice. Psalm 127 gives a basis for him to understand human beings as God's instruments in the area of politics and economy. God makes things happen through humanity. Therefore, human beings become the servants and the coworkers of God.[16]

Luther's understanding of people as the created coworkers of God encourages us to take seriously the liberative dimension of Christian mission by challenging the violence and injustice of the socio-economic order in our global context.

God's justification refers to creating justice and to bringing the sinner to righteousness. In light of the resurrection of the crucified, the new beginning of life leads to a life of forgiveness, reconciliation, and *metanoia*. This aspect establishes the justification and compassion of God's grace socially, politically, ecologically, and culturally. We remain sinners with respect to our past. However, we are always created righteous from the future of God. *Simul justus et simul peccator* characterizes a Christian existence in expectation of the coming God. Therefore, Luther's witness to the gospel of justification has a striking missiological relevance in respect to God's justice in the secular realm. For this reason the church's involvement in securing justice for the poor and the victims in light of the so-called "Nazareth Manifesto" (Lk 4:16–19) must be an integral part of the present-day church's missiology.

Justification in ecological context

Luther's idea of justification is also oriented toward the new creation in a cosmic dimension through the work of the Holy Spirit. In his commentary on Galatians, he articulates the testimony of the Holy Spirit in the experience of the believers.[17] Through the Spirit, God is immanently powerful in nature, in which we see God's dynamic presence and compassionate care "in, with and under" all living creatures. The whole creation is envisioned as the mask of God.[18] What is extraordinary for Luther's theology of creation is that God cooperates with human beings for the preservation of creation while rejecting this cooperation in regard to justification. For Luther, all creatures are God's masks and mummery.[19] God the Creator, constantly penetrating, overflowing into the created world and filling the cosmos, preserves creation both in its innermost and outermost aspects.[20]

For Luther a lively faith goes hand in hand with praise of God's beauty and glory in the universe. We Christians are encouraged to listen attentively to the beautiful

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15. Luther, "An die Pfarrherren, wider den Wucher zu predigen," *WA* 53:331-424. Cf. Friedrich W. Marquardt, "Gott oder Mammon: aber Theologie und Oekonomie bei Martin Luther," in *Einwürfe* 1 (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1983): 189.

16. Enarrationes in Psalmos 1533–1534. Cf. Marquardt, "Gott oder Mammon," 196.

17. Cf. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1:526.

18. *LW* 14:115. As Luther states, "Ever since the fall of Adam the world knows neither God nor his creation. It lies altogether outside of the glory of God. Oh, what thoughts [humans] might have had about the fact that God is in all creatures, and so might have reflected on the power and wisdom of God in even the smallest flowers!" *LW* 54:327; cf. 1:141.

19. *WA* 17 II, 192.28–31. Cf. B. Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. and ed. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 213.

20. *LW* 57:57. Cf. H. Paul Santmire, *Nature Reborn: The Ecological and Cosmic Promise of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985), 82.

music coming from others. Herein we read Luther's marvelous sense of nature in his usage of an ancient Greek sage. Bemoaning his time, Luther said that "we have become deaf to what Pythagoras aptly terms this wonderful and most lovely music coming from the harmony of the motions that are in the celestial spheres."[21] Luther at this point helps us to appreciate how faith and justification are correlated to ecological or environmental ethics. To be sure, in light of today's ecological crisis, Christian missiology must improve its awareness of the harmony and interconnection between human being and nature. The lovely music of nature that is at the heart of Luther's aesthetics of creation signifies wonderment of nature that also gradually strengthens our faith. Christian faith without wonderment would be reduced to a deaf faith.

For this reason, I agree with the San Antonio report on World Mission and Evangelism: "Mission in Christ's way must extend to God's creation. Because the earth is the Lord's, the responsibility of the church towards the earth is a crucial part of the church's mission."[22] Peace, justice, and the integrity of creation are interconnected with each other.

Lutheran witness in interfaith context

Since Vatican Council II, theologians in the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant churches have sought to pave a way for interreligious dialogue—toward constructing a theology of mission as they encounter the religions of the world. In this theology we observe an attempt to contextualize Christendom with respect to the coming of global Christianity.[23]

To avoid the mistakes of the past, there have been a number of theological efforts to pay attention to the differences and distinctive qualities of other cultures and religions. Karl Rahner and Hans Küng have carried out a groundbreaking paradigm shift in recognizing other religious people outside the walls of the Christian Church as anonymous Christians (to use the phrase of Rahner) or anonymous children of God. Küng expresses the significance of interreligious dialogue and peace: "No peace among the nations without peace among the religions; no peace among the religions without dialogue among religions."[24] In Küng's view, dialogue between religions cannot take place in a genuine sense without having accurate and profound knowledge of one's own religion and of the other's.

When it comes to Christian mission and evangelism in the non-Christian world, the relation between Christianity and world religions becomes inexorably a part to the agenda of missiology. This awareness must play an integral part in shaping Christian missiology in a more multicultural fashion. The organized world religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Islam, have long traditions of both scholarship and spiritual wisdom. As Huston Smith argues, learning from the world's religions means returning to the world's Great Wisdom Traditions.[25]

Regarding a typology of exclusivist-inclusivist-pluralist, Mark Heim proposes a model of orientational pluralism for recommending a particular witness and

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21. *LW* 1:126.
22. Cf. Kirk, *What Is Mission?* 167.
23. Cf. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
24. Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1991), 138.
25. Huston Smith, *The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 9.

religious diversity as the counterproposal to exclusivism or pluralism. In the framework of orientational pluralism associated with inclusive pluralism, Heim attempts to be open to others' distinctive claims and at the same time remain faithful to a particular authentic witness to Christianity. According to him, the move beyond inclusivism would be out of the question and "the attempt counterproductive."[26] Heim is convinced that there should be a paradoxical correlation between respect for exclusivism and the diversity of faith traditions in the community of other religions.[27] The inclusivist strategy is ready to accept the values found in other religions. It is, however, inclined to see these values as either the preliminary stage of preparing for or receiving Christian grace.

However, theologians of religions (such as John Hick) attempt to propose a universal relativizing of all different religions and faith orientations, integrating them into the mystery of God the Great Integrator. Such a relativistic-pluralistic strategy, rejecting claims for a specific, particular, context-bound way, does not recognize the privilege of Christianity when it includes other religious truth claims in any absolute sense. Promoting a pluralistic theology of religions, John Hick and Paul Knitter represent an epistemological break with the universal demand of Christianity, giving Christianity no hermeneutical privilege or normative status within religious plurality. God the Great Integrator has many names. The slogan that theology of religions raises up is the crossing of a theological Rubicon.[28]

Raimundo Panikkar challenges theocentric universalism in terms of his Trinitarian theology of cosmotheandrism. God does not need many names; God's one name as the Mystery is enough, beyond all religious truth claims. Using the metaphor of a river, he calls for a pluralistic plunge into the river Ganges. The rivers of the earth do not meet each other, not even in the ocean. They do meet in heaven. His poignant question is: "Does one need to be spiritually a Semite or intellectually a Westerner in order to be a Christian ?"[29] Unfortunately, a spiritual anti-Semitism becomes an inevitable reality for Panikkar's theology of cosmotheandrism.

Against the pluralist theology of religions, Wolfhart Pannenberg sees in the religions the originating roots of the appearance of divine reality, in which humans participate. For the basis of his theology of religions, the revelation of God grounds and mediates the historicity and openness of religious experience. Instead of contrast between revelation and religion, divine revelation (with its priority over religion) becomes manifest in the medium of religion. For Pannenberg this christocentric theology stands for God's work in other religions and the eschatological future of God's reign.[30]

Given the complexity of debate in the interreligious setting, it would be dubious to pursue and gain insight from Luther himself, because he was a child of Europe in the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, I try

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26. S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 222.

27. Heim, *Salvations*, 226.

28. *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. John Hick and Paul Knitter (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987), viii.

29. Raimundo Panikkar, "The Jordan, The Tiber, and The Ganges: Three Kairological Moments of Christic Self-Consciousness," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, 89.

30. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* I, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 178.

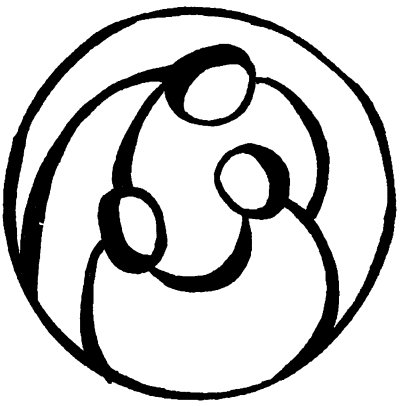
to contextualize the so-called irregular side of Luther's thought. Luther's sensitivity to others, despite his limitations, is expressed well in their bearing the face of Christ, his reflection on the irregular grace of God as seen in the other. A Christian is to learn to recognize God's irregular grace. Luther's remark on Ishmael is striking at this point.

> For the expulsion does not mean that Ishmael should be utterly excluded from the kingdom of God. . . . The descendents of Ishmael also joined the church of Abraham and became heirs of the promise, not by reason of a right but because of irregular grace.[31]

At this juncture Luther's christocentric idea of regular grace does not stand in competition with God's mystery regarding irregular grace for the world.

Reminiscent of Luther's saying, Dietrich Bonhoeffer expressed his marvelous sensitivity to the other: "The curses of the godless sometimes sound better in God's ear than hallelujahs of the pious."[32] In his prison cell Bonhoeffer represented a theology for others, that is, "the excluded, the suspect, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled—in short . . . those who suffer" outside the walls of Christianity.[33] For Bonhoeffer, as Jesus is for others, so the church becomes meaningful only when it exists for others. A christological motive for Bonhoeffer's being for others refers to God in human form; the man for others is the Crucified.[34] Regarding Bonhoeffer's insight of the church for others, Jesus Christ is the Lord not only of our church but also the Lord of the world.

Christian mission is primarily and ultimately a witness to the work of the Triune God in Jesus Christ for the sake of the world. The church is privileged to participate in God's mission by witnessing to the mystery of God in the revelation of Jesus Christ by conforming ourselves to the gospel under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.



Our particular confession to Jesus Christ does not block us from being humble and open before the mystery of God in the world.

Despite Luther's late anti-Jewish writing and polemic, his understanding of Jesus as a born Jew can contribute to the Jewish-Christian relationship. In principle, Luther distinguishes law from gospel without separation. But he was ready to revise and extend the theory of two kingdoms in respect of the theory of three kingdoms. His distinction between the three estates—the priestly estate, the estate of marriage, and the temporal authority—serves to protect the right of the poor and the weaker and preserve the creation. In all three estates of *ecclesia*, *oeconomia*, and *politia* which God

31. *LW* 4:42–44.

32. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being: Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Systematic Theology*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr., trans. H. Martin Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 161.

33. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Reginald H. Fuller, Frank Clarke, John Bowden, et al. (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 17.

34. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 381.

established, the Christian is called to act responsibly for others.[35]

In the two-kingdoms theory, worldly government rules with the sword. The spiritual kingdom, however, rules only with grace and the forgiveness of sin. One sees the worldly kingdom with a physical eye, but the spiritual kingdom is grasped with the eye of the faith. Between them, Luther contends, there is another kingdom, a half-spiritual and half-worldly kingdom, that grasps the Jews with commandments and external ceremonies.[36]

From this perspective Luther was willing to overcome the simple dialectics of separating God's kingdom from the kingdom of the world in terms of providing Judaism with a place without yielding to the urge of subsuming it. The kingdom that the Jews represent remains, according to him, a kingdom of Jewish service for the world. This is a kingdom of the Jews, the sent ones, that is dissolved into neither the worldly government nor the spiritual one. It is rather established in the middle. Luther did not elaborate and develop his idea of the third kingdom of the Jews in his theological program.[37]

Although Luther did not accept Jewish rejection of Jesus Christ as an act of faithfulness to the Torah, his idea of justification does not necessarily lead to evangelical anti-Judaism. Heiko Obermann distinguishes personal-resentment anti-Judaism from evangelical anti-Judaism in Luther's theology. The latter, according to Obermann, holds a central place in the Reformation doctrine of justification. However, an anti-Jewish contour of Reformation theology[38] may be balanced by its particular-inclusive orientation. For Luther sinners are saved only by God's gracious act in Jesus Christ. Christ's saving work is definitely for all. In his commentary on 1 Tim 2:4, for example, Luther argues that God desires all people to be saved. At this point an inclusive dimension of *sola fidei* does not necessarily mean that it develops in an anti-Jewish direction.[39]

Luther knew fulfillment of faith in theWord of God in the world of the Old Testament. According to Luther, "the faith is all the same, so all the fathers [in the Old Testament] just like ourselves were justified by the Word and faith and also died therein."[40] Therefore, Abraham was justified in his faith in the Word of God and God's promise, just as we are justified in faith in Jesus Christ. At this point Luther regards Abraham as the sublime example of evangelical life.[41]

This positive line of Luther's idea of Israel should be taken up to be renewed and improved for our ecumenical Jewish-Chris-

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35. *LW* 1:104. Cf. Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 323–25.

36. Luther, "How Christians Should Regard Moses," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 138.

37. Friedrich W. Marquardt, "Feinde um unsretwillen": Das jüdische Nein und die christliche Theologie, in F. W. Marquardt, *Verwegenheiten: Theologische Stücke aus Berlin* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1981), 314.

38. Heiko Obermann, *Wurzeln des Antisemitismus. Christenangst und Judenplage im Zeitalter von Humanismus und Reformation* (Berlin: Severin und Siedler, 1981).

39. As Luther articulates, "This is an exclusive proposition that is expressed in universal terms. . . . He causes all men to be saved" (*LW* 28:262). Similarly, Bonhoeffer actualizes Lutheran concern in the following way: "It means that nothing is lost, that everything is taken up in Christ, although it is transformed, made transparent, clear, made free from the anguish of selfish desire. Christ restores all this as God originally intended it to be." Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 170.

40. *WA* 24, 99, 26.

41. *WA* 57: III, 4f. (A Lecture on Hebrew, 1518). Cf. Paul in Romans 4.

tian encounter, especially in regard to Bonhoeffer's theology of Israel. For Bonhoeffer the Jew leaves open the question of Christ. The Jewish "No" is therefore positive, not negative, to him, because

> Western history is, by God's will, indissolubly linked with the people of Israel, not only genetically but also in a genuine uninterrupted encounter. . . . An expulsion of the Jews from the West must necessarily bring with it the expulsion of Christ. For Jesus Christ was a Jew.[42]

Conclusion: Lutheran witness to God's mission

Following in the footsteps of Luther, Barth conceptualized his own theology of *missio Dei*. According to Barth, mission is to be articulated as an activity of God. God who loves in freedom sent the Son, and God the Father and the Son sent the Spirit after the resurrection. Mission is to be understood as "the expression of the divine sending forth of the self, the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit to the world."[43] Likewise the Triune God sends the people of God, the church, into the world. Mission is not seen in triumphalist categories; rather it is seen as God's love in Jesus Christ for the world. Mission under the cross does not mean forcing people of other cultures into the ecclesiastical sphere but affirms God's mission with an emphasis on God's solidarity as the crucified God with people of other cultures. Jesus Christ died and rose again for people outside the walls of the Christian church. For Barth,

> Neither the aim to strengthen confessional positions, nor to extend European or American culture and civilization, nor to propagate one of the modes of thought and life familiar and dear to the older Christian world by reason of its antiquity, can be the motivating force behind true Christian missions, and certainly not the desire to support colonial or general political interests and aspirations.[44]

The *missio Dei,* which becomes manifest in sending the Son and the Spirit through the Father, includes the church. To participate in the church is to participate in the movement of God's love and grace toward people. The church is privileged to participate in God's missional activity, because God's mission embraces both the church and the world.

Within the framework of God's mission I propose that other religions should be recognized as signposts in preparation for the coming of God's eschatological salvation announced by the gospel of Jesus Christ. God's mission arrives in the life of Jesus Christ without being relegated to the past. So, Christian mission locates itself in creative tension between God's arrival in Jesus Christ in our history and our yearning on the way toward the future of God. Therefore, the prolepsis of God's mission present in Jesus Christ takes a particular and inclusive way against the militant exclusivism of evangelical conservatives as well as the sheer relativism of neo-liberal pluralists.

Likewise, Heim, following in the footsteps of John B. Cobb, proposed his model of orientational pluralism by which one can overcome exclusivism and relativism by affirming Christian superiority. For Cobb, in the Buddhist-Christian context, Christ is the Way of Transformation which does not exclude other ways. His christocentric Catholic theology represents an alternative way of going beyond exclusive absolutism

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42. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics,* ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Neville Horton Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 89.

43. Barth, *Theologische Fragen und Antworten* (Zollikon: EVZ, 1957), 104–5, 114–15. Cf. *Classic Texts in Mission & World Christianity*, ed. Norman E. Thomas (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 106.

44. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3 pt. 2, 875.

God's promise in Jesus Christ is to be concretized and fulfilled by faith through discipleship active in love for evangelization of God's mission.

or pluralistic relativism. However, his understanding of Christ is grounded in the Greek metaphysical term *logos spermatikos*, which is the key principle of mutual transformation, enabling Christianity to be faithful to its own tradition and at the same time transformed in its interaction with other faith traditions.[45] In keeping with his claim for Christian superiority, Heim places his idea of orientational pluralism in favor of dialogue, inclusion, and transformation.

In God's reconciliation with the world, nothing can separate the world from God. Christian witness to God's mission in a genuine sense lies in serving the world by bearing witness to Jesus Christ and God's reconciliation with the world. Jesus Christ is the herald of justification, reconciliation, and consummation. He cannot be conflated merely with a metaphysical theologumenon of the *logos spermatikos*.[46] In light of the resurrection of the crucified one, justification "as the last word"[47] points to what happens in the incarnation, cross, resurrection, and the coming of Jesus Christ.

God's reconciliation offers a missional dynamism for all believers to invite people in the world to participate in God's life in word and sacrament, implementing diaconal discipleship in serving the poor, resisting the reality of evil, and anticipating God's final promise in the hope of the coming of God's future. Reconciliation is not salvation but God's loving invitation to people in the world, no matter how hostile and disobedient they are to God. God who justifies in reconciliation through Jesus Christ is the one who motivates and encourages the church to move in God's mission for the world. God's promise in Jesus Christ, which is articulated by justification through faith in God's promise of word and sacrament, is to be concretized and fulfilled by faith through discipleship active in love for evangelization of God's mission.

In the reconciled world God speaks to us completely differently. God's irregular voice helps enrich and deepen the universal message of the gospel not only for others but also for Christians. God is pleased to have Abraham blessed by Melchizedek. Melchizedek can be understood as the non-Jewish leader of a religious community, different from the Levitical or Aaronic order. In our general climate of religious intolerance and indifference, God speaks to us through symbolic figures like Melchizedek on behalf of righteousness and universal peace.

Although Luther was not able to develop his reflection on God's irregular grace for the world, I propose to deepen and radicalize his irregular thinking for Lutheran witness in light of God's reconciliation with the world and in respect to world mission. Our mission is to witness to the

45. Heim, *Salvations*, 144.

46. For a critique of the Greek term, see Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 60.

47. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 120.

mystery of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ. This witness shapes and characterizes a Lutheran spirituality of humble attitude before the reign of God and discipleship in following the way of Jesus Christ. This discipleship underscores Luther's idea of the priesthood of all believers.

Martin Luther can be understood as a creative and original missionary thinker. As God the Father sends the Son through the Spirit, so this Trinitarian fellowship sends the church into the world. The crucified God, as the cosmic One, died, descended into hell,[48] and rose in compassion for others, in anticipation of the coming kingdom of God. For Luther, the coming of God's kingdom takes place in a twofold sense. First, it comes, in time, through the Word, sacrament, and faith. Second, it comes through the final revelation. The reality of God's kingdom becomes the foundation for preaching throughout the world, which God's kingdom may pervade through the Word and by the power of the Holy Spirit until God's kingdom finally eradicates sin, death and hell.[49] For Luther, eschatology is in expectation of the future renewal of the entire world and the perfection of all creation. Christ's resurrection is the foundation of redemption as well as the perfection of all creation so that Luther's eschatology is one that includes the world and creation. The crucified God as the coming slain Lamb of God anticipates the Gentile's participation in eschatological salvation and the new creation of all creatures.[50]

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48. Regarding the inclusive dimension of Luther's idea of Jesus' descent into hell, Pannenberg states, "The symbolic language of Jesus' descent into hell expresses the extent to which those men who lived before Jesus' activity and those who did not know him have a share in the salvation that has appeared in him." Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), 274. Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 251–53.

49. Luther, "The Large Catechism," in *The Book of Concord*, 447.

50. At this point, for instance, Paul Althaus argues that Blumhardt's movement in the pietism of Würtemburg, despite its theology of the history of God's kingdom, is closer to Luther than Lutheran orthodoxy in the seventeenth century. Cf. Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 423–24.

Book Reviews

The Gift of Grace: The Future of Lutheran Theology. Edited by Niels Henrik Gregersen, Bo Holm, Ted Peters, and Peter Widmann. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004. xvi and 368 pages. Paper. $30.00.

What an ambitious work! 28 essays from 28 theologians about the past, present, and future of God's experiment that we call the Lutheran Reformation. *The Gift of Grace* gathers a variety of voices and viewpoints to paint a broad picture of Lutheran scholarship today. The authors' consistent emphasis on justification and justice merits high praise. The topical essays are worth reading individually, while the book grows even more thought-provoking when taken as a larger vision of what God is doing in our times through Lutheran Christianity.

The Gift of Grace contains eight sections in the following sequence: grace, cross, justification, justice, comparisons [to Luther], ecumenics, world, and science. This order highlights the historic doctrinal core of Lutheranism and moves from there. Yet it struck me that it might also be helpful to read the collection backward. Why not begin as Luther did: with a serious analysis of the world around us that drives us to justice, justification, the cross, and ultimately God's grace? Chapter 1, Robert Jenson's "Triune God," then becomes a powerful conclusion. Thus we move from observation and reflection to proclamation and mission, rather than waiting for the world to come to our fixed doctrines. David Truemper's suggestion to view our confessional writings as "problem-solving literature" speaks to this tension of being a mission-minded church with a confessional tradition.

An awareness of the global church rightly permeates this collection; the authors recognize that North Atlantic theology has itself been a contextual theology. The essays that focus on sharing Reformation heritage in non-European and post-Christendom settings are without exception excellent pieces of faithful and creative theology. Sometimes, though, the collection does fall into North Atlantic biases. The section "comparisons" relates Luther to Aquinas, Calvin, Grundtvig, and Kierkegaard. Placing Paul Chung's chapter on Martin Luther and Asian Spirituality or Fidon Mwombeki's "The Theology of the Cross: Does It Make Sense to Africans?" in that same "comparisons" category may have more forcefully highlighted how relevant and vibrant a sixteenth-century Thuringian monk remains on the global scale.

Finally, as laudable as this collection of essays is, it will never be a popular book; it is not written for the populace. The authors and editors have aimed at a graduate-level audience. Though academic discussions do need to challenge the mind, a work like this could easily be more reader-friendly. Also, for a theological tradition rooted in Scripture, the use of the Bible as a primary source was minimal. This is tragic at a time when the Lutheran encounter with God's Word is such a vital necessity. Maybe we forget that readable theological and biblical scholarship is not "dumbing-down." When our mission is Christian proclamation, a clear telling of Jesus' grace is a gift to all of God's people.

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A History of the First Christians. By Alexander J. M. Wedderburn. Understanding the Bible and Its World. London, New York: T & T Clark/Continuum, 2004. xii and 296 pages. Cloth $130.00.

This history of early Christianity concentrates on the period down to C.E. 70, treating the last third of the first century quite briefly. It should be the standard critical English introduction to that history for the next decade or two. Wedderburn discusses the sources in the introduction (carefully describing how fragmentary they are and making clear the problems in using Acts in the writing of history).

Chapters 2 to 4 cover the origins of Christianity as a Jewish group (resurrection appearances and Pentecost), the emergence of the Hellenists (Stephen and early persecution), and the spread of Christianity (Peter's activity, beginnings in Antioch).

Chapters 5 through 7, the largest section of the work, discuss Paul, a concentration justified by the number of surviving writings. Wedderburn makes careful, discriminating use of Acts in describing Paul's life down to the Jerusalem council and in working out the chronology of Paul's ministry (chaps. 5 and 6). Chapter 7 describes Paul's missionary activity, including a description of Pauline communities and their problems and the significance of the collection.

"Judaizing Christianity" is the subject of chapter 8 (James, the Jerusalem church, etc.). Chapter 9 is devoted to "Pauline Christianity after Paul" (a Pauline school? "early Catholicism"). Chapter 10 describes "Johannine Christianity," based on the Gospel and the three letters. The last chapter, "The Church in the Roman Empire," briefly surveys the relationship of the Roman authorities to the Christian community. Some texts receive scant treatment, e.g., 1 Peter, Revelation, and the deutero-Pauline literature. Hebrews merits only two brief mentions.

The history Wedderburn has given us is magnificent on the church down to Paul but falls off decidedly after that. Still, it is one of the best we have, up to date in its bibliography and in the questions it asks. A select bibliography and indexes of primary sources, modern literature cited, and subjects discussed completes the volume.

The publisher describes the goal of the new series as responding to "the needs of introductory level students." It is also to appeal to "the general reader who wants to be better informed about the latest advances in our understanding of the Bible and of the intellectual, political and religious world in which it was formed." Wedderburn's history goes far beyond that goal: It is critical, sophisticated history, heavily documented from modern scholarship, replete with discussions of key texts, that fills a gap in the professional literature of New Testament studies.

Edgar Krentz

Reading the Gospels Today. Edited by Stanley E. Porter. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004. xvii and 211 pages. Paper. $24.00.

This sixth volume of the McMaster New Testament series includes papers presented at the 2002 Bingham Colloquium at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario. All except two of the contributors teach in Canada.

The first offering by Craig A. Evans, "Sorting Out the Synoptic Problem: Why an Old Approach Is Still Best," argues for the ongoing benefits of redaction criticism. In the second paper, "Reading the Gospels and the Quest for the Historical Jesus," Stanley E. Porter investigates the genre of the Gospels, the language of Jesus, and the criteria of authenticity as part of his basic conclusion that the quest for the historical Jesus enriches the reading of the Gospels. Michael Knowles's "Reading Matthew: The Gospel as Oral Performance" and Allan Martens's "Salvation Today: Reading Luke's Message for a Gentile Audience" are both thoughtful essays. Less insightful is Yong-Eui Yang's "Reading Mark 11:12–25 from a Korean Perspective."

By far the most creative and even profound contribution, worth the price of the book in my judgment, is "Reading John: The Fourth Gospel under Modern and Postmodern Interrogation" by Andrew T. Lincoln, Portland Professor of New Testament at the University of Gloucestershire in the United Kingdom. Lincoln agrees with many scholars that the Fourth Gospel's truth claims about Jesus are inextricably tied to the context and struggle of the Johannine community as a "marginalized group" and that "it is not plausible to defend any consistent or detailed one-to-one correspondence between John's narrative and what is likely to have happened in the ministry of Jesus" (p. 132).

The bulk of Lincoln's essay seeks to demonstrate how the Johannine claim to truth has to be understood in light of ancient biographies' flexibility to incorporate the concerns of the present situation (John's community) by giving voice to these concerns through the words of the founding figure of the past (Jesus) and how the Gospel's repeated "testimony" to the larger truth of who Jesus is as the one sent from the Father

can make sense of its "alleged anti-Judaism." "In its original context it is the language of reproach in the face of violence" (p. 141) and as a polemic is designed to push those who did not believe in Jesus to repentance and a new vision. Finally, in the face of the assertion that claims to truth are always related to the power of the group making the claim, Lincoln argues that in John "the power of truth is a quite different sort of power" (p. 145) from that represented in the figure of Pilate who asks "What is truth?" Jesus' power is revealed in "self-giving love" and is confirmed in the nature and life of the Christian community.

The final two essays in the book are Lee Martin McDonald's "The Gospels in Early Christianity: Their Origin, Use, and Authority" (tracing their use in the second to fourth centuries C.E.) and Al Wolters's "Reading the Gospels Canonically: A Methodological Dialogue with Brevard Childs" (demonstrating the limitations of Childs's canonical criticism).

On the whole, the teaching scholars represented in this volume are less suspicious of the historical value of the Gospels than many published scholars in the United States. Though the other essays were worth reading, I found Lincoln's essay on John by far the most valuable.

James L. Bailey, Professor Emeritus
Wartburg Theological Seminary

The Leapin' Deacon: The Soldier's Chaplain. By Conrad N. Walker and J. Walker Winslow. Austin: Lang-Marc Publishing, 2004. 269 pages. Paper. $18.95 ($22.50 Canada).

Lutheran churches long have had a place of honor in the annals of military ministry. Lutheran chaplains bring a message centered in Jesus and a style of pastoral care centered in Word and sacraments. They stand firmly on the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. Many conduct such ministry in a very effective manner. This book is about one who clearly excels in ministry to the soldiers, Conrad Norman Walker, pastor and Army chaplain.

Raised in Minnesota in a Lutheran Norwegian family, "Connie" learned the essentials of hard work and honest living grounded in family and the Lutheran faith of his ancestors. Wrestling, football, and boxing became essential sports for him. His college football experience as a Washington Huskie opened the door for him to make football a career, but the call of service to the Lord was stronger than the lure of the goal line. He entered seminary and soon adapted his pastoral skills to the ministry of an Army chaplain. His great physical strength and ability guided him to the airborne elite and put him with the frontline units in Vietnam. Here he earned a Silver Star, a story he rarely shares. The reader is privileged to read some of this story of physical strength and care for the wounded.

General John Vessey, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has supplied a brief "Foreword," a testimony to how much this gifted leader and Lutheran layman appreciates the ministry he observed and received from Walker.

This is a book for those who know Connie and want to learn even more about him. It is a book for those interested in ministry to the Armed Forces to read and learn about the joys and trials of the chaplaincy. It is a book that will give any pastor a deeper appreciation for the importance of family in our identity as pastors. It is a book to read when you simply want a great story of one empowered by the joy of the gospel message and the excitement of sharing the Good News in often difficult surroundings. It is a gift to all interested in this privileged area of young adult ministry, that of chaplain to those in service to our nation.

J. Walker Winslow provides some background to the writing of this memoir. He aptly summarizes the many testimonies to Connie's ministry and helped organize the material for the book. He helps tell the story about Connie in the words of others.

For those who know him, this book is a fun trip through a man and a family we know and love. For those who have not had this privilege, it is a powerful introduction to the person and ministry of one of the most dynamic and effective chaplains to serve in the U.S. Army.

Kenneth M. Ruppar
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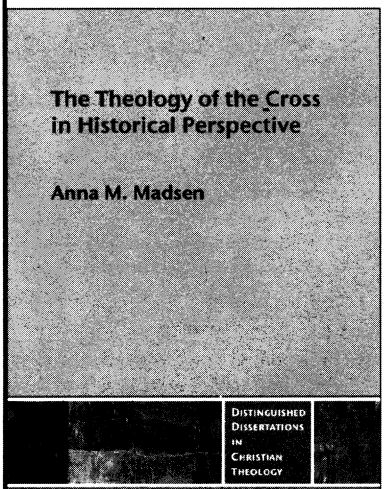
The Theology of the Cross in Historical Perspective

Anna M. Madsen



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The theology of the cross is widely discussed today. Seminars, books, and dissertations tackle the topic. But *The Theology of the Cross in Historical Perspective* demonstrates that interest in the theology of the cross is no passing fancy. Theologies of the cross appear at the beginnings of the church, in the sixteenth-century reformations of the church, and in the more contemporary modernization of the church.

Anna Madsen surveys the theology of the cross in the thinking of Paul and Luther and outlines several important twentieth-century contributions. Madsen suggests that the theology of the cross reveals God to be found even in death. In death, after all, boundaries disappear. The theology of the cross assures Christians that God is present in the death of sin and in the realities of suffering and uncertainty. The theology of the cross is ultimately a theology of grace, freedom, and trust.

Distinguished Dissertations in Christian Theology
Alan G. Padgett and Beth Felker Jones, series editors

ABOUT THE SERIES: We are living in a vibrant season for academic Christian theology. After a hiatus of some decades, a real flowering of excellent systematic and moral theology has emerged. This situation calls for a series that showcases the contributions of newcomers to this ongoing and lively conversation. The journal *Word & World: Theology for Christian Ministry* and the academic society Christian Theological Research Fellowship (CTRF) are happy to cosponsor this series together with our publisher Pickwick Publications (an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers). Both the CTRF and *Word & World* are interested in excellence in academics but also in scholarship oriented toward Christ and the Church. The volumes in this series are distinguished for their combination of academic excellence with sensitivity to the primary context of Christian learning. We are happy to present the work of these young scholars to the wider world and are grateful to Luther Seminary for the support that helped make it possible.

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Crossing the Divide: Luther, Feminism, and the Cross. By Deanna A. Thompson. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004. xv and 184 pages. Paper. $18.00.

"The Cross is our Theology" (Martin Luther). "No one was saved by the execution of Jesus" (Rebecca Parker). It is the divide between Lutheran and feminist theologies exemplified in these citations that Deanna Thompson seeks to cross. Thompson carefully delineates the problems and possibilities of each theology because she proposes that "to become a feminist theology of the cross is to adopt an appreciative yet critical stance toward both" (p. xiv). By doing so, Thompson has authored a clearly written, richly annotated, and valuable contribution to both theologies.

In the book's first part, Thompson offers a solid overview of Luther's career as a reformer. Chapter 1 lays out the sources behind Luther's, if not systematic, then certainly constructive, theology. In the second chapter, Thompson offers a clear account of how this two-kingdoms theology informed his handling of the peasant's revolt, such that "it becomes impossible to endorse the harsh, unforgiving tone he took with the peasants" (p. 54). In the third chapter, she notes how Luther's persistent anti-Judaism was the primary source for his later, now infamous, wrath toward Jews who did not convert.

Having exercised her "appreciative yet critical" stance toward Luther, Thompson clearly does the same with feminist theology. Next she adds parameters for dialogue and also constructs bridges for "a way forward" for each of her three areas of interrogation—sin, the male savior, and atonement. While she argues that Lutheran theology often confuses the sins of humanity with sins of men, she contends that some kinds of sin are indeed applicable to women. Thompson proposes that Christ today be located in "the crucified woman," but without thereby eclipsing narratives of the historical Jesus, "the Jewish man, who is also God" (p. 125). Mindful of atonement theologies' sometimes negative "effective history," Thompson reframes Luther's joyous exchange between God and a harlot as the joy of God's friendship with humanity.

Thompson's final chapter, "On Becoming a Feminist Theologian of the Cross," offers provocative suggestions for saying No to facile theology as well as Yes to the "real life of faith" (p. 139). Building off the research of Jewish feminist scholar Amy-Jill Levine, she offers a fascinating analysis of the ambiguities in the relationship between Sarah and Hagar that exemplify how women may be both victims and oppressors.

Thompson's work takes a step beyond Mary Solberg's worthy feminist theology of the cross by examining problems in Luther's theology identified by other feminist theologians as well as detailing problems within feminist theology itself. To be sure, the book may not move those fixated on either side of the divide. However, for those in between, it may provide ways to cross back and forth.

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Breaking the Conspiracy of Silence: Christian Churches and the Global AIDS Crisis. By Donald E. Messer. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004. xx and 192 pages. Paper. $15.00.

This book offers the reader both information and exhortation. It is a profound account of the current facts of the global AIDS crisis, made all the more poignant by the firsthand stories and experiences that enrich and enliven them. It is also a much-needed exhortation directed at the church in the hope of awakening it from its unconscionable and immoral lethargy.

The exhortation develops around two questions: What is the cause of the church's indifference, and What is to be done? The answers that Messer provides get better as the book develops. The first third of the book is driven by your standard liberal polemic against conservative/evangelical/confessional theology. We are told in no uncertain terms that the church is in the grips of a conservative theology of exclusion and judgment and that the only way to extend love and care to the victims of AIDS is to reject this theology for an inclusive and compassionate theology. What is particularly troubling about this polemic is not simply the contradiction that

drives it (we must judge and exclude judgment and exclusion) but the way in which it lets liberals off the hook. Messer offers not one word of reflection on what underwrites liberal apathy. After all, it is at least arguable that the mainline churches—especially their social service arms—are not (yet) controlled by conservatives. Thus we might profitably ask what enables liberals to decide, say, to spend tens of millions of dollars on an ad campaign that does not so much as hint at welcoming AIDS victims or to create yet more layers of bureaucracy instead of devoting similar quantities and qualities of energy toward the AIDS crisis.

The argument, however, does improve as Messer goes on, in spite of his initial claims, to offer necessary judgments on particular behaviors and attitudes and as he retreats from his liberal polemic, acknowledging that conservatives/evangelicals, no less than liberals, have the theological resources, and in fact can and do embrace and care for the victims of AIDS and that we can and should work together to confront this crisis. Here he is at his theological best.

With regard to what is to be done, Messer encourages the churches to take up the challenge to educate and care. He discusses gender issues, components of prevention (arguing, for example, that there is a place for both abstinence and fidelity as well as condoms), public policy initiatives (debt relief, funding, and issues surrounding the accessibility of needed drugs), as well as the liturgical dimension of ecclesial response (confession, behavioral change, commitment, courage, and community). One wishes, however, that there had been a few more examples of local congregational efforts (e.g., formation of care teams, adoption of HIV+ infants, etc.) to stimulate our imaginations in the direction of concrete steps beyond typical public policy advocacy and funding pleas.

On the whole, the book does a good job of both lifting up the crisis and provoking the church to thoughtful confession and reflection on its (in)action. Now if only we will begin to heed Messer's call. . . .

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In Life and Death: The Shaping of Faith. By LeRoy H. Aden. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005. xi and 132 pages. Paper. 10.99.

In twenty years of parish ministry, the two most poignant and painful funerals over which I presided were for a three-year-old boy who died of leukemia and a thirty-year-old mother of three who died of melanoma. Both deaths brought me to the limits of my pastoral wisdom and words in the face of such stark and senseless loss.

I wish I had had Leroy Aden's book to read as I prepared for those funerals and gave pastoral care to those families. This is a wise, honest, and compassionate book that takes seriously the questions of faith and doubt in the face of death. Aden, pastoral care professor emeritus at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, looks squarely at the dynamics of death, grief, and loss and does not cop out with pious murmurings for those of us who take seriously both the claims of faith and the psychological and spiritual challenge of death and grief.

Aden's chapter headings give us a glimpse of where he heads. In "The Fundamentals of Faith" Aden takes on a definition of faith heard by most pastors when their flock speaks of their belief, "a simple faith" composed of three major beliefs: that God is good, that God will reward those who are good, and that God will grant us fulfillment. Aden shows how death can shake the assumptions of a simple faith and lead us to a deeper faith, moving from "I believe that" to "I believe in." In "The Frailty of Faith" Aden explores through pastoral vignettes how an encounter with death produces grief, an all-consuming experience that undermines ultimate answers and exposes the weakness of our faith. In "Faith in Ourselves" Aden traces our human response to encounters with death, how we attempt to delete death from life, attribute death to the will of God, lose ourselves in the mundane, and search for immortality—all variants of a misplaced faith.

Turning next to the "Tenacity of Faith," Aden gives examples of faith leading to peace and steadfastness in the face of death, giving us hope that we might disarm the power, dispel the isolation, and diminish the finality of death. At

the same time, Aden is realistic about the tendency of church members to abandon the dying and to underutilize the communion of saints to counteract isolation and finality of dying. But he returns to the bottom line of the tenacity of faith to describe how people of faith reach beyond their own resources and draw strength from the resurrected Christ. In "Faith and the Assurances of God" Aden blends pastoral, personal, and theological examples of the way in which we are comforted, strengthened, and reassured by the work of the Spirit as we face death, even, like Luther, in the midst of our *Anfechtung,* suspended between faith and doubt.

The final two chapters, "The Psychological Fruits of Faith" and "Concrete Instances of Faith," provide perhaps the most provocative of Aden's insights in his exploration of how faith empowers us to accept what was, to live with what is, and to embrace what is to come. Aden notes the psychodynamics of our difficulty with living in the present, thus distorting our experience of life and death, unable to affirm life because we cannot accept our failings and forgiveness. Faith is needed to help us trust what lies beyond the horizon. Aden compares two concrete examples, the death of Luther's 13-year-old daughter Magdalena in the sixteenth century and the death of a 33-year-old construction worker in the twentieth century, and the responses of their loved ones to these losses. While appreciative of Luther's experience of grief, Aden notes how Luther used his personal loss in referring a bereaved friend to the Word of God and how such an approach may not work in the same way in the twentieth century. Aden notes: "When we read Luther's letters to the bereaved, for example, we find his quick references to God and his firm conviction that God is at work in the loss, less than convincing or comforting." In a richly detailed case study of the construction worker's death, Aden shows how pastoral care and preaching are different in their witness, one through verbal assurance and the other through incarnate, relational care. Pastors who assist their bereaved parishioners in articulating their faith struggle help them through such articulation to experience a healing power that potentiates their faith.

This book from an experienced pastoral counselor takes seriously the tough questions and quandaries faced by pastors as they minister to bereaved and dying parishioners. Newly minted pastors and wise mentors alike will find much wisdom here that resonates with real ministry and insights that will reward their return again and again to its pages as they prepare for pastoral care in death and life.

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Religion and Empire: People, Power, and the Life of the Spirit. By Richard A. Horsley. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003. ix and 151 pages. Paper. $6.00.

In this short yet fascinating book, Richard Horsley, Distinguished Professor of Liberal Arts and the Study of Religion at the University of Massachusetts, looks at the relationship between political power and religion. Horsley's intention appears modest—"to raise some theoretical issues in . . . relations between imperial power and religion"—yet the cases he examines raise deep and potentially disturbing questions, especially for those of us in the United States, on the imperial side of power relations.

The book is divided into three sections, each of which looks at a "pattern of relations," examining modern and historical examples.

1. "Cultural elites" in the dominant society, suffering from spiritual malaise, adopt and construct a subject people's religion. Here Horsley looks at Buddhism, which, divorced from its ritual aspects, has been widely adopted as a rational philosophy by Western intellectuals. In the ancient world, a similar pattern occurred as Roman elites constructed the cult of Isis from Egyptian religious practices.

2. People subjected to foreign domination renew their own religious traditions as a means of resisting imperial power. Horsley focuses on the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Cutting close to home, he examines the history of the United States' involvement in Iran prior to the 1979 revolution and how resistance to U.S. imperialism became centered in a renewed form of Islam. Renewal and resistance movements against Roman power in Judea are the parallel ancient pattern.

3. Those in the dominant society develop an "imperial religion" that comes to characterize those imperial power relations. In this last section, Horsley begins with the Roman emperor cult, then turns to an examination of Christmas, the "festival of consumer capitalism," as the modern example of imperial religion. Horsley's own position shows most clearly in this chapter as he critiques Western consumer culture where capitalism, hiding under a religious façade, has in fact become the new imperial religion being marketed to the world.

Whether one agrees with Horsley's critique of the United States and its imperial role in the world, the reader cannot help but be stimulated by this book and its evaluation of the relationship between imperial power and religion. In light of the United States' present involvement in the Middle East, this book is must reading for any thinking American. It would be especially appropriate for adult discussion groups.

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The Biblical World. Edited by John Barton. 2 vols. London and New York: Routledge, 2002; paperback ed., 2004. xxiii and 524 pages; ix and 539 pages. Paper. £45.00.

The Early Christian World. Edited by Philip F. Esler. 2 vols. London and New York: Routledge, 2000; paperback ed., 2004. xxvi and 689 pages; ix and pages 690–1342. Paper. £45.00.

These two large, multi-authored reference sets are extremely helpful in understanding and interpreting biblical texts. The first covers both testaments, the second only the New. The first volume of *The Biblical World* briefly describes the OT, the Apocrypha, and the NT. Then comes a description of significant genres (myth and legend, historiography, prophecy, wisdom, apocalyptic, the Jewish novel, gospels, and letters). The third section discusses documents, including Hebrew inscriptions, and Gnostic gospels. The final section describes the history of Palestine from the Bronze Age to 135 C.E. (There is little attention to the wider world of the New Testament—a gap the second set fills well.)

The second volume pays more, though limited, attention to the New Testament. Thus the articles on law in the New Testament concentrates on law in Palestine; it says nothing about law in the Greek polis or Roman administrative units. The writers discuss institutions (languages, warfare, arts, religion in different periods, and social life); a series of articles discusses Jewish religion; the two articles by Justin J. Meggitt orient the reader to the social life and the religious practice of the "First Churches." They are the first articles to take note of the Greco-Roman context of early Christianity in this set, and offer extensive bibliographies. The section on Biblical Figures concentrates on only a few people: patriarchs and matriarchs, Moses, David and Solomon, Jesus, and Paul; major figures are missing, e.g., Hezekiah, Josiah, Peter, and James. The discussion of religious ideas (salvation, interpretation of Jesus, death and afterlife, and purity) are terse presentations. The final section, "The Bible Today," presents Jewish and Christian Bible translation and modern interpretation.

The Biblical World is better on the Old Testament than the New; but the deficiency is salvaged by *The Early Christian World,* which covers both the New Testament in its world and Christianity through the early fifth century. Volume I contains five sections that cover the context of the early church, survey Christian origins and subsequent developments, discuss community formation and maintenance, everyday life and practices, and survey post-apostolic theology. The four sections in volume II discuss the artistic contributions of post-NT Christianity (architecture, art, music, and imaginative literature), external challenges (martyrdom, philosophical challenges, and popular opposition), internal challenges (aberrant movements and heresies) and profiles of key patristic figures. Here I missed Clement of Alexandria and any discussion of Gregory the Illuminator and Armenian Christianity.

Both volumes have bibliographies appended to each article, and each contains numerous black-and-white illustrations. Originally published in hard cover at £150 and £170, the paperback editions put them within the reach of individuals. They would be useful additions to

both personal and parish libraries. If one had to chose between them, I would opt for *The Early Christian World.* But both have rich resources in compact form.

Edgar Krentz

The Old Testament Story. By Don C. Benjamin. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004. xxvi and 470 pages. Paper. $32.00.

Although the reader of this volume will most certainly come away with a fresher understanding of how the world of the Old Testament fits into its greater historical context, the explicit objective of Benjamin's book is to proclaim that the Bible is more story than history. In the author's words, "*The Old Testament Story* represents a new generation of introductions to the Bible that integrate what historical criticism taught with what narrative criticism, social-scientific criticism, and feminist criticism are teaching" (p. 19). By applying literary schema such as "crisis/climax/denouement" to a variety of texts Benjamin is able to effectively highlight not just the content of these tales but also the highly skilled way Israel told these stories.

After an opening chapter in which he tackles general topics such as "How old is the Bible?" and "Who were the Hebrews?" Benjamin systematically moves through the Old Testament, using an effective blend of literary and historical criticisms. For example, he highlights general ANE covenant treaties and how they are paralleled by similar covenant treaties in the Old Testament (chaps. 2–3); he compares the creation of the city of David in 2 Sam 5:6–16 with the Enuma Elish stories from Mesopotamia (chap. 6); and he is able to present a highly detailed legal analysis of the movement of the book of Job (chap. 7). The book ends with a chapter titled "Living the Bible," which presents some of the challenges that Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike share in reading this book today.

Clearly one of the great strengths of this volume is how seriously it takes an analysis of the ancient world of the Old Testament, giving the reader insights into the original social context of biblical Israel. This emphasis at times comes at the expense of a more theological reading of these texts. For example, in his treatment of Jeremiah the reader will learn much about the significance of the prophet's various "pantomimes" while more well-known texts (the temple sermon in chap. 7, the new covenant in chap. 31) are passed over. However, Benjamin's choice of topics is consistent and well researched throughout, and *The Old Testament Story* is an excellent introduction for anyone interested in expanding their understanding of the world of the Old Testament.

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In the End—The Beginning: The Life of Hope. By Jürgen Moltmann. Translated by Margaret Kohl. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004. xii and 180 pages. Paper. $17.00.

Jürgen Moltmann continues to do us the favor of offering popular, more accessible versions of his larger tomes. This short eschatology resounds themes that Moltmann treated more academically in *The Coming of God* (Augsburg Fortress, [1996] 2004), though here he focuses primarily on "the personal experiences of life" (p. x). The book's odd title, after a line from T. S. Eliot, points to Moltmann's fundamental claim: that eschatology is not about 'the end," but rather is the good news that in every seeming end God makes a new beginning.

Moltmann organizes the book around three beginnings—birth, new birth, and resurrection. Individual chapters vary in length, tone, and quality, in part because they began as lectures in quite diverse contexts. Part One illustrates this point. Chapter 1 is a profound exploration of "the promise of the child." It shows how the evangel of messiah's birth frees us from binding hope to male sons, to procreation and to marriage, but also frees us for seeing in each child the promise of hope. On the other hand, chapter 2 gives an abbreviated cultural history of "youth," from which not even perfunctory theological conclusions are drawn.

Part Two offers an excellent chapter (4) on the relation of justice and salvation. It includes a detailed critique of the tradition of justification, and a suggestive discussion of how "justice must be done on both sides" (p. 53)—God setting right both victims and perpetrators. In the

end, by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, "God is justified too" (p. 78).

Part Three includes accessible discussions of such traditional eschatological themes as death, purgatory, resurrection, judgment, and eternal life, and atypical themes such as reincarnation, modern antipathy toward mourning, and the relation of the living to the dead.

I recommend this book for Moltmann fans, pastors who want to review eschatology from a new perspective, and bright laypersons. Given the superiority of Part Three, I might recommend beginning in the end.

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Bridging Science and Religion. Edited by Ted Peters and Gaymon Bennett. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003. xii and 260 pages. Paper. $17.00.

The world of systematic theology has been taken by storm in recent years by a discipline that is quite old: the integration of religion and science. In this volume, the study takes on a more pluralistic approach as foundations are laid for work in multiple religious traditions. Anyone familiar with religion and science knows that Ted Peters and Gaymon Bennett are active participants in the discussion and good choices for editors of a volume of this nature. There are fourteen contributors to the book, with a vast range of expertise. They come together to create the metaphor of a bridge, a fitting image for the religion-and-science dialogue, as a gap divides these two lands of study. What makes this book special is that bridges are built not just from a Christian perspective but also from the perspective of other major world religions, predominately Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism.

The book is broken into three major sections. The first is titled "Methodology: How Bridges are Built" and contains two essays that discuss approaches to science and religion on a methodological level. This is especially helpful for those looking for a foundational approach to the study of religion and science. There is a brief discussion of Ian Barbour's four viewpoint approach (pp. 20–22), followed by a discussion of various philosophical points of view. Nancey Murphy offers a postmodern context for religion and science, an important endeavor given the philosophical climate of scholarship today. This section presents a nice overview of foundational philosophy and theology that allow one to proceed in a dialectical study.

The second section, "Constructing Scientific Spans," works with various disciplines of science and how they relate to the religion-and-science dialogue. The areas of study, ranging from astronomy to neurology, present the diversity within the field of science that one may not notice at first glance. Here the authors break down scientific concepts into different areas, giving the reader a feel for the religion-and-science dialogue.

The third section, "Constructing Religious Spans," is where this volume sets itself apart from much of the work already done in the field of religion and science. One gets a sense reading the various authors that this is only the beginning of discussion, as many religions have entered into the dialogue, creating new worlds of possibilities. Each essay presents a view of the specific belief system discussed by each author. This exposes why dialogue is difficult at times, all the while giving the reader an appreciation for the individual approach of that particular faith.

This volume is beneficial to those looking for an introductory book discussing the religion-and-science dialogue, while also broadening the horizons of those currently involved in the discussion. Most essays are very readable for the novice in the field, but, as with any compilation of essays, there is a range of difficulty, depending on the reader's familiarity with various subjects. With the prominence of current events regarding bioethics and related topics, familiarity in the religion-and-science dialogue is essential to those currently in ministry. This book presents an opening dialogue for those interested in this area and for those who feel the need to "get up to speed." Interaction with other belief systems also make this a valuable read given the religious world climate. As a first step into the dialogue, *Bridging Science and Religion* is a good start.

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Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction. By Margaret Guenther. Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1992. 146 pages. Paper. $12.95.

Alan Jones, Rector at Grace Cathedral, San Francisco, writes in the Preface that "all along we've had a spiritual life and we didn't know it." Margaret Guenther, says Jones, recognizes "God's amazing work in us and among us in the ordinariness of human existence."

Spiritual direction, Guenther writes, is about "holy listening," waiting (attentiveness), and presence. Her perspective is as a woman, mother, teacher, and Episcopalian priest. Welcoming the stranger or offering hospitality is at the core of spiritual direction when getting started with a directee. She emphasizes that the true director is the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, she underscores that spiritual direction is neither psychotherapy nor pastoral counseling, nor is it a deep personal friendship, but often it shares some of the raw material found in each. One major difference between spiritual direction and psychotherapy is that "the director must be willing to be known . . . but known in her vulnerability and limitations as a child of God." The spiritual director is simultaneously a learner and a teacher of discernment. The first step in discernment is perception, and the second is judgment with a heavy emphasis on the "value of the present moment." In short, the director must be capable of discernment as well as being fully present with the directee.

The imagery of midwifery and the increasing role of women as spiritual directors and participants in spiritual direction is enlightening and insightful. Women finding and trusting their voice is important in this ministry. Guenther's book reinforces the role of spiritual director as listener, teacher, and midwife. The example of silently saying the Jesus Prayer—"Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner"—is important when there are times of silence with the directee. Self-awareness is part of the foundation for the spiritual director. Keeping a personal journal, having one's own spiritual director, and making a retreat all help keep the director sharp.

Chapter 2, "Good Teachers," was most helpful to me. Jesus was, after all, a rabbi, a teacher. There are some forty references in the Gospels to Jesus as teacher. I appreciated the story of the woman at the well, John 4:13–15, where Jesus helps the woman to look deeply into herself and discover her thirst for God. Guenther shares that "in the ministry of spiritual direction, there are no right answers, only clearer visions and ever deeper questions."

Chapter 1, "Welcoming the Stranger," provides helpful insights for director and directee. Both director and directee are vulnerable before the first encounter. Hence, the director must comprehend that the directee is on a journey. The director welcomes individuals on their journey by being self-aware, by recognizing that there will be times of silence, by providing a safe space, by listening to the directee's story, and by asking questions. The directee shares her or his story, and self-disclosure is maximized as the relationship grows. I appreciated Guenther's insight that "We have neither magical powers nor a direct line to God's ear . . . we are [director/directee] only fellow travelers—at different places on the road, perhaps, but fallible and ordinary nonetheless."

Guenther uses gender-appropriate images of midwifery. As a male, midwifery draws me out of my comfort zone to experience a new image for the process of spiritual direction. As one involved in spiritual direction, the director is able to encourage the directee to move ahead by giving birth to something that is new and not yet known. Although every person living on this earth has had a birthing, Guenther provides an earthy description of moving forward and trusting the Spirit. The image of midwifery is interesting because even in the birth of the world God brought order out of chaos. She provides voice for struggling women and also men. The Epilogue reminds us that even Eli encouraged Samuel to say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening" (1 Sam 3:9–10).

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Speaking of Trust: Conversing with Luther about the Sermon on the Mount. By Martin E. Marty. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003. 155 pages. Paper. $13.99.

This is a delightful book from the *Lutheran Voices* series. It provides Marty's interpretation of Luther's commentary on the Sermon on the Mount. It does not offer the Sermon or Luther's commentary in full—that would far exceed the purposes of the volume, which is addressed less to the highly specialized, technical scholar and more to the thoughtful Christian serving in any vocation.

Here we have Luther's interpretation of Jesus and Marty's interpretation of Luther. Marty is concerned not with Luther's meaning "behind" (historically) or "within" (linguistically) the text but "in front of" (hermeneutically) the text. How does Luther's commentary address and engage our lives? How might we live differently in light of Luther's interpretation of the life of faith? What makes this all particularly rich is the subject matter, the Christian life, outlined in terms of seeking the kingdom, praying, blessing, justice, peace, and solidarity with the persecuted.

A confidant, mature, well-respected voice, Marty uses nontechnical, direct, and winsome language to engage Luther's thinking for today. The volume is perfect for congregational study, particularly as it is enhanced with study questions at the end of each chapter. Also, given many people's unawareness of basic Lutheran vocabulary and grammar, Marty skillfully introduces terms in a way that will not offset but rather invite their usage to understand our world.

The key word here is *trust*, which Marty defines as openness to God's promise. It is fundamentally opposed to sin as being curved in on oneself (*incurvatus in se*, p. 9). The Christian life is a pilgrimage, from childlike trust to end-of-life commendation (p. 19). For Luther, all of life is a gift. As such it need not be centered on clinging to things but is to be shared with others. Possessions need not rule us (p. 27). They simply indicate that the heart has no vacancy—it is governed by either God or an idol. And, the true God is good—God is "in motion" for our salvation (p. 43).

Marty's work is really a commentary on Luther's view of justification by faith. By faith we honor God by receiving gifts and are thus free in life. It is faith that permits us to live simultaneously as saint and sinner (*simul iustus et peccator*). It is in faith that we acknowledge that we are not perfect even when we think we are perfect (p. 48). It is faith that permits us to trust that God is working providentially for good in the world, that opens us to a life of prayer and dependence on this goodness, that acknowledges that we are blessed and permits us to be blessings to others in justice and peace. It is all grounded in the promise (*pro-missio*), a word that pushes us into mission and action (p. 71). The world ignores God's blessings, but the world misses a lot in the process (p. 87). Faith opens two kinds of righteousness: (1) before God with whom we as sinners God is well pleased, and (2) before the world where we must work on behalf of our neighbor's welfare.

The sense of trust in Luther as believing God's promise even in opposition to God's hiddenness and accusation is underplayed here. That theme, however, may be exactly what needs to be accentuated for contemporary people who unknowingly wrestle with God but have no theology of the cross by which to interpret their struggle.

All in all, this book deserves wide reading. Marty is one of the most highly regarded of public theologians over the last several decades. We continue to be graced by his research, writing, and reflection. It is exactly the kind of interface between academic theology and congregational life that needs to be done today if we are to regain the sense of being a "thinking church."

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Preaching Helps

Day of Pentecost—Proper 12, Series C

Read Scripture in Odd Places and Odd Ways

I have just read *Preaching as Testimony* (Westminster John Knox, 2007), a new book by my friend Anna Carter Florence, who teaches preaching at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia. Dr. Carter Florence asks us to consider preaching as a narration of events and a confession of belief: We tell what we have seen and heard, and we confess what we believe about it. This kind of preaching—testimony—cannot be proven. All that listeners can do is engage the witness, who in this case is the preacher. Rather than verifying whether a sermon is true or false, one can only believe it or reject it.

In her book, Carter Florence introduces readers to historical preaching women to make the case for testimony and teases out the implications of testimony for preaching today. Then she gets practical, inviting us to attend to what we see in the biblical text by changing our location and subject position. She encourages us to make time and space in which there is room for us to be open and receptive to the Word in text and world. This involves putting away our books (for a while) and leaving our studies in order to read the text in odd ways and in odd places. She offers some suggestions (pp. 139–43), including:

- Write the text out longhand in a journal, in order to slow down and notice what grabs you.
- Carry the text around in your pocket and look at it frequently.
- Memorize the text (a personal favorite of mine).
- Underline words and phrases in the text that stand out to you (turn off the internal editor) and then ponder them separately.
- Read the text in the places where you spend most of your time, and invite your companions to read the text with you.
- Take the text someplace where you feel like a fish out of water, and read it there.
- Block the text like a scene in a play.
- Embody the text using movement and dance.

- Read the text with someone "other" than you and ask for his or her reaction.
- Create the text artistically, using crayons and paint.
- And, of course, study the text.

In my introductory preaching class, one of my mantras is Spend time with the text before consulting the commentary. Carter Florence helps us know how to do that. Truth be told, exegetical lectures put me to sleep—particularly if I am treated to several in the course of a single preaching lab—and are not the good news that God's people yearn to hear. We must do our exegesis, but exegesis is not an end in itself. The question, of course, is, How does exegesis inform and enhance the proclamation of the gospel? When an insight enhances that proclamation, it belongs in the sermon. As for the rest, all those pages of exegetical notes, I once heard Mark Allen Powell, who teaches New Testament at Trinity Lutheran Seminary, brilliantly compare exegesis in preaching to underwear. Dr. Powell said, "Our people want you to have it, but they don't want you to show it to them."

Aaron J. Couch, co-pastor of First Immanuel Lutheran church in Portland, Oregon, author of this series of Preaching Helps, echoes Carter Florence by calling us to a different kind of study. Pastor Couch observes that he appreciates writing Preaching Helps because it obliges him to spend time with texts in ways that his normal sermon preparation does not. More odd times and odd places!

I write this reflection as we begin a new year and as I prepare to return to LSTC from a sabbatical. You will read this as we prepare for the end of the congregational program year and the coming of summer. Whether we are gearing up or winding down, the invitation to spend more time with Scripture, reading it in odd places and in odd ways, will only enhance our preaching. In the words of Colossians, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God" (Col 3:16 NRSV).

Craig A. Satterlee
Editor of Preaching Helps

Day of Pentecost
May 27, 2007

Genesis 11:1–9
Psalm 104:25–35, 37 [NRSV 104:24–34, 35b]
Acts 2:1–21
Romans 8:14–17
John 14:8–17 [25–27]

The story of the tower of Babel completes the primeval prologue's account of humanity's descent from life with the Creator into division and death. Genesis 1–11 pictures human beings as part of God's good creation but willfully sinking deeper into sin. The stories in these chapters conform to a pattern: Having received God's gift of life, humanity repeatedly rejects God's rule and experiences God's wrath. Each time, God acts in mercy to give another chance. The story of building Babel is the final story in the cycle, but the cycle is incomplete. The tower builders reject God's rule and as a result are divided and dispersed. In Hebrew, there is a play on words: The city was called *Babel* (בָּבֶל) because God confused, *balal* (בָּלַל), their language. There is, however, no immediate sign of divine mercy. The reader must wait until chapter 12 to hear how God is beginning anew to reach out to a wayward humanity through Abraham and Sarah.

A key to understanding this story is hidden by the traditional decision to transliterate the Hebrew word בָּבֶל as Babel. Everywhere else in the Old Testament the name is translated as Babylon. This reveals why building *the city and the tower* is a sign of human rejection of God and why God responds in wrath. The tower builders are constructing Babylon, the city that represents (for the post-monarchy Judean faithful) the pinnacle of everything that is anti-God. Because the Babylonian armies destroyed Jerusalem, slaughtered its inhabitants, and burned the temple, the city of Babylon became a symbol of human evil that produces domination, death, and destruction. Although from the perspective of the story Nebuchadnezzar's empire is yet to arise and the tragic end of Jerusalem lies in the distant future, the reader already knows what Babylon will accomplish. It is this memory that supplies the emotional punch to the story.

In Acts 1:8, the risen Christ gave his followers a promise and a command: a promise that they would receive power from the Holy Spirit and a command to go as his witnesses to the ends of the earth. Acts 2:1–21 tells how God has fulfilled the promise so that Jesus' followers might fulfill the command. The followers of Jesus were together for the festival of Weeks, known among Greek-speaking Jews as Pentecost because it was fifty days after Passover (πεντηκοστή = fiftieth). God's Spirit filled the disciples with new life and power. They began to speak in other languages, announcing to the many visitors in Jerusalem God's powerful work of raising Jesus from the dead. Peter interpreted this mysterious event as the fulfillment of prophecy, citing Joel 2:28–32a. God has given the Spirit to all of God's people! The images of cosmic disruption refer to God's vindication of Jesus and God's victory over the established powers of this world. After Peter's sermon, the reader sees how the command has begun to be fulfilled. The 3,000 who welcomed the message and were baptized that day (v. 41) carried the good news of God's victory over sin and death as they returned to their homes—from Mesopotamia, Egypt and Rome, to the ends of the earth.

It is common to see in the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost a sign that reveals God's purposes to heal and restore creation, including overcoming the disorder and confu-

sion of languages at Babel. The Spirit of God crosses over the boundaries of language and culture to create a new people of God, a human family renewed and made whole. This community is able to be a sign of God's healing purposes precisely because it is the Spirit of Jesus that shapes it. To be the community of Jesus amounts to being the anti-Babylon community. Babel/Babylon was built by human hubris on the bodies of the victims of its violence. The church, empowered by the Spirit, is the new and life-giving alternative to *every* empire that deals domination and death. Guided by the Spirit, the church is God's gift of an alternative to the sad history of human violence and destruction. The church is able to be such an alternative, and an anticipation of the city of God, insofar as it embraces Jesus' way of forgiveness, generosity, service, and peacemaking.

In Romans 8, Paul explores how the Spirit defines life for the people of God. In verses 14–17 Paul uses the image of kinship to picture the new status shared by those who belong to Christ and live in the Spirit. Believers are children of God, received by adoption into God's very own family. Paul's use of Aramaic, *Abba*, to call upon God as Father may reflect Jesus' practice and teaching for prayer. In a culture in which identity received through kinship was of supreme importance, what Paul says is striking. For believers, the benefits of membership in their family of origin and the claims of that family loyalty have all been surpassed by the new identity given by God. We are in fact not only members of God's family but also heirs of God's dominion. It is the presence of God's own Spirit in our lives experienced through a relationship of intimacy in prayer that confirms to us our identity as God's children.

Paul pauses to identify an important quality that belongs to God's children: suffering. Suffering is inescapable for those who belong to Christ and are led by the Spirit. God is delivering the world from the powers of sin and death, bringing a new world into being. Until God's work is completed, those who seek to live in the way of Jesus will be at odds with every empire. To live against the values of Babel/Babylon will inevitably bring grief for believers. But such experiences of sorrow and suffering must not be regarded with ultimate seriousness, because a far greater glory awaits.

In John 14 Jesus speaks with the disciples about the Holy Spirit on the evening of his betrayal. Jesus warns them that he is going to the Father but promises that he will send the Advocate, the Spirit of truth. The reading unfolds in typical Johannine style. Philip misunderstands what Jesus says about the Father, which provides the opportunity for Jesus to lead his followers into deeper teaching. Jesus speaks of his relationship with the Father, a relationship testified to by the character of the works Jesus has done. Jesus declares that those who believe in him will do even greater works, evidently because Jesus is going away and will send the Spirit for his followers.

The final verses of the reading are a thick web of significant Johannine themes. The one who loves Jesus is obedient to Jesus, abides in Jesus, and will receive the Spirit that Jesus sends. Jesus refers to the Spirit as the Paraclete, variously rendered as Advocate, Counselor, or Helper. The Spirit's task is to reinforce the work that Jesus has already done to lead his followers in his way of service and love. Jesus' last words in this reading are a profound source of strength for the community that would live by Jesus' alternative wisdom. Jesus gives peace and calls his followers to not be afraid. AJC

Holy Trinity
June 3, 2007

Proverbs 8:1–4, 22–31
Psalm 8
Romans 5:1–5
John 16:12–15

First Reading

In Proverbs 8, Woman Wisdom invites all who are foolish to come to her and learn truth. Through the chapter as a whole, she makes the case that it is advantageous to follow in her way. From a utilitarian perspective her advice is beneficial, assisting those with power to exercise it well. But even more, what she teaches is desirable and good. It conveys the inner benefit of happiness. Within this context, Woman Wisdom speaks of her divine origin. She comes from God and truly stands apart from the rest of the created order. The knowledge she gives, then, is of profound and eternal value.

The lectionary focuses on the verses that describe Wisdom's unique status (8:22–31). The language is ambiguous about the relationship between God and Wisdom. Verse 22 speaks of Wisdom as "created at the beginning of God's work," although the verb translated as "created" (קָנָה) might be better rendered as "gotten" or "acquired." Verses 24 and 25 speak of Wisdom as being "brought forth." The verb חוּל means to writhe in travail or to give birth. While being cautious about pressing poetic language to say more than it intends, if Wisdom is "born of God" she may be thought of as an aspect of God's own life. The imagery of the natural world—mountains and hills, earth and fields—reminds the reader of the creation account in Genesis 1. Wisdom existed "before the beginning of the earth," before all God made. Wisdom enjoys the status of priority over every created thing. The reader may also be reminded of the Logos hymn in John 1. Wisdom, not unlike the Word, was with God as everything was made.

In Romans 5, Paul celebrates the peace that is God's gift through Christ. God has acted to provide right relationship to all who trust God's promises. To receive such a gift gives one a sense of sureness about his or her standing in life, which is cause for boasting. But Paul's truly surprising conclusion is that, with this gift of peace, we may even boast in our sufferings. Paul denies that the afflictions of life are meaningless for those who live in right relationship with God. The believer's experience of suffering is a matter of sharing with Jesus, which may lead to becoming more like Jesus. Suffering makes one stronger, effecting real change in one's character and nurturing hope within, so that one may see demonstrable signs of God's love working to renew one's life.

In John 16, Jesus prepares his disciples as best he can for what is to come. He will be taken from them and will return to the Father. In his place he will send the Spirit of truth. The role of the Spirit, also referred to as the Advocate (Paraclete may also be translated as Helper or Comforter) is described in a variety of ways in this Final Discourse. A crucial element of the Spirit's mission is to remind the disciples of all that Jesus has said and done while he was with them. In today's reading, it may seem as if the Spirit will provide new revelations of "the things that are to come," a truth that goes beyond what the disciples are able to bear now. More likely, though, the Spirit will support and equip the disciples by helping them see where Jesus' teaching will lead them through each new challenge and for every new generation.

Pastoral Reflection

In the readings for this festival day celebrating the Holy Trinity, there are some antici-

pations of Trinitarian language. Woman Wisdom seems to share some significant qualities with the Johannine concept of the preexistent Logos. Paul speaks of the justifying work of God in Christ and how God now pours out love through the Holy Spirit. John indicates that the gift of God and the work of Christ and the activity of the Spirit are all intertwined. The focus in these readings, though, is not on the being of God. Rather, each passage in its own way is about the experience of being recipients of God's mission to save. The doctrine of the Trinity gives expression to the church's awareness of having been caught up into God's great work of love to save and renew God's creation.

Proverbs 8 presents the reader with two different glimpses of God's outreaching love. In verses 22–31, God's love is expressed in delighting to create the entire world with wisdom. Wisdom rejoices in the goodness of God's work. In the wider context of the chapter, God reaches out to a foolish humanity in the persona of Woman Wisdom, calling us to order our lives according to the divine wisdom. The invitation from Woman Wisdom is a sign of God's continuing love and delight in human beings. This divine delight finally leads to the Incarnation and to the most surprising revelation of divine wisdom. In wisdom God embraces suffering and death in order to set us free and give us life.

The John 16 reading most directly addresses the concerns of mission. As Jesus prepares to complete his work and return to God, he tells his followers how he will support them in their work. Having assured them that he will not leave them alone (14:18), Jesus promises to send the Spirit of truth. The mission of God is not being dropped into their hands. Rather, they have been caught up into God's work, which *God* will now accomplish through the Spirit. The disciples in their time, as we in ours, can count on receiving guidance from the Spirit, who will assist us in appropriating the message and wisdom of Jesus for meeting the challenges of being God's people in the world.

The mission of God is revealed most mysteriously in the experience of suffering. God's good work, given in love, is to set us free from bondage and to bless us with life. At times, though, we will receive these gifts of freedom and life within the confines of suffering and death. When this happens, Paul encourages us to boast in our sufferings. See what great love God shows for us?

It is true that not every kind of suffering is the same. It is equally true that it is dangerous to make judgments about the meaning of other people's suffering. But there may be a painful time in the preacher's own life that he or she can look back to and describe how God's Spirit was at work in and through that experience to give strength to endure. Having endured, perhaps it is now possible for the preacher to see that he or she has grown in character. And perhaps from that experience he or she will continue to draw strength, since it has helped nurture a sense of hope that God will never abandon God's beloved. Remembering those dark days, perhaps the preacher has come to a greater awareness of God's great love because the Holy Spirit has been working in his or her life to give freedom and life. AJC

Proper 5
June 10, 2007

1 Kings 17:8–16 [17–24]
or 1 Kings 17:17–24
Psalm 46 or Psalm 30
Galatians 1:11–24
Luke 7:11–17

First Reading

When only the second half of 1 Kings 17 is read, some may not remember how God had sent Elijah to stay with the widow of Zarephath. She had trusted the prophet's promise and prepared a cake for him with the last of the meal and oil she had. She found, then, that the jar of meal and jug of oil continued to provide for her, her son, and Elijah. By her trust and by the word of the Lord through Elijah, they were all fed.

The story continues with a tragic turn. The widow's son becomes so ill that "there was no breath in him." The text does not say he has died but suggests he is very near death. This is a tragedy for the widow on a personal level and an economic level. She is bereft of her child and stripped of the remaining male member of her household. In the male-centered society of the ancient Near East, a widow without a male family member to protect her interests was among the most vulnerable of people. The widow blames Elijah for this misfortune, and the prophet raises the question of whether God is to blame. Elijah then prays for the child, and God restores his life.

From the perspective of the story, Elijah's power for healing is a sign of his authority as a representative of Yahweh. If the miracle of providing food wasn't sufficient, now the widow knows that the word of the Lord in Elijah's mouth "is truth." The reader also is given to see that it is the prophet on the margins of society, rather than the king occupying the throne, who is at the center of God's activity for the covenant people.

The reading from 1 Kings stands in the background of the account of Jesus raising the widow's son at Nain. Luke intends for the reader (like the villagers in 8:16) to recognize that Jesus is a prophet like Elijah yet also greater than Elijah. Elijah acted in response to the widow's complaint, but Jesus took the initiative in acting with compassion. Elijah restored a gravely ill child to health, but Jesus raised a son from death to life. Francois Bovon observes that "the story describes a meeting between a parade of life (Jesus and his disciples) and a parade of death (the dead man, his mother, and the grieving crowd)" (*Luke 1: A Commentary of the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50* [Minneapolis: Fortress], 267). With this powerful act of kindness, Jesus reveals that he is truly Lord of life.

Paul's tone seems defensive as he begins his letter to the community of believers in Galatia. After having expressed deep concern for them (that they are turning to a "different" gospel, which is in fact no gospel at all), Paul writes at length about how he received the gospel message and how he has proclaimed it. Paul asserts that he did not receive the gospel message from any human source but by revelation from God. He describes his past as a persecutor of the church and the break he has made with that past. Paul identifies his God-given purpose in life as proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles. He mentions meeting Peter and James but emphasizes his relative independence from the church authorities in Jerusalem.

The lectionary skips over the rest of what Paul has to say about his relationship with Peter and the Jerusalem church. For balance, it may be helpful to note that Paul desires to picture that relationship in as positive a manner as possible. They have

given their blessing to his mission to the Gentiles and have not contradicted his understanding that the law concerning circumcision does not apply to Gentiles. Yet Paul also reports that when the gospel was at stake he was not shy about confronting what he saw as hypocrisy, even on the part of a leader of the stature of Peter.

Pastoral Reflection

The readings from Luke and 1 Kings describe a gift of life restored. The young men from Zarephath and Nain were brought back from the brink and from beyond the brink of death. Each had received life as a gift from God the Creator. Each received life again when a "great prophet" of God raised them up. The mothers also received their lives back with the return of their sons.

In the verses that follow the Luke reading, Jesus makes it clear that giving life again is part of his job description as Lord and Savior. When some of John the Baptist's disciples asked Jesus if he were "the one," Jesus answers by describing his ministry in terms that echo a number of the beautiful promise passages of Isaiah. Jesus is giving people life again. The blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised. Of course, for the young men of Zarephath and Nain, as for their mothers, this gift of life again was temporary. The time would come when each would reach the end of his or her natural life. But this amazing gift of life again is a sign. For Elijah, it was a sign of his authority. For Jesus, it is that and more. It is also a sign of the great work of new life he will accomplish for the whole creation through his cross and empty tomb. Luke hints at as much by his use of the word "rise."

The preacher might ponder what the young men from Zarephath and Nain did with their lives. Did they marry? Did they have children? How did they live the rest of their lives? Did they sense that there was something inexpressibly precious about the extra time they had been given? Of course that raises the question of what we choose to do with the gift of life God has given us. We receive that gift at birth and receive it again in baptism. In Christ we receive a gift of life that is defined by forgiveness. There is no condemnation for the one who lives a new life in Christ, a life characterized by freedom. We are set free from every entanglement so that we might live the life we were meant to have.

It is worth noticing what the apostle Paul did with his new life. The preacher needs to be careful with Paul's example, since he may appear to people as more of an example of "in-church" Christian ministry rather than an example of daily discipleship in all of life. Yet there is something compelling about how he invested himself fully in the work he was convinced God had given him. He believed that from before birth God had called him and had set him aside to carry the message of Jesus to the Gentiles. After God revealed the gospel to him, Paul made a dramatic break with his earlier life. The road ahead could only be a new road.

The preacher may reflect with the congregation on what road God has opened—for each person individually and for the believing community together. Having received a gift of new life that is inexpressibly precious, how should we use it? If the purpose of our lives is to love God with our whole heart and love our neighbor as ourselves, what great work of love will we give ourselves to? AJC

Proper 6
June 17, 2007

1 Kings 21:1–10 [11–14, 15–21a]
or 2 Samuel 11:26–12:10, 13–15
Psalm 5:1–8 or Psalm 32
Galatians 2:15–21
Luke 7:36–8:3

First Reading

When King David seduced (or raped) Bathsheba and ordered the death of her husband Uriah, he abused royal power, betrayed a loyal servant, and transgressed the covenant relationship with Yahweh. With Uriah dead and Bathsheba a member of the royal harem, David thought he had covered up his deed. He sent word to Joab, who had managed Uriah's death, to not let this matter trouble him (in Hebrew, "Do not let this thing be evil in your eyes"). But royal pronouncement could never make it so. The thing was evil in the sight of Yahweh, who sent Nathan the prophet to confront the king.

It would have been unwise for Nathan to directly call the king to account. With the parable, the prophet incites the king to pass judgment on his own conduct. Once the king has denounced the greed and arrogance of the rich man in the story, Nathan declares Yahweh's verdict on David's own arrogance. In spite of gift after gift of divine grace, David has despised Yahweh. As a consequence, violence will never cease to bring death and division in David's household. It is perhaps surprising that David does not silence Nathan but instead confesses his sin. In spite of the cynicism of his former conduct, David turns out to still have a measure of integrity. In response, Nathan announces that Yahweh has put aside David's sin. God will not require David's life as a consequence of what he has done. Instead, Nathan declares that the child born to David and Bathsheba will die. The text seems to regard the child's death either as divine punishment or as something like an atoning sacrifice on David's behalf.

In the verses immediately preceding this week's reading from Galatians, Paul recalled a conflict with Peter, who had acted as though Christ had given him freedom to enjoy table fellowship with Gentiles until it became politically disadvantageous to do so. Paul called Peter a hypocrite to his face. The underlying issue for Paul was whether Gentiles would be received into the community of Christ *as Gentiles* or whether they would be required to submit to Jewish cultural and religious practices. Paul argued that in Christ God opened the covenant community to all people, Jews and Gentiles alike. The law of Moses does not define who is right before God. Rather, God regards all who have faith in Christ as sharing in Christ's covenant loyalty.

Paul's concern is sometimes paraphrased in terms of faith versus works. This not only misses Paul's point but also threatens to turn "having faith" (enough faith or the right kind of faith) into the one necessary work which the believer must accomplish. For Paul, the issue is whether it is the law of Moses or Jesus Christ that gives entry into the covenant community. Paul asserts that the law is unable to accomplish that for any person. What is needed is a whole new beginning—for the old life to be put to death so that God may give a new life in Christ.

Jesus was known for eating with tax collectors and sinners. In Luke 7 he is pictured as also eating with Pharisees. Table fellowship is a sign of acceptance. For Jesus, such acceptance is given entirely apart from the purity boundaries of his society. Simon, the host, is unable to see beyond the limits of the purity system. The woman who approaches Jesus is known as a sinner, and for this reason Simon believes Jesus should

not permit her to touch him. That Jesus permits her not only to touch his feet but also to bathe them with her tears, wipe them with her hair, and anoint them with ointment leads Simon to conclude that Jesus cannot be a prophet. Although Simon appears not to have spoken a word, Jesus reads his judgmental attitude.

Like Nathan the prophet, Jesus tells a parable that allows Simon (and every listener) to make a judgment in principle before realizing how it applies to them personally. The image of debt characterizes the nature of relationship with God. Jesus invites Simon to see that there is no fundamental difference between him and the woman regarding their indebtedness before God. In the eyes of God, both are sinners and both need forgiveness. Before God, the size of the debt becomes irrelevant. What is important is how one responds to the gift of forgiveness.

Pastoral Reflection

A primary theme for this day concerns our extravagant gratitude in response to the extravagant goodness of God. Gratitude is truly beautiful to see. It isn't anxious or worried about propriety or proportionality. It is utterly free. It is finally the sort of life we truly want to live—not a life measured out in teaspoons. It is also a great antidote to the temptation to be controlling and judgmental that seems to be such a danger to religious people. The preacher might reflect on the saints who have blessed his or her life by their example of gratitude.

Yet, we cannot become grateful on demand. The preacher certainly cannot thunder with the authority of Mt. Sinai to command a congregation to demonstrate gratitude. In truth, we can't even be reasoned into a response of love when our hearts are completely wrapped around our own selves. We have to be knocked head over heels by the extravagant love of God for us. Or, reflecting on the story of David in the first reading, one might say that we must be broken open, both by the rightness of God's judgment and by the astounding surprise of God's love, in order to be set free for love. Perhaps God will need to break open our sin or break down our reliance on our own virtue or ability. In the end, this breaking is finally redemptive. God sets us free from the lives we would construct for ourselves, lives that would finally become constricted and perhaps idolatrous. God sets us free for new life in Christ.

The words of the parables for this day are dangerously sharp, like scalpels. Nathan was able to cut away David's pretensions of moral autonomy. Jesus sliced open the self-satisfied self-righteousness of his host. These words are able to do the same subversive and healing work of God's grace for today's listener. It is not necessary for the preacher to harangue or condemn, but only for the word to give new eyes for seeing one's debt. The parables remind us that the gathering of the Christian assembly happens only by God's grace. The church is not the assembly of the righteous but of sinners who are righteous by faith. We gather under the sign of the cross, the reminder that God has accomplished at great cost what we are unable to do. In response to such love, what can we do but seek to open our hearts to the Spirit's work and offer our whole lives—body, mind, and spirit—to worship God? AJC

Proper 7
June 24, 2007

1 Kings 19:1–4 [5–7] 8–15a
or Isaiah 65:1–9
Psalm 42 and 43 or Psalm 22:19–28
Galatians 3:23–29
Luke 8:26–39

First Reading

Isaiah 65 begins with an address to the post-exilic community on behalf of God. The manner of speaking calls to mind the father in Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son. As the father gathers up his robes, casting dignity to the wind to run and greet the returning son, so here God calls out to the covenant people, "Here I am, here I am," almost like a child responding to an adult's summons (1 Sam 3:5). And yet God turns peevish rather quickly, provoked by the aberrant religious activities of the people. The list of obscure items seems to suggest a variety of superstitious or foreign religious practices rather than to define a particular cultic identity. Sacrificing in gardens and offering incense on mountains may refer to fertility worship. Sitting inside tombs may be a means of seeking a vision or contacting the dead.

In contrast to the judgment oracles of classical prophecy, which were addressed to the nation as a whole, these words seem more individualized. Punishment is in order for "these" who have rejected God. But because there is a faithful minority that remains true to the covenant, God also promises blessing. An otherwise unknown proverb is cited to justify God's promise. Just as people won't destroy a (small?) cluster of grapes because there is a blessing (juice for wine?) in it, so God will not destroy all of Judah because there are still faithful servants of God among the people. The prophet seems to look forward to a future time when future generations of God's people will possess the land. The only thematic links from Isaiah 65 to Luke 8 seem to be the image of sitting inside tombs and a reference to swine.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul is fighting against the imposition of Jewish law on Gentile Christians. He points back to Abraham as the primary model of life with God. Abraham "believed in God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (3:6). Paul asserts that it is so for all who believe the promises of God. But if this is the case, it becomes necessary for Paul to explain why the law was given. The image he uses seems almost derogatory: The law functions as a disciplinarian—like the slave who provided harsh discipline to ensure that the children learned their lessons.

But now that Christ has come, the need for a disciplinarian is past. God is creating a new community of Jews and Gentiles together. In fact, all of the distinctions that used to carry so much significance—ethnicity, gender, status—are irrelevant before God. Jews and Gentiles alike may now recognize the goodness of God in Christ and respond in faith. Jews and Gentiles alike are now joined to the family of God through faith in Christ. In this new family of God, the role exercised by the law is taken by the Spirit (Gal 5:18). The law used to provide order for life by means of condemnation. Now those with faith are set free by the Spirit, who will guide them into the sort of life that the law could only point toward—loving God with heart, mind, and strength and loving one's neighbor as oneself.

Luke is concerned in this movement of his Gospel to present Jesus' unique authority, demonstrated through his teaching and works of power. Very soon, with the journey to Jerusalem, Luke will shift his focus to stories and teachings whose themes are important for the community that will follow Jesus. At this point, though, it is essential

for the reader to be grounded in recognizing Jesus as Son of God who extends God's merciful work of salvation. In the encounter in the country of Gerasenes, Jesus acts with great power to defeat the demonic powers. The reader who trusts Jesus as Savior must know that this same saving power is at work in his or her life.

Some will be surprised by the response of those who received the report of what Jesus did for the demon-afflicted man. Rather than hearing of Jesus' saving power and turning to him in faith, they ask him to leave! Jesus does depart, but he leaves the healed man as a witness. In the last verse of the reading, Luke pictures a foundational Christian understanding: What God is doing is what Jesus is doing. Jesus commands the man to return home and declare what God has done for him. The man does so, announcing what Jesus had done for him.

Pastoral Reflections

Luke invites the reader into a strange world, following Jesus across the sea to the region of the Decapolis where he is confronted by a man afflicted with demons. The preacher will need to consider how to help members of a congregation follow into a realm that will be alien for many. Some may understand the demonic by analogy to an experience of mental illness. Others may have their imaginations informed by films like *The Exorcist.*

For the pastor's own study regarding the power of the demonic, Walter Wink presents a helpful reading of this story in *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces That Determine Human Existence* (Augsburg Fortress, 1986). Wink proposes that the language of demons was the ancient world's way of picturing a reality that our materialistic culture finds very difficult to name at all: the inner, spiritual aspect of corporate human reality. There is a spiritual aspect of reality that reflects and shapes every human group, system, and institution. These spiritual realities have the capacity to warp and distort the lives of those who belong to those groups, systems, and institutions, and in such a case becomes visibly demonic.

Wink identifies three ways in which the language of the demonic was used: to describe outer personal possession, collective possession, and the inner personal demonic. Wink reads the story of the demon-afflicted man in Mark 5 (parallel to Luke 8) as a clear presentation of outer personal possession. The demon-afflicted man is "possessed" by the region's anti-Roman sentiments. He functions as a scapegoat for the community. By his demonic affliction he is a living, breathing cautionary tale. At the same time he acts out a challenge to Roman occupation with his strength while also signifying with his madness the danger of inciting Rome to assert its dominance.

While the preacher may benefit from such theoretical exploration of the text, he or she will consider the needs of the congregation to hear a word of hope in the face of evil, grounded in the promise that Jesus has power to set them free from every form of bondage. After reckoning with the complications of the text, the preacher may opt to lead the congregation in reflecting on the nature of Christian freedom and the place of the Mosaic law in the Christian life.

The reading from Galatians offers a clear opportunity to challenge the implicit legalism present in much Christian life. The preacher may invite believers to reject a way of life made small by conformity to a list of rules and instead open their hearts to the work of the Spirit who will lead them deeper into Christ's way of loving service. AJC

Proper 8
July 1, 2007

2 Kings 2:1–2, 6–14 or 1 Kings 19:15–21
Psalm 77:1–2, 11–20 or Psalm 16
Galatians 5:1, 13–25
Luke 9:51–62

First Reading

The reading from 1 Kings begins in the middle of Elijah's encounter with God at Mount Horeb. Elijah had defeated the priests of Baal, escaped Jezebel's wrath, and been fed by an angel before arriving at the mountain. God then met the prophet, not in wind, earthquake, or fire, but in mysterious silence. Elijah complained to God about being persecuted and alone. In the text for today God responds—not with words of comfort but with a command to return to the struggle. Among the tasks God gives are anointing Jehu as king of Israel and Elisha as prophet to succeed Elijah. The text barely hints at the bloodshed that will follow when Jehu slaughters the descendants of Ahab and the worshippers of Baal. Almost as an afterthought God refutes Elijah's claim of aloneness, asserting that 7,000 remain faithful to the covenant.

The story continues with Elijah summoning Elisha to be his successor. Without words Elijah places his mantle over Elisha, but Elisha understands what is being asked of him. He bids his family farewell and then slaughters his oxen to serve a feast. It appears he intends never to return and has acted to make it nearly impossible to change his mind later. He has disconnected himself from his former life as a farmer.

In Galatians 5:1 Paul pictures the essence of Christian life as freedom and warns his readers not to submit to a yoke of slavery. The lectionary omits the specifics of Paul's warning—that a relationship with God defined by circumcision and obedience to the law is incompatible with faith in Christ. It is not that Paul rejects the law. He rejects obedience to the law as a means of pleasing God and attaining the status of covenant faithfulness. To embrace obedience to the law in that way is to renounce freedom and take on a yoke of slavery. But when Paul returns to the theme of freedom in verse 13, he has in mind a new threat. He warns now against the abuse of freedom through self-indulgence. To follow every whim and desire is simply another kind of bondage—bondage to the flesh. To live with faith in Christ is to live by the Spirit.

Paul pictures flesh and spirit as opposites that direct human life in completely different ways. Flesh and spirit are not components or elements of human life—physical body versus immaterial spirit. Instead, flesh may be thought of as human life when it is ordered in a reactive manner by desires and fears, or guided unreflectively by biological impulses. Spirit is the presence of God acting on and through the believer to create a life that is a beautiful reflection of Jesus. For Paul, freedom does not mean the ability to do whatever one wants to do. Freedom is the capacity to choose and to govern oneself. The opposite of freedom is the life of a slave who must respond to the directives of another. Flesh can never give freedom but only offers a kind of bondage. Christian freedom means being unbound from the constraints of flesh so as to live fully and joyfully according to God's good intent.

Luke 9 recounts the beginning of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. Luke's intent is expressed beautifully in the structure of the narrative. In chapters 4 through 9 the reader learned about Jesus' ministry of healing and teaching, which grounded the reader in a sense of Jesus' identity and purpose. Then, in chapters 10 through 19, Luke recalls

Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, along the way relating some of Jesus' teaching that will be essential for the reader's own journey as a follower of the Lord.

At the very beginning of the journey, Jesus is rebuffed by Samaritans. James and John respond with great indignation, asking if they should command fire from heaven to consume the offenders. They demonstrate how completely they failed to understand when Jesus indicated that suffering, rejection, and death were ahead of him (9:22). As the group proceeds toward the capital city, Jesus speaks to three potential followers. In these three brief encounters, Jesus makes the reader aware that following him is challenging and difficult, a matter of great urgency that is not to be undertaken lightly.

Pastoral Reflection

Luke understands that we cannot follow Jesus on his way to Jerusalem. Through the next ten chapters, though, Luke will permit us to listen in as Jesus teaches his disciples about how to follow in his way of compassion, forgiveness, prayer, trust, serving, and suffering. The three encounters with potential followers in this week's text challenge us to consider not simply *whether* we will follow but also *how* we will follow. What shape will our lives take if we unreservedly give ourselves to Jesus and his way?

In the first encounter, Jesus characterizes the difficulty of following him in terms of the itinerancy of his ministry. Every living creature has a place to call home, but Jesus does not. How can we respond? Perhaps we have a home, a mortgage, a car, and more things than we know what do with. Among the many difficult and challenging aspects of Jesus' message, his words about possessions are among the most difficult for us to hear. We are not alone; Christians have struggled with Jesus' words and example for nearly 2,000 years. The situation for us, though, seems acute. In our materialistic society we are in danger of being smothered by our things. Jesus does not condemn or scold. Instead, he walks ahead lightly and joyfully in the freedom of the Spirit that is his to enjoy.

In the second encounter, Jesus takes on devotion to family. There is a harsh edge to his dismissal of familial obligations. In Jesus' time, family relationships were supremely valued. One's whole life was caught up with one's family identity. Jesus claims priority over the duties that belong to those family relationships. In truth, he claims priority over *everything* else. How can we respond? We must be careful. Jesus is not asking his followers to sacrifice their children, spouses, or parents for the sake of church involvement. He insists, though, that family must never be offered as an excuse for why we cannot conform our lives to Jesus' way of forgiveness, generosity, and compassion.

In the third encounter, Jesus' use of the image of putting the hand to the plow recalls (in reverse) the example of Elisha, who slaughtered his oxen in order to cook and serve them for a feast before following after Elijah. There would be no going back to his former life. Jesus requires the same sort of wholehearted and unreserved response. Life in the reign of God is not a part-time hobby. It is not an activity to pursue when we feel like it. It is a matter of yielding our whole lives to belong to our Savior. This is the character of the journey we make, accompanying Jesus as we follow in his way. He calls us again, each and every day, to learn from him how to live a life that is free and full and faithful. AJC

Proper 9
July 8, 2007

2 Kings 5:1:1–14 or Isaiah 66:10–14
Psalm 30 or Psalm 66:1–9
Galatians 6:1–16
Luke 10:1–11, 16–20

First Reading

With wonderful, warm, maternal imagery, the covenant people are called to rejoice for God's rich providing to Jerusalem. The consoling breast and glorious bosom suggest gentleness, nurture, and care as well as a sense of safety and more than sufficiency for God's people. There will be a relationship of intimacy between God and people, given through God's saving work for the city. These words were spoken for the post-exilic community as it struggled through adversity, hardship, and deprivation. The Lord promises an end to harsh and painful conditions, supplying the city with prosperity and wealth. With the image of a stream overflowing its banks, the prophet pictures how the people will be inundated with good things. As a mother cuddles and comforts a baby, so God will carry and care for the people. They will see God's promises fulfilled. They will rejoice and flourish when God brings an end to their suffering. The passage ends with a declaration that God's wrath is directed toward God's enemies. The remainder of the chapter makes it clear that these enemies are not primarily foreign nations that threaten Jerusalem but syncretistic Judeans who engage in superstitious faith practices (see Isa 65:1–9, Proper 7).

Paul addresses the Galatian community as "friends," revealing his warm feelings for them. The harsh words sprinkled through the rest of the letter (1:6, 3:1, 4:16, 5:12) indicate the depth of his concern. He concludes his letter with a series of loosely related admonitions and instructions. He urges the members of the community to live with genuine love for each other. For example, in the case of a member whose conduct has alienated others ("detected in a transgression"), there is no room for any reaction that suggests feelings of superiority, such as judging, shunning, or gloating. Instead, those who are spiritually mature in the congregation must work to restore such a person with gentleness. This is one example of how love is expressed by sharing another's burdens. Such love requires humility, not pride.

Without knowing the particular situation of the Galatian congregation, many of Paul's exhortations feel somewhat slippery. It is sometimes difficult to tell exactly what is being addressed or how one statement leads to another. We presume that the original recipients of the letter would have recognized right away the object of Paul's concerns. It is clear, though, that Paul desires the congregation to be strong and faithful. The final verses indicate that Paul had been dictating but at the end writes with his own hand. He hammers home his main concern. Circumcision and obedience to the law do not provide entrance into God's new community, founded in Christ, of Jews and Gentiles together. In the execution of Jesus, God has acted to judge and condemn the old world, the life that is captive to flesh and sin, and to bring a new creation into being. The person belonging to Christ experiences this dramatic rupture not as a promise for the future but as a present reality. Living fully in this present reality, by faith in Christ, is the only thing that matters.

Luke reports the mission of seventy emissaries sent by Jesus to announce the nearness of God's reign. The story is surprising because Luke narrated the mission of the Twelve only a chapter before. The similarities between the two stories include

references to power over demons, instructions to heal the sick, restrictions on traveling equipment, and directions concerning how to receive hospitality (or what to do when hospitality is refused). The repetition should probably be seen as an expression of Luke's concern for inclusiveness. Just as he includes stories about Jesus' ministry and teaching relating to both men and women (8:26–39 followed by 8:40–56 or 15:3–7 followed by 15:8–10), these two stories picture the mission of Jesus going out to both Jews and Gentiles. The twelve disciples represent a mission to the twelve tribes of Israel. The seventy anticipate the church's mission to all nations, based on the idea that there were seventy (or seventy-two) nations or language groups in the world.

Jesus tells the seventy that there is great need as well as significant danger waiting for them. In order to extend Jesus' mission of peace, they must be tremendously vulnerable, like sheep among wolves. The reign of God will be present wherever the seventy act out Jesus' way of peace, specifically through healing and sharing table fellowship. The lectionary omits Jesus' warning that rejecting his way of peace leads to judgment. When the seventy return, Jesus greets them with joy. He shares with them a heavenly vision that identifies the meaning of their successful mission. In every place where the healing work of Jesus and been received and open table fellowship has been shared, the powers of evil are being broken. He encourages them, though, to not congratulate themselves on these past successes but to rejoice that they have been taken up as participants in God's great work to redeem creation.

Pastoral Reflection

The instructions Jesus gives to the seventy as he prepares to send them out may seem at first to be a strange relic of the first century, entirely untranslatable into our world. We rely on e-mail, cell phones, credit cards, and automobiles to make our way in the world. What can we learn from the command to carry no purse, bag, or sandals? We may have much more to gain from these obscure requirements than we would guess. As Jesus sends his emissaries out with his message of peace, he instructs them to conduct themselves in a manner that is congruent with that message. They will be like lambs in the midst of wolves. In our time, when the word *Christian* is heard by many as a label for self-righteous cultural warriors, a lived witness to peacefulness is greatly needed. The seventy did not trumpet their arrival with signs of power. Their manner was humble, needy, and vulnerable. This is the proper demeanor for a post-imperial, post-Constantine, post-established Christianity.

Jesus also requires the seventy to create a new community in every place they go. Wherever they act out Jesus' message of healing, welcome, and acceptance, the citizens of that town or village are invited to become part of God's great work of healing for the whole human family. The invitation is profoundly personal, as it comes from someone who has received hospitality and shares table fellowship. It is my conviction that in a culture that seems to be becoming increasingly suspicious of and even hostile toward religious institutions, Christians need to learn a similarly personal style of invitation. Slick evangelism programs that carry no personal risk and entail no personal relationship seem to me to be worse than useless. They smell of marketing and manipulation. They are the opposite of a style of evangelism that grows out of shared life and shared gifts of God. The recipient of such a genuinely personal sharing may know before being told, whether they have the words to describe it as such or not, that the reign of God has come near to them. AJC

Proper 10
July 15, 2007

Amos 7:7–17 or Deuteronomy 30:9–14
Psalm 82 or Psalm 25:1–10
Colossians 1:1–14
Luke 10:25–37

First Reading

Deuteronomy 30 proclaims that God's mercy is stronger than God's judgment. The text addresses the covenant people after the destruction of the monarchy, calling them to turn to God, trusting that God will be merciful. The promise of God is extravagant. Even after the terrible curses of Deuteronomy 28 have brought death and destruction to the people for their failure to uphold the covenant, when the people turn to God, God will delight to give them life and blessing. When the people obey God by living faithfully according to the law, God will restore them. Deuteronomy asserts that it is not too difficult to obey the commandments, nor are they too mysterious or inaccessible. The law of God is as close as the believer's own mouth and heart.

For a preacher comfortable within one of the Reformation traditions, this Deuteronomy passage may present a challenge. Lutherans and others have cited Paul to assert that the law is unable to give life (Gal 3:21) and that it is impossible for any human being to so fully obey the law as to earn favor before God. The law functions instead to condemn sin and drive people to seek grace (Rom 3:20, 23). What will one make of Deuteronomy's claim that life and blessing will come to the people who obey the law, and that the law is not too difficult to keep? The resolution of this apparent problem is possible only when it is recognized that Deuteronomy is concerned not with the question of salvation but with how to *live within* the salvation God has already given. Deuteronomy does not claim that Israel will earn God's favor by obedience to the law. Israel's covenant relationship with God is a gift. The law is given as an additional gift to guide Israel to live faithfully within the covenant.

A post-Pauline author begins the letter to the Colossians addressing the believers with a typical greeting of grace and peace. The author reports prayers of thanksgiving for the community of believers, particularly for their faith in Christ and their love for all other believers. Their faith and love are strong because of the hope that is bearing fruit among them. The author refers to Epaphras, who is known to the Colossians as a minister of Christ, and who has brought good news concerning the church's loving character. Having received this good report, the author describes praying continually for the believers there, that they may be filled with knowledge and lead worthy lives, and that they may be made strong and able to endure with patience. He reminds them to give thanks to God who is the source of their hope, who has given them a place in the reign of Christ, through whom they receive forgiveness of sins.

In Luke 10, it should be noted that the lawyer who questions Jesus about eternal life does so with hostile intent. He apparently hopes for evidence that Jesus' teaching is in some way defective. Jesus does not answer the question but asks what the lawyer understands the law to say. When the lawyer responds with the same summary of the law that Matthew (22:37–39) and Mark (12:29–31) place on the lips of Jesus, Jesus agrees and tells him to do so and live. The lawyer, though, wishes in some way to put himself up and Jesus down, so he asks for a definition of neighbor. He appears to want to be able to identify who is and who is not a neighbor.

Jesus replies with a story that suggests that it is not possible to identify *anyone* who is not a neighbor. On the one hand, it is a very simple story. It functions, as many folk tales do, by considering the conduct of three main characters, the last of whom demonstrates some quality to which the listener should attend. On the other hand, it is a profoundly challenging story that embodies a number of significant elements from Jesus' teaching, including compassion, service, and love of enemies. In the story it is the enemy, the hated Samaritan, who acts as neighbor. Although the lawyer's curt response suggests he is unmoved by the Samaritan's example, Jesus instructs him to go and do likewise.

Pastoral Reflection

The preacher faces a number of challenges from this week's parable. It is a very familiar story. The image of the Good Samaritan is so well known that it has become part of nearly everyone's vocabulary. In the process, though, the meaning of Samaritan has been changed. The element of "enemy" or "outsider" has been lost. Instead, the Samaritan has come to be associated with a cheerful kind of do-good-ism.

In addition, the story has a history of being used in Christian circles as a sort of rhetorical club to beat the listener, passing judgment for every instance of "passing by on the other side." Before the preacher says a word, some in the congregation will have begun to berate themselves for not helping the man or woman begging on the street corner. It often goes unnoticed that the tone of the story reflects its context of conflict. This makes it even more likely that some listeners will hear the story as conveying a message of guilt and condemnation. In a global society linked by satellite and television, the listener can be aware of billions of neighbors in need and end up feeling completely powerless to help.

Although these factors may make it difficult for the preacher to proclaim a life-giving word, he or she must work to overcome the obstacles to hearing Jesus in a fresh way. The preacher might prayerfully discern ways in which his or her congregation needs to be opened to the all-embracing love of God.

Perhaps there is a false sense of superiority or self-righteousness present. The story challenges the lawyer's smugness by presenting a despised Samaritan as a role model. The preacher might follow Jesus' lead by inquiring about unexpected experiences of grace. Jenny Browne describes how a man with tattoos helped her start her car and in the process challenged some of her cultural assumptions ("Sunday's Best," *The Other Side* [May/June 1995], 6).

Perhaps a congregation is satisfied with being loved by God but has no desire to reach out beyond its comfort zone to neighbors in need. In the story, Jesus seems uninterested in the question of inheriting eternal life but very interested in the question of whether there are limits to who might be a neighbor. The preacher might invite the congregation to see the real needs of real neighbors.

Or perhaps a congregation is feeling overwhelmed and unable to do anything of significance when faced with the enormity of needs in the world. Deuteronomy can guide the preacher to ask about the opportunities that are not too difficult and not too far away, where the congregation's gifts can make a genuine difference. The parable does finally ask the listener to take action in some way that "is very near to you, . . . in your mouth and in your heart for you to do."

AJC

Proper 11
July 22, 2007

Amos 8:1–12 or Genesis 18:1–10a
Psalm 52 or Psalm 15
Colossians 1:15–28
Luke 10:38–42

First Reading

Genesis 18 begins with a story of hospitality, a surprise guest, and a reaffirmed promise. Abraham had pitched his tent near the oaks of Mamre (near Hebron, south of Jerusalem and overlooking the Dead Sea in the southern part of the West Bank). With wonderful storytelling style, the narrator informs the reader that it was the Lord who visited Abraham, while the patriarch himself didn't yet know who his guests were. The reader is told what Abraham saw: Three men appeared suddenly. Mysteriously, it seems that Abraham did not see them as they approached. The text does not say whether the Lord was one of the three or was present as all three together. Abraham ran to greet them, honored them by bowing, and invited them to stay. Extending hospitality was a cultural requirement, but what Abraham offered was extravagant. He described it diminutively: a little water and a morsel of bread. In fact, the "three measures" was an immense amount of fine wheat flour. Although dry measures were not standardized, three *seahs* equaled one *ephah*, which may be estimated at between twenty and twenty-four quarts, or about one-third of a bushel! Abraham also slaughtered a calf, preparing a true feast. The reading concludes with the Lord's promising Abraham that Sarah will have a son "in due season."

The beautiful Christ-hymn in Colossians 1:15–20 celebrates the place of Christ at the center of God's work. Christ is the image of God, firstborn of creation. All things were created through Christ and have their proper place in relation to him. In Christ the fullness of God is present. Through Christ God is making peace in the cosmos. What is most interesting and surprising are the echoes (and thus denials) of the claims of imperial Rome concerning Caesar. The cult of the emperor honored Caesar in terms very similar to what is claimed for Christ!

The Pauline author echoes language of the Christ-hymn to remind the readers of God's great gift of reconciliation that they have received through Christ's suffering and death. As Gentiles, the readers must know that they were formerly alienated from God. In the gospel message proclaimed by Paul, they have been restored to relationship with God. This message announces the mystery hidden for ages but now revealed. This divine secret is truly breathtaking: Christ—the centerpoint and linchpin of all creation—is "in you." For believers, then, it is of supreme importance to continue in faith, to endure (and even rejoice) in suffering, and to grow toward maturity in Christ.

Luke 10 tells of Jesus' visit with Martha and Mary. Luke presents the scene very simply: Martha worried about providing the sort of hospitality that was expected, while Mary listened as a student to Jesus' teaching. Martha was resentful that Mary was not helping and asked Jesus to intervene. Jesus gently reproved Martha for being worried about "many things" (see Luke 12:22–34 about worry about what is secondary over against what is genuine treasure), indicating that Mary's attention to Jesus' words was of true and lasting value.

Notice the placement of this story. Luke pictures Jesus coming to "a certain village" to visit with Martha and Mary. In John 11:1 we learn that they lived in Bethany, quite near Jerusalem to the southeast, but according to Luke's travel narrative Jesus has been passing through Samaritan territory (9:52)—far to the north—and won't enter Jericho

(northeast of Bethany) until chapter 19. Since Luke has chosen to insert this story ahead of its proper geographic context, the reader may consider whether it is intended to clarify or qualify an adjacent part of the text.

This story may be read in two rather different (but not mutually exclusive) ways, pushing further or providing limits for insights drawn from the parable of the Good Samaritan. Mary attends to Jesus like a student learning from the teacher, but in doing so she has transgressed culturally defined gender roles. Tom Wright says, "There is no thought here of learning for learning's sake. Mary has quietly taken her place as a would-be teacher and preacher for the kingdom of God" (*Luke for Everyone* [Westminster John Knox, 2004], 131). Just as the compassionate Samaritan deconstructed accepted limits for identifying the neighbor, so Mary deconstructs accepted limits for women. Alternately, Jesus' clear approval of Mary's devotion to the Word may be meant to balance the parable's emphasis on serving: Rather than serving *or* studying, the disciple of Jesus embraces both serving *and* studying.

Pastoral Reflection

Some preachers may be drawn to the image of quiet comfort in the Luke text. For believers who feel overwhelmed by the pace of change in their world, Mary reveals the one thing that is reliable, the constant that will not be taken away. It is to bask in the goodness of God given in Jesus. There is something beautiful and peaceful in the image of Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus. It captures one of the reasons some believers come to church. They are seeking a place of beauty and peace. They draw deep strength from this still point where everything stops moving, even if only for a moment.

Other preachers may be drawn to the more challenging imagery of the Christ-hymn from Colossians. Christ is the image of God, the one to whom all things belong and in whom all things hold together. Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat claim that as soon as the author of Colossians "made references to 'the image of God,' 'firstborn' and 'first place,' everyone with ears to hear would know that he was contrasting Jesus with Caesar" (*Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* [Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2004], 89). They suggest that the church in our time needs leaders who will assert Christ's sovereignty in ways that are equally direct. They attempt to make a culturally appropriate translation of the "thrones, dominions, rulers and powers" which all belong to Christ, proposing that the powers of the twenty-first century might be "the Pentagon, Disneyland, Microsoft or AT&T . . . the institutionalized power structures of the state, the academy or the market" (p. 86). They call the Christian community to resist giving their hearts or imaginations to any vision for life that is less than that embodied by Jesus.

These two approaches may not be as far apart as they might at first seem. David James Duncan speaks of his prayer practice with an image drawn from Matt 6:6. Jesus speaks of going into one's closet to pray so that prayer is not contrived to be a public show but is a genuine opening of one's heart before God. Duncan describes having "a secret life in the closet. And it's become more or less portable, this closet. I've learned to occupy it, quite a bit of the time, even when I'm 'out in the world'" (Robert Darden, interview of Duncan in *The Wittenberg Door* [January/February 2007], 10). How strong and peaceful might our lives be if we, like Mary, cultivated time to sit in the presence of our risen Lord? How bold might our lives of discipleship be if we, like Duncan, learned to recognize and be nurtured by that presence in every place we go? AJC

Proper 12
July 29, 2007

Hosea 1:2–10 or Genesis 18:20–32
Psalm 85 or Psalm 138
Colossians 2:6–15 [16–19]
Luke 11:1–13

First Reading

Genesis 18 concludes with a story that pictures Abraham bargaining with God like a shopper at the market haggling with a fish seller. The Lord tells Abraham that a great cry for justice has reached him from Sodom and Gomorrah. The Lord must investigate to see whether the complaint is true. Although Abraham strikes the "correct" tone before God ("I am but dust and ashes."), he demonstrates true chutzpah in challenging God to do what is just.

There is a comic element about the bargaining session between Abraham and the Lord, but a profoundly serious issue lies under the surface. Abraham dares to ask what makes God's judgment just. Is justice in any way proportional? If so, how will God account for the innocent people as well as the wicked people who live in Sodom? By the end of chapter 18 the story seems to assert that God is relatively more inclined to show mercy than to punish. God regards the presence of a few innocent people as being of greater importance than the presence of many wicked people. For the sake of as few as ten innocent people, God will forgive all. As the story plays out in chapter 19, though, it appears that there are less than ten innocent. All of the innocent—Lot and his daughters—escape, while all of the wicked perish.

The Colossians text encourages the reader continue to live in Christ, using a series of wonderfully contradictory images: keep *walking* (*peripateo*), having been firmly *rooted* and *built up* in the faith. The specific warnings that follow reflect the author's particular concerns for believers to remain true to the faith as it was taught to them. There is wide variety of opinion about whether the warnings are a call to resist the teaching of a "Colossian heresy" and, if so, what sort of false teaching it was. It has been variously described as showing signs of Gnostic, Jewish, ascetic, pagan, or mystical influences. While it may not be possible to identify with certainty a link between the Colossian heresy and any single known religious group of the ancient Mediterranean world, we can identify what the author of Colossians regards as dangerous. The references to philosophy, human tradition, and elemental spirits, as well as observing festivals and worshipping angels, suggest a view of Christ that is something less than the view held by the author. Regardless of whether we understand the heresy as a religious "system," the author seems to be warning against any view that identifies Christ as merely one powerful supernatural presence among many. We are not to regard Christ as something less than the fully sufficient Son of God and Savior so that it is necessary to also make use of other powers to be assured of salvation or protection.

The author's response is direct. He asserts that in Christ "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily." Furthermore, fullness of life is available to the believer through Christ. This life may be pictured in terms of a "spiritual circumcision," which is to be understood in terms of being set free from the limits of a life directed by mere biological impulses and drives. This life can also be described in terms of forgiveness, accomplished through Christ's death on the cross and received through baptism. The author depicts this gift of new life as already received, as the believer has been joined to Christ in both death and resurrection. In the cross, Christ's victory over every other power

is decisive so that the author can imagine Christ as leading a parade, like the triumphant processions celebrating the victories of the Roman armies, with every other spiritual power following to display their subjugated and defeated status. The Colossian community is called, then, to resist attributing any positive value to any spiritual power other than Christ.

In Luke 11, Jesus teaches his disciples a simple prayer addressing God as "Father." The prayer gives expression to some of Jesus' central concerns: love and trust toward God, forgiveness, and hope. The prayer begins with a call for praise, that God's name and reputation be revered. It continues with a request for God's reign, voicing the dearest hopes of God's people that under God's gentle rule there will be vindication for God's people. The supplicant asks God both to provide what is needed for life and to grant forgiveness, remembering, as Jesus makes clear elsewhere, that receiving forgiveness is closely related to extending forgiveness (Matt 18:23–35). Finally Jesus teaches his followers to ask God for protection from great trial.

Jesus then tells two short parables that invite the listener to trust God's good providing. The first asks the believer to reflect on how important the bond of love is between friends and to know that, because of God's great love, God will respond to every believer who asks, seeks, or knocks. The second pictures God's love as far greater than any human love, even love for a child. If parents know instinctively how to care for a child, how much more will God respond to our needs! God's answer to prayer is seen as giving the Holy Spirit.

Pastoral Reflection

The Colossians text encourages the reader to continue living in Christ. This raises the question, though, of how Christians will be nurtured in faith and Christian identity, which points to the need for ongoing faith practices that shape life to conform to the way of Jesus. Prayer is one of the essential practices for maintaining a lively faith.

The Lord's Prayer is received by the church as Jesus' essential teaching on prayer. It often is used in communal settings and often spoken together in unison. A different sort of communal use is suggested by *The Didache*, which encourages use of the Lord's Prayer three times a day (8:3). Aaron Milavec observes that within the earliest church spontaneity was the normal expectation for prayer, "even when an abstract or schema was set out for guiding the praying leader." He goes on to suggest that "it would be hard to imagine that members of the Didache community assembled together to recite or hear a prayer that lasted a brief twenty seconds. Rather one can expect that in the presence of a gifted prayer leader the Lord's Prayer served to indicate the progression of themes that were expanded upon and added to in accordance with the specific circumstances and perceived needs of those present" (*The Didache: Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary* [Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003], 67).

In the congregation I serve, the Lord's Prayer has been used in something akin to this manner in small-group settings. A prayer leader, perhaps the pastor, speaks one line of the prayer. During a period of silence, group members may speak their personal praises, thanksgivings, and petitions. When it appears that all who wish to speak their prayers aloud have done so, the prayer leader speaks the next line of the prayer, again followed by silence, and so on. In this way, the Lord's Prayer has facilitated a profound experience of shared faith and life. AJC

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