



T R I N I T Y
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R E V I E W

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Atheist Stimulus & Faith Response
By Ted Peters

Restating Justification for a Scientific World
By George L. Murphy

Resources in the War and Peace Debate
By Ward (Skip) Cornett III

FROM THE EDITOR'S KEYBOARD

In this issue two authors with impeccable credentials in the area of theology and science address contemporary challenges.

Ted Peters, ELTS graduate, Director of the Institute for Theology and Ethics and co-editor of *Theology and Science* takes on the newly aggressive atheism, which he calls "evangelical." Dr. Peters has spent a career on the cutting edge of theological reflection and dialogue, mostly at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, and during the 2008-09 academic year he served as the Martin E. Marty Professor of Religion and the Academy at St. Olaf College.

George Murphy is an ELCA pastor with a Ph.D. in physics who is well known to the Trinity Lutheran Seminary community. At Trinity he periodically teaches a Templeton Fund prize winning course on theology and science. Dr. Murphy here undertakes to re-articulate the classic Reformation doctrine of justification by grace through faith in language intelligible to a scientific age.

Skip Cornett, Trinity's Director of Continuing Education, is a graduate of LSTC and TLS and recently completed his MA degree in Political Science and International Relations at Virginia Tech. Periodically Skip teaches an interim course on the church and politics, with immersion in the world of D.C. politics. Here he presents a review article reacting to three books that examine the church's vocation in relation to the powers, and to war and peace, as set in a global context.

The *TSR* continues to appreciate responses from readers, and is available online both through Trinity's website, (www.trinitylutheranseminary.edu) through the Publications link, through EBSCO subscriptions in educational institutions, and will soon be accessed as bibliography through commercial search engines such as Google, Yahoo and MSN. We welcome inquiries about possible articles, always are looking for insightful reviewers, and are proud to present original poetry. With an unusually large circulation for a theological journal, we trust that the reviews of recent books will be of concrete value to readers engaged in ministry in varied settings.

Tim Huffman, editor

TRINITY SEMINARY REVIEW is a publication of Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio, for its alumni/ae, students, and friends. Its purpose is to provide a forum for interaction between theological disciplines and the practice of ministry. It is designed to aid in the continuing education of church leaders. The seminary faculty and others engaged in the practice of ministry may submit materials for possible publication.

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BLUE SONNET

Blue morning glories reach from ground to sky,
Jacob's ladder connecting earth, heaven.
Singing, angel muse patiently stands by.
Pure hue, glory, loveliness is leaven.
Hagar looking upon the face of God
Lived. So shall those whose gaze is strong enough
To embrace the icon nourished in sod.
Beauty so deep sadness is joyful hush.
Fathers of Israel saw beneath God's feet
A sapphire pavement. Hallow, praise, chant.
Sing in Heaven's City evil's defeat.
Foundations of treasured, precious blue stone,
Power, purest presence, God's face alone.

—*Sharon R. Chace*

Atheist Stimulus & Faith Response

By *Ted Peters**



Right now the Christian faith is under fire. Today's attack is the most vicious I've witnessed in my lifetime. The barrage is coming from the ranks of the new atheists, the group I dub the "Evangelical Atheists." Faith is irrational because no God exists to believe in, they say; and they add that religion is responsible for the bulk of the violence and war that plague our world. These atheists are on a crusade to persuade us to give up our faith, to convert to atheism, and embrace liberal values such as human equality, justice, and peace.

A barrage of spiritual machine-gun fire is coming from the notorious book written by Oxford's Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*. Dawkins considers what he calls the "God Hypothesis," analyzes it scientifically, and concludes that God most probably does not exist. He claims this is a scientific conclusion; and on this basis he describes the content of Christian belief as a "pernicious delusion."¹

Spiritual machine-gun fire also comes from Sam Harris, who complains that "religious faith remains a perpetual source of human conflict."² In order to bring global peace, we need to stamp out religion. The religions Harris particularly wants to eliminate are Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. These irrational and violence-prone holdovers from a pre-modern era must be dispensed with. "All reasonable men and women have a common enemy. ... Our enemy is nothing other than faith itself."³

Still more spiritual machine-gun fire also comes from the pen of Christopher Hitchens, among others. Hitchens finds "four irreducible objections to religious faith," namely, "that it wholly misrepresents the origins of man and the cosmos, that because of this original error it manages to combine the maximum of servility with the maximum of solipsism, that it is both the result and cause of dangerous sexual repression, and that it is ultimately grounded on wish-thinking."⁴ Hitchens assumes that "the attitude of religion to science is always necessarily problematic and very often necessarily hostile."⁵ Although Hitchens might hope that we would simply evolve ourselves right up and out of religion into an epoch of scientific reason, he finds himself unable to be optimistic. "Religious faith is, precisely *because* we are still-evolving creatures, ineradicable."⁶ Hitchens' complaint is that religion poisons everything in the human way of life. Even if we cannot rid ourselves of religious faith, Hitchens can dream of a society without it.

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88 Such an attack might send faithful Christians scurrying for cover. While under cover looking for a counter strategy, perhaps we need to pause and ask ourselves: just what is this faith that we hold to be so important?

In this article, I would like to remind ourselves of the content and structure of our faith in the gracious God of Jesus Christ. It will not be my task to muster a counter offensive against the evangelical atheists. Nor will it be my task to defend religion, because faith in God can itself be quite critical of religion. Rather, as a preliminary, I would like to view the attack against faith to be a moment when we re-examine our faith. Just what does our faith consist of? Why is it worth maintaining and defending?

In what follows I would like to analyze our faith in a trustworthy God, faith in the God of grace. I would like to give attention to seven features of faith, seven marks that distinguish faith in the God of Jesus Christ from faith in lesser objects. Here are the seven features on my list:

1. Faith responds to God's Word
2. Faith recognizes that God is gracious.
3. Faith believes.
4. Faith trusts.
5. Faith invites the risen Jesus Christ into one's soul.
6. Faith acts in love.
7. Faith seeks understanding.

Follow me as we look briefly at each. The first challenge Christians face is to re-assess the nature of our faith and its value to us. Only thereafter might we be ready to ask whether it is worth defending, and how. Atheist criticism is the stimulus; and faith is our response.⁷

1. Faith responds to God's Word

The first thing to note is that, before the attack of the evangelical atheists, our faith was already a response to a stimulus. Our faith is a response to what we have heard or what we have read about God's gracious activity in the life and work of Jesus Christ. Because we have heard the story of Jesus, we respond by living the life of faith. We do not generate our own faith as a heroic act of will. Rather, our faith is a response to God's Word. ^{NRS} Romans 10:17: "faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ," writes St. Paul. What we hear is the story of Jesus; and when this story becomes our own personal story we respond with faith.

For Karl Barth, the Word of God is an event, an event of revelation. It comes to us in three forms: (1) the incarnate Word in the person of Jesus Christ; (2) the Bible; and (3) the living proclamation that takes place within the Church. "The revelation attested in Holy Scripture is the revelation of the God who, as the Lord, is the Father from whom it proceeds, the Son who fulfils it objectively (for us), and the Holy Spirit who fulfils it subjectively (in us)."⁸ On the one hand, the Word of God is spoken to us. On the other hand, the Word of God becomes revelation only when it lodges within our soul, only when it is received.

God speaks. We listen. God declares that our sins are forgiven. We accept God's judgment and we celebrate our forgiveness with gratitude. "Faith means to take God's judgment on oneself: to trust in his promise and to accept his forgiveness."⁹ Faith begins with God's word objectively addressed to us; and it concludes with our subjective response.

God's Word is objective and our faith is subjective. Right? Well, this is the way it looks superficially. Yet, if we press deeper we find that it is more complex. What makes it more complex is that our subjective reception is due to the work of the Holy Spirit within us. From deep within us, the Holy Spirit prompts us to listen to the Word of God, to hear the divine Word as addressed to ourselves. John Calvin calls this the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. "For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit."¹⁰ On the one hand, God's Word comes to us objectively as a word addressed to us. On the other hand, God works from within our subjectivity to seal the contract, so to speak, to establish and maintain our relationship.

In principle, then, we Christians will not concede to atheist critics that our faith is our own invention, merely a projection of our wishes onto an imaginary spiritual realm. We believe we have heard God speaking to us; and our faith is a response to what we have heard.

The matter gets still more subtle and complex. Lutherans try to spell out the next complexity by connecting what is revealed about God with the event of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. With the label, *Theology of the Cross*, we refer to the paradox within special revelation, namely, God is revealed in, with, and under what is not divine. Specifically, the event of the cross reveals God in a most unexpected and mysterious way. In the cross we see tragedy, defeat, suffering, and death. Yet, to the eyes of faith, the God of meaning, victory, salvation, and resurrection is present. In, with, and under the weakness of the cross, the power of God is present. In, with, and under the degradation of Jesus, the glory of God is present.

Martin Luther writes, "The manifest and visible things of God are placed in opposition to the invisible, namely, his human nature, weakness, foolishness ... it does [a theologian] no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross ... 'Truly, thou art a God who hidest thyself' (Isa. 45:15)."¹¹ The heart of God along with God's willingness to share the sufferings of the world God so loves comes to articulation in the event of the cross.

Now, much could be said about this subtle insight. However, I would like to draw just one implication, namely, any attempt to confirm Dawkins' God hypothesis in a so-called scientific manner could never admit this kind of evidence found in the cross.

The event of the cross toward which the scriptures aim our eyes is an event of revelation. Yet, this mode of revelation cannot in any way be placed in the same categories of knowledge with which a scientist might work. To study the natural world scientifically is to examine our world with microscopes and telescopes and other measuring devices; and then the scientist cautiously reports what is confirmable knowledge. The paradoxical and mysterious dimension of the cross event simply cannot be turned into subject matter for empirical

90 research. It should come as no surprise to a theologian of the cross that Dawkins is unable to verify his God-hypothesis based upon what he construes as empirical evidence.

Christians who place their faith in the God of grace revealed in, with, and under the cross of Jesus Christ are unaffected by Dawkins' God hypothesis. This is the case for two reasons. First, the God Dawkins is testing for is not exactly the same God revealed in the cross. Oh yes, we are talking about the omnipotent God of theism who is responsible for the creation of the world, to be sure. Yet, what Christian faith discerns in the cross is that God is gracious; and this cannot be discerned when asking about the creative power behind natural phenomena.

Secondly, the two pathways to knowledge are not consonant. To set out to confirm or disconfirm a scientific hypothesis is to look for relevant evidence that supports or challenges the hypothesis. All such evidence is evaluated positively. Revelation through the cross, in contrast, provides negative knowledge, or at least paradoxical knowledge. We see weakness, but power is revealed. We see defeat, but victory is revealed. We see sin, but forgiveness is revealed. We see disgrace, but grace is revealed. The truth or falsity of this Christian claim cannot be adjudicated by an appeal to scientific research. That Dawkins does not even raise the question of God's graciousness to the level of a hypothesis is no surprise, to be sure; but it signifies that Dawkins does not address what is at the heart of Christian belief in God.¹²

2. Faith recognizes that God is gracious.

Our faith is in God. But not just any old divine being will do. The particular God in whom the Christian invests faith exhibits a unique and decisive attribute, namely, grace. God loves us graciously. Even if we human beings find ourselves estranged or alienated from the divine, God overcomes this alienation by graciously loving us, accepting us, justifying us, saving us. ^{NRS} Romans 3:23-24 "since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

By grace God's justice becomes our justice. By God's grace we sinners find ourselves forgiven. By our own reason or strength we are unable to fulfill the demands of justice or accomplish our own forgiveness; yet these become ours in faith as a gift of God's grace. "All grace comes from above," writes Korean martyr Ju Gi-Cheol.¹³

This awareness that the God of grace has entered our human soul constitutes the liberating power of faith. In addition to the objective knowledge that God is gracious, the grace of this God can become subjectively present to us in our faith. This is where faith gets its liberating power. "Faith ... involves liberation from the drive for self-assurance and therefore from uncertainty," writes Oswald Bayer. "It means liberation from the search for identity and its attempted discovery. In prayer I am led away from myself. I am torn away from self and set outside the self with its abilities and judgments."¹⁴

Now, we might ask: what role does this emphasis on divine grace play in the current debate over the existence of God? The new breed of angry and aggressive atheists is trying

to persuade us to give up our belief in God, to replace faith in God with faith in human reason. The divine being in whom Jews, Christians, and Muslims place their trust does not exist, say the atheists. What does exist is the material world. What also exists are humane values such as mutual respect and the Golden Rule, say the same atheists.

What kind of God does not exist? Sam Harris argues that “the biblical God is a fiction, like Zeus and the thousands of other dead gods whom most sane human beings now ignore.”¹⁵ What Harris fears is the immoral and violent behavior perpetrated by religious persons. “Competing religious doctrines have shattered our world into separate moral communities, and these divisions have become a continual source of human conflict.”¹⁶ Elsewhere, “religious faith perpetuates man’s inhumanity to man.”¹⁷ In short, if we believe in a god such as Zeus we will foster hatred against other religious groups and prosecute violence against those who believe differently. Harris would prefer that we give up our belief in the God of Israel, affirm a rationalist’s approach to human living, and put our trust in humane values.

The Olympian Zeus, with all of his temper tantrums and lightning bolts, is not a god which would attract Christian belief. Once we Christians have heard the news that the God of Israel – the God who created our cosmos – is gracious, we are likely to lose interest in all other candidates running for the office of head divine being. It would be quite a disappointment should someone prove the existence of a god, and then discover that this god is not gracious. A non-gracious divine being, whether existent or not, would be unworthy of Christian appreciation or praise.

What is central to Christian faith is the affirmation that the God of Jesus Christ is the wellspring of divine grace. God loves us, even when we are unworthy of that love. Grace is the most important divine attribute. I wonder if we might say: *for Christian faith, the gracious character of God means more than the mere existence of a divine being.*

One implication is this: if we place our faith in a gracious God, then we are likely to behave graciously in our world. We are likely to respect and perhaps even love those who are *other* to us, those who disagree with our doctrines. We are not likely to shatter the peace over doctrinal disputes nor persecute those who believe differently than we do.

3. Faith believes.

The Apostle’s Creed and Nicene Creed each begin with the affirmation, “I/we believe” (*credo*). What we affirm when we confess in this manner is that we have heard the story of Jesus, and that we respond by believing what the story of Jesus tells us about the God of the universe. We treat God’s Word as truthful.

What we believe is that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth reveals to us a truth about the whole of reality. All that is real comes from God’s creative and redemptive will. Only the God who raises the dead can be the God who creates the world.

Faith as belief in the God who creates and redeems the world requires a modicum of knowledge and understanding. “Faith rests not on ignorance, but on knowledge,”¹⁸ contends

92 Calvin. Christian faith requires knowledge of the story of Jesus as well as understanding how one fits into the big picture of reality that God is drawing. Pentecostal Amos Yong places the pursuit of understanding at the earliest stage of faith where God's Word elicits our response: "revelation is received by humble faith seeking understanding."¹⁹ Some level of understanding is required at the beginning of faith if faith is to be intelligible. Faith builds on a prior knowledge that incorporates respectful understanding. One cannot be coerced by dogma or sword to believe what is unbelievable. "Faith without understanding is not faith but coercion,"²⁰ writes Danish ethicist Knud Løgstrup.

Contemporary atheists attack Christian faith on the grounds that belief relies upon ignorance rather than knowledge. "Faith is an evil precisely because it requires no justification and brooks no argument,"²¹ says Dawkins with derision. Dawkins and other atheists believe that scientific reason provides all the knowledge we need; and because scientific reason cannot prove the existence of a creator God we should drop belief in such a God. Trust science, not religion, Dawkins would say.

Those who hold Christian beliefs defend their position in opposition to atheism, arguing faith is based upon knowledge. This knowledge includes the objective history of Jesus plus its subjective appropriation in faith. In Article XX of the Augsburg Confession we find: "*faith* here does not signify only historical knowledge ... it signifies faith which believes not only the history but also the effect of the history, namely, this article of the forgiveness of sins, that is, that we have grace, righteousness, and forgiveness of sins through Christ."²²

Believing faith is justified by appeal both to the story of Jesus we find in God's Word and to reason as well. Reason supports faith, even if this support never completely expunges all doubt. Scientific reasoning provides helpful knowledge of the created world in which we live, to be sure; but its method restricts itself to looking for natural causes. Modern science is blind to transcendent reality. This blindness is not proof that no transcendent reality exists. People with strong Christian faith can work quite happily in scientific research. Atheism has no exclusive patent rights to scientific reason.

Belief requires prior knowledge; but this knowledge may fall short of certainty. Once we believe in God, the intellectual battle between doubt and faith continues. "Faith is not possession but pilgrimage," warns Paul Sponheim. "Therefore, it is not strange that the word of confession is 'I believe, help my unbelief!'"²³

The bad news, so to speak, according to John Calvin, is that "believers are in perpetual conflict with their own unbelief."²⁴ However, there is good news. Belief resides deeper within us than doubt does. Belief remains home, while doubt only visits on occasion. "Unbelief does not hold sway within believers' hearts, but assails them from without."²⁵ Despite the perpetual struggle between doubt and faith, faith will triumph because it relies upon the presence of Christ within the human heart at a level deeper than the doubts that assail us.

Even with the confidence Calvin tries to elicit in us, it is still a struggle to answer with confidence the question, "what should I believe?" Philosopher of Religion Paul Holmer

lays the responsibility for working through this struggle at the feet of the theologian. The theologian's struggle is exacerbated by our context in which God is said to be either dead or non-existent. "*Post mortem dei*. We are told by so many today that God does not exist and that the word *God* itself is therefore dead almost beyond revivifying."²⁶ As Holmer sifts through the subtleties regarding the content of Christian beliefs, he goes to the root of believing itself, namely, the possibility of personal faith in God. Rather than provide us with a set of beliefs which we may dub "revelation," the theologian should attend to the basic capacity for belief at all. "Perhaps it is the task of theology not to be God's revelation but only to help people again to believe in God ... Seeking God with one's whole heart is no joke, especially if it might be the only way to find him."²⁷ Note how Holmer moves from the mind to the heart, from belief to trust.

Belief is an activity of the human mind. When we turn to faith as trust, we turn not just to the mind but also to the heart and all that we are.

4. Faith trusts.

Faith trusts God. Faith places us within the strong hands of God and trusts that, no matter what happens, God will keep a safe hold on us. When all that is finite and ephemeral has disintegrated and fallen, the God in whom we trust will bear us beyond the debris into the kingdom of salvation. We are told by Article XX of the Augsburg Confession: "In the Scriptures the word 'faith' is to be understood not as knowledge ... but as trust that consoles and encourages..."²⁸

Just as joy gives rise to a smile, trust gives rise to hope. Faith orients us in the present, while hope orients us toward the future. Calvin exclaims, "faith believes God to be true, hope awaits the time when his truth shall be manifested ... faith believes that eternal life has been given to us, hope anticipates that it will some time be revealed; faith is the foundation upon which hope rests; hope nourishes and sustains faith."²⁹

Atheism rejects this hope. "Atheism rejects the existence of God as fiction devised by men desperate to keep on living in spite of the inevitability of death," writes Michel Onfray.³⁰ Onfray's accusation is that our belief in God is a fiction we human beings have devised to give us comfort in the face of the cold prospect of our own ceasing to exist, our own death. This is a stimulus worth responding to. Yes, indeed, we Christians find comfort in trusting that God will raise us from the dead just as he resurrected Jesus on Easter, "the first fruits of those having fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20). Now, which came first: our subjective desire to beat death or our response to an objective message we heard regarding God's promise? Such a question is inescapably important, even decisive. It will be a challenge requiring a response.

Turning to the dynamics of faith as trust, the existential question we must repeatedly ask ourselves is this: in whom are we actually placing our trust, in God or something less than God? "Faith," said Paul Tillich, "is the state of being ultimately concerned."³¹ Our ultimate concern is the value beyond all other values that orients our entire human life. If the material world is thought to be all that exists, then the material world could become that which we value ultimately. If material possessions and profits enlist our

94 focused energies and dedication, then in effect wealth has become our ultimate concern, our god. If, on the one hand, we make the market or our profit within the market our ultimate concern, we are subject to the self-destruction that comes with idolatry. If, on the other hand, the true God is our ultimate concern and we daily trust God, then our faith orients all other values toward God; and we enjoy living in hope regardless of the vicissitudes reaped upon us by the market or other such external forces.³² Understanding faith in terms of ultimate concern helps us discern within ourselves just what has captured our trust. If the only worthy God—the God of grace—has captured our trust, then we live the robust life of a dynamic faith.

Living daily out of a disposition of trust in the only worthy God guides our eyes to see metaphors of God's grace in the world around us. Herbert Brokering, for example, perceives in the emergence of the butterfly from the cocoon a sign of God's promise of our promised resurrection.

O silent one, your wings will find the sunshine
Our hearts now bow in butterfly delight.³³

As we said above, belief is an activity of the human mind. Trust involves more. Trust is an activity of the entire self: mind, heart, feelings, body, and activity. Trust is existential. Trust enlists the whole of our being when living the life of hope.

5. Faith invites the risen Jesus Christ into one's soul.

Faith justifies the sinner because Jesus Christ becomes present in the soul of the believer. It is the work of the Holy Spirit that unites three temporal moments: the Easter resurrection of yesterday, the resurrection promised us by God in the future, and the presence of Christ in our faith today.

Faith is more than mere belief, and even more than existential trusting. Faith includes the mystical presence of the living Christ. Martin Luther tries to express this somewhat awkward yet indispensable dimension of faith. "It [faith] 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."³⁴ Calvin says flatly, "Christ is not outside us but dwells within us."³⁵ This indwelling presence of Christ in the person of faith is the work of the Holy Spirit, adds Calvin. "The Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself."³⁶

The Holy Spirit prompts the new life of Christ from within the person of faith. Commenting on Martin Luther, Scott Hendrix emphasizes this point. "The new birth and the new connectedness to Christ come only through the operation of the Holy Spirit. Luther's spirituality is indeed Christocentric, but it is not Christomonist; it neither ignores nor neglects the third person of the Trinity."³⁷

The New School of Luther Research at the University of Helsinki in Finland stresses the importance of Christ dwelling within the person of faith. "Faith means the presence of Christ and thus participation in the divine life," writes Tuomo Mannermaa. "Christ 'is

in us' and 'remains in us'. The life that the Christian now lives is, in an ontologically real manner, Christ himself."³⁸ Our heart invites the living Christ into our soul; and, curiously, we then discover Christ has already been there. 95

To my observation, the real presence of the living Christ in our soul is one of the dimensions of faith most overlooked and ignored by our theologians. Forensic and other models depicting the relationship between grace and faith attempt to explain our justified relationship to God without this key dimension. Why? If the Holy Spirit places the living Christ within us, deep within us, then it seems to me we could daily draw from this wellspring of divine presence. Awareness of Christ's abiding presence could become the most comforting and inspiring gift of God's grace.

6. Faith acts in love.

Today's atheists attack Christians and others on the matter of love. Religious faith is said to reap dogmatism, rigidity, narrow-mindedness, belligerence, violence, and war. Michel Onfray lets loose with the big cannons. Referring to Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, he writes: "the religion of the one God...seeks to promote self-hatred to the detriment of the body, to discredit the intelligence, to despise the flesh, and to prize everything that stands in the way of a gratified subjectivity. Launched against others, it foments contempt, wickedness, the forms of intolerance that produce racism, xenophobia, colonialism, wars, social injustice. A glance at history is enough to confirm the misery and the rivers of blood shed in the name of the one God."³⁹ In order to build a bridge across the rivers of shed religious blood, Onfray calls us into a form of battle between religion and anti-religion: "we must fight for a post-Christian secularism, that is to say atheistic, militant, and radically opposed to" the three monotheisms.⁴⁰

Has the broken dam of religious bigotry flowed into rivers of blood? Unfortunately, some chapters of history would tell just this tragic story. Believers in God need to listen to this criticism, welcoming the judgment it entails. Then, we need to ask: is spilling the blood of those who disagree with us the appropriate expression of our faith in Jesus Christ? No, of course not. But, what is?

Faith acts in love. The faith we are talking about here performs works of love. When the gracious love of God in Jesus Christ becomes present within us, that outward moving love energizes and directs and empowers the person of faith and the community of faith.

"Because the Holy Spirit is given through faith, the heart is also moved to do good works," we find in the Augsburg Confession.⁴¹ Thus, faith "is more of the heart than of the brain,"⁴² Calvin reminds us. From the heart of faith issues love. ^{NRS} Galatians 5:6b: "the only thing that counts is faith working through love," writes St. Paul. When asking whether love precedes faith or whether faith precedes love, Calvin trumpets: "It is faith alone that first engenders love in us."⁴³ Faith alone saves; but the faith that saves is never alone. Living faith is loving faith. ^{NRS} James 2:26b: "faith without works is ... dead." In short, faith can be understood only as a source for love and service.

96 “Neighbor love” (*Nächstenliebe*) is a key term in the Lutheran vocabulary for identifying the direction that faith’s love follows. Whether the neighbor be a friend next door or someone unknown on another continent, faith looks for the neighbor’s needs and responds in loving service. Martha Ellen Stortz captures the mood. “To a community of pickpockets, all the world is a pocket. More soberly, to a community of Lutherans, all the world is filled with neighbors.”⁴⁴

Christians embrace a mission, a mission to make the world a better place through sharing faith and through works of neighbor love. Our “mission is the true influencing power aiming at changing the world,”⁴⁵ according to Steve Sang-Cheol Moon. This mission anticipates a transformed future, a redeemed creation. “The promise and vision of God’s future set the course for faith active in love striving in hope and seeking justice,” writes James Childs.⁴⁶ We seek to make this world a better place by first sharing the gospel of God’s grace and by attempting to replace injustice with justice.

What all this means for Luther is this: faith is not idle. “For the believer has the Holy Spirit; and where He is He does not permit a man to be idle, but drives him to all the exercises of devotion, to the love of God, to patience in affliction, to prayer, to thanksgiving, and to the practice of love toward all men.”⁴⁷ Luther goes on to liken the person of faith to a tree that grows and bears loving fruit. “Thus he is a doer of the Law who receives the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ and then begins to love God and to do good to his neighbor. Hence ‘to do’ includes faith at the same time. Faith takes the doer himself and makes him into a tree, and his deeds become fruit.”⁴⁸ We might state this another way: the person justified by faith works for justice in an unjust world. Paul Chung comments on the German Reformer: “Luther’s theological thinking of God regarding justification is enmeshed with his social and economic thinking of God’s justice.”⁴⁹ This pursuit of economic justice is accompanied by a presupposition of human equality, a point Indian Old Testament scholar Monica Melancthon makes. “The justice of God and the equality of human persons realized by the doctrine of grace is a sign of hope.”⁵⁰ Justice, equality, and the pursuit of human dignity are the social direction that a faith active in love follows.

If atheist critics of the Christian religion perceive in us intolerance leading to violence, then this stimulus deserves an appropriate response. This criticism could be prompted only by eyes that have not seen love. This criticism might lead to confession, repentance, and renewal within the Christian communion. We need to honestly ask ourselves: have we been true to our divine calling? Has our faith been truly active in love? Members of the Church of Jesus Christ are called to love, not to decimate, our enemies.

7. Faith seeks understanding.

Fides quaerens intellectum (faith seeks understanding), said two of our precedent setting ancient theologians, St. Augustine of Hippo and St. Anselm of Canterbury. This seeking appears twice, first in the establishment of faith and second in expanding on the faith once established. Earlier, when we described faith as belief, we pointed to the first stage, the knowledge of the story of Jesus conveyed by God’s Word to which faith responds. Now, we look at the second stage, when established faith builds upon itself as it tries to

understand more and more of reality. "Faith is not settled belief but living process,"⁵¹ adds Catherine Keller.

Faith leads to reflection on faith; and reflection on faith leads to theology. The theologian digs deeply to search out foundational understandings. The theologian pursues knowledge of the created world in ever expanding circles of understanding. The theologian borrows wisdom to better understand human nature. The task of Christian theology is to understand and explain all things in reality in light of their origin and destiny in the God of grace.

Faith is never naked, it comes dressed in understanding. I would like to shop briefly for four types of understanding within which faith might dress itself.

The first is *symbolic self-God-world understanding*. This is existential understanding at its near primordial level, the level of understanding out of which we think and act. For the person of faith, we understand ourselves to be united to God by the indwelling of Christ, tied to the world around us by the mandate to love. This basic understanding rises up into articulation through symbolic speech and action: in the hymns we sing during worship, the prayers we offer to God, the gospel message we share with others, our acts of kindness or charity, and the organizations we elect to support for making our world a better place. Our self-world relationship is implicitly understood in light of our understanding of God as our creator and abiding presence. The theologian will ask us to pause and ask: just how might we understand this understanding?

The second garment in which faith's understanding gets dressed is *technical mastery*. Darting fingers texting a friend on a Blackberry or iPod demonstrate a mastery of the technology that we find ready-to-hand. We daily negotiate our urban existence with its global network of communication in a near unconscious awareness of how much we understand. This is a functional understanding, not an intellectual one. It is a secular understanding, not an inherently religious one. It appears to be a value neutral understanding, not demanding ultimate concern. As stewards acting out of faith, we may wish to pause occasionally and query ourselves: just how can our technical mastery become a servant to faith acting in love?

The third is *scientific explanation*. Science shines light into the darkness of ignorance, illuminating the world of nature. Microscopes and telescopes reveal wonders and truths invisible to the naked eye. Science is like a pot of boiling water with research bubbling to the top and bursting with new knowledge. Understanding in the form of explanation expands as science expands. A faith that seeks understanding will be attracted to science like a child to a Christmas toy. As the size and complexity of our wondrous cosmos grows, so also does our appreciation of the God who created and sustains it. Yet, we should ask questions of ultimate concern from time to time. Does the natural world explain itself? Or, does what we know about nature require a transcendental explanation, an explanation that requires positing God as its creator and sustainer?

Fourth, and finally, *maturing wisdom* is a form of understanding faith should seek. Even though scientific explanation might contribute to wisdom, wisdom is a much more

98 comprehensive and synthetic form of understanding that incorporates explanation within a web of insights born of accumulated experience. The Akamba and other tribal peoples of Africa wait until a person is thirty-five years old or older before allowing such a person to become an elder, a member of the ruling council. Similarly, in Asian cultures senior family and community members are respected, especially when seniors provide wise counsel and insightful judgment. Such wisdom comes naturally; yet it seems miraculous because so few among us exhibit it. Such understanding is not automatic with Christian faith; yet, it is worthy of our seeking.

One manifestation of maturing wisdom is moral discernment. The contemporary moral difficulties we face are ambiguous; they may not yield immediately to black and white analysis. Insight and discernment are called for. Faith expressed as wisdom can lead to a more insightful understanding. "Faith may broaden our vision and enable us to see what might otherwise have remained hidden to sight," writes Lutheran ethicist Gilbert Meilaender. "It may enrich and enlarge our understanding of the moral life, and this enlarged understanding is, in principle at least, able to be shared with anyone and everyone."⁵²

Here is a question a person of faith might ask: how does the following apply to me? ^{NRS} Proverbs 4:7 "The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever else you get, get insight."

Conclusion

The biggest challenge to Christian faith in our global era is the appearance of substitute gods, secular deities that substitute the shallow for the deep or the ephemeral for the eternal. The international web of economic exchange, for example, seems to promise increased wealth and happiness to everyone. Pondering this economic promise requires careful discernment to see how unstable the market is and how its structure lacks the means for uplifting the poor around the globe. Personal profit from the global market is not worthy of our ultimate concern.

The substitute gods of economic materialism are sometimes difficult to discern, difficult to distinguish from the God to whom we sing praises during Christian worship. Much less subtle and more obvious is the material god that the Evangelical Atheists lift up. Atheists call us to an altar where transcendence is absent. They preach to us about an alternative non-spirituality, one of revering only our material make-up and of repenting from our delusionary imaginations.

Evangelical Atheists buttress their intellectual argument against God's purported existence with a moral argument that draws the line between good and evil. Once the line is drawn, they place themselves on the good side and everyone who is religious on the evil side. Whereas religious people are allegedly guilty of narrow mindedness, bigotry, racism, war mongering, and genocide, we are told that atheists stand up for open mindedness, human equality, world peace, and justice. If we rid ourselves of our uninformed and irrational faith and join the atheists, we are told we will be siding with the group self-commissioned people who can bring peace on earth.

To a person of faith, this may sound attractive because a person of faith acting in love also seeks peace on earth right along with human equality, economic justice, and a society imbued throughout with caring love. But in order to embrace such values, we Christians might ask: should we throw away our faith in the God of grace and purchase instead the gospel of Evangelical Atheism? Do atheists suddenly have a right to claim a patent on what Christians thought they had invented two millennia ago? For an atheist to knock on the door of the household of faith to sell these values is like a salesman trying to sell a glass of water to a household with a swimming pool in the back yard.

¹ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006) p. 31.

² Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2004) p. 236.

³ *Ibid.* p. 131.

⁴ Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York and Boston: Twelve, 2007) p. 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12. Not all atheists are vitriolic when it comes to religion. Daniel Dennett, who tries to subordinate religious history to an evolutionary paradigm, writes, “I do not hate religion. I am not an enemy of religion. I’m a student of religion. I’m an atheist, but that does not mean that I hate religion.” Chapter 1 of *The Future of Atheism: Alister McGrath and Daniel Dennett in Dialogue*, edited by Robert B. Stewart (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008) p. 22.

⁷ My plan is to rely in large part on Reformation resources. Not everyone in the Reformation tradition sees the atheist stimulus as decisive, however. Oswald Bayer, writing two decades ago, says, “The problems of the Reformation period seem outdated. Today, the emphasis of the theological debate has shifted...In our times, it is not so much atheism that is on the agenda but the return of new—often polytheistic—types of religion.” *Living by Faith: Justification and Sanctification*, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromily (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984, 2003) p. xiii.

⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 Volumes (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936-1962) I:2:1. As faith responds to God’s word, it expresses itself in the construction of a religious tradition, Christianity. God transcends and even judges this religious tradition. Distinguishing divine transcendence in this way humanizes and de-absolutizes our understanding of the Christian religion. This interpretation stands in contrast to that of Lutheran dogmatician John Theodore Mueller, who can speak of “perfection” in reference to the Christian religion. “Christianity is a God-made religion; all others are man-made.” *Christian Dogmatics*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955) p. 28.

100 ⁹ Hans Joachim Iwand, “The Righteousness of Faith According to Luther,” *Lutheran Quarterly*, XXI: 1 (Spring 2007) p. 35.

¹⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), Book I, Chapter 7; edited by John T. McNeill, *Library of Christian Classics* XX, XXI (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960).I:79.

¹¹ Martin Luther, “Heidelberg Disputation” in *Luther’s Works*, American Edition, Vols. 1-30, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing Company, 1955-1967); Vols. 31-55, edited by Helmut T. Lehmann (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1955-1986) 31:52-53.

¹² I provide a more thorough exposition and reply to Dawkins in chapter 1 of *The Evolution of Terrestrial and Extraterrestrial Life* (Goshen, IN: Pandora Press, 2007).

¹³ Ju Gi-Cheol, *Essential Writings*, Selected by the Korea Institute for Advanced Theological Studies (Seoul: The KIATS Press, 2008) p. 115.

¹⁴ Bayer, *Living by Faith*, p. 26.

¹⁵ Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006) pp. 55-56.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.79.

¹⁷ Sam Harris, *End of Faith*, p. 15.

¹⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, Chapter 2; I:545.

¹⁹ Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of a Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005) p. 298.

²⁰ Knud Ejler Løgstrup, *The Ethical Demand* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997) p. 2.

²¹ Dawkins, *God Delusion*, p. 306.

²² *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) p. 57.

²³ Paul R. Sponheim, *Faith and the Other* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) p. 162.

²⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, Chapter 2;I:562. Paul Tillich writes, “Every theologian is committed *and* alienated; he is always in faith *and* doubt; he is inside *and* outside the theological circle.” *Systematic Theology* (3 Volumes: Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-1963) 1:10.

²⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, Chapter 2; I:567.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

²⁸ *Book of Concord*, p. 57.

²⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, Chapter 2; I:590. Hans Schwarz captures the future orientation of the Christian faith expressed as hope. “Jesus and his destiny are, symbolically speaking, the lens through which the rays of all history since the creation of the world are focused and projected into the future.” *Responsible Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986) p. 205.

³⁰ Michel Onfray, *Atheist Manifesto: The Case Against Christianity, Judaism, and Islam*, translated by Jeremy Leggett (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2005) p.15.

³¹ Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper, 1957) 1. Richard A. Rosengarten applies Tillich’s description of faith as ultimate concern to the moral struggles we face in our global economy in “Letter from the Dean,” in the University of Chicago Divinity School organ, *Circa*, 31 (Winter 2009) p. 1.

³² “The bubble giveth and the breaking of the bubble taketh away. It is a bit comforting to know that the big run-up in our pension funds in the 90s and early 2000s was partly due to the bubble produced by the three causes I mentioned above. We enjoyed the bubble’s fake prosperity which was then forfeited when the bubble broke. This means that my gains and losses were both a bit illusory.” Robert Benne, “Reflections on the Economic Downturn,” *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, 9:3 (March 2009) <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Journal-of-Lutheran-Ethics.aspx>

³³ Herbert Brokering, “O Butterfly,” *Trinity Seminary Review*, 30:1 (Winter/Spring 2009) p. 46.

³⁴ Luther, “Commentary on Galatians 2:16 of 1535,” *Luther’s Works*, 26:129.

³⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, Chapter 2; I:570.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Book III, Chapter 1; I:538.

³⁷ Scott Hendrix, “Martin Luther’s Reformation of Spirituality,” in *Harvesting Martin Luther’s Reflections on Theology, Ethics, and the Church*, edited by Timothy J. Wengert (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) p. 252.

³⁸ Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther’s View of Justification* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005) p. 39.

³⁹ Onfray, *Atheist Manifesto*, p. 67.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

102 ⁴¹ *Book of Concord*, p. 56.

⁴² Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, Chapter 2; I:552.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Book III, Chapter 2; I:589.

⁴⁴ Martha Ellen Stortz, "Practicing Christians," in *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, edited by Karen L. Bloomquist and John R. Stumme (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998) p. 60.

⁴⁵ Steve Sang-Cheol Moon, "The Spiritual Influence of Korea: The Movement and Task of Korean Mission," *KIATS Theological Journal*, II:1 (Spring 2006) p. 176.

⁴⁶ James M. Childs, "Ethics and the Promise of God," in *Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, p. 106.

⁴⁷ Luther, "Commentary on Galatians 2:18 of 1535," *Luther's Works*, 26:255.

⁴⁸ Luther, "Commentary on Galatians 3:10 of 1535," *Luther's Works*, 26:255.

⁴⁹ Paul S. Chung, *Christian Mission and a Diakonia of Reconciliation: A Global Reframing of Justification and Justice* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2008) p. 43.

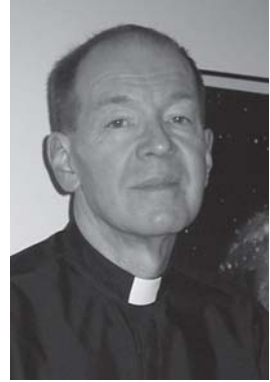
⁵⁰ Monica Melanchthon, "The Grace of God and the Equality of Human Persons," in *The Gift of Grace: The Future of Lutheran Theology*, edited by Niels Henrik Gregersen, Bo Holm, Ted Peters, and Peter Widmann (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005) p. 43.

⁵¹ Catherine Keller, *On the Mystery: Discerning God in Process* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008) xii.

⁵² Gilbert C. Meilaender, *Faith and Faithfulness: Basic Themes in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991) p. 127.

Restating Justification for a Scientific World

By *George L. Murphy**



I. Salvation and Science

Basic questions are being asked today about what Lutherans have traditionally claimed to be “the article by which the church stands or falls,” the doctrine of justification. A thorough treatment would require discussion of such matters as recent Finnish Luther research, the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, and the “new perspective on Paul” in New Testament theology studies. But in this brief article we will be concerned with even more profound challenges to the very concept of justification. Must a legal concept like justification be the primary way in which we speak about salvation? Are the existential questions that people ask today ones about guilt and forgiveness like those that prompted the Reformation’s teachings on justification, or should we now be addressing different concerns?

These questions are not new. Over fifty years ago Paul Tillich said that the traditional doctrine of justification is “so strange to the modern man that there is scarcely any way of making it intelligible to him.”¹ Some theologians regard as a scandal the inability of the 1963 assembly of the Lutheran World Assembly in Helsinki to come to a consensus on the meaning of the doctrine of justification for that time. A statement from the assembly expressed its dilemma as follows:

The man of today no longer asks, “How can I find a gracious God?” His question is more radical, more elementary: he asks about God as such, “Where is God?” He suffers not from God’s wrath, but from the impression of his absence; not from sin but from the meaninglessness of his own existence; he asks not about a gracious God, but whether God really exists.²

There are many reasons why people today may wonder about the relevance of Christian doctrines and question the reality of God, but one important cause is surely the rise and spread of scientific views of the world in recent centuries. People who are accustomed to thinking of the world in scientific terms, or who are just acquainted with popularized versions of science, are separated by a considerable distance from the thought forms of biblical writers or theologians of the Reformation period. My concern in this paper is to express the doctrine of justification and its implications in a way that is meaningful for citizens of a scientific world.

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104 An explosion of interest in relationships between science and religion during the past quarter century has had a considerable impact on Christian thought. Big bang cosmology, biological evolution, genetics, ecology and neuroscience have all been part of the conversation. They have both challenged and deepened understandings of what it means to confess the triune God as “maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen,” and to recognize ourselves to be creatures of God.

Most of the theological implications of science-religion discussions have had to do with the doctrine of creation. This is perhaps to be expected but it has had the result that these conversations have seldom touched on “second article” issues. The doctrine of justification has not been on the agenda of science-theology dialogue. The importance both of that doctrine and of the scientific context of people’s thinking today means that that neglect must be remedied if the church is to carry out its fundamental task of proclaiming the gospel. As John Mangum wrote some years ago, “Today’s churches have no other place to fulfill their mission than a world whose basic assumptions are pervaded more and more by science.”³

The fraction of Americans who identify themselves with no religion has increased in recent years.⁴ It is unclear how many have been led to this position by arguments that scientific progress has made the idea of God obsolete, as “New Atheists” like Dawkins, Dennett and Stenger argue.⁵ Nevertheless, awareness of scientific realities does raise important questions about traditional pictures of salvation.

Obvious questions arise in connection with evolution. Our species has a long history of development from a common ancestor with present-day apes and even earlier species, and natural selection has played a crucial role in this process. What we know of evolution through natural selection, as well as observations of the behaviors of the great apes, our closest surviving relatives, makes the traditional western picture of the first humans existing in a sinless “state of integrity” quite implausible. In addition, the time that would be required for the present genetic diversity of humans to develop from a single couple would place a literal Adam and Eve millions of years in the past, which again is scarcely credible.⁶ Discussions of justification today that refer to “the Fall” or “Adam” as the source of the human problem thus seem to be out of touch with reality.

I have discussed these issues raised by evolution previously.⁷ While they are important, a resolution of them is not essential for an adequate presentation of the gospel. The claim sometimes made by both opponents of Christianity and Christian opponents of evolution that the need for a savior, and thus the whole of Christianity, stands or falls with the historical truth of Genesis 3, is simply false.⁸ The reason that a savior is needed is that everybody is a sinner, quite apart from the interesting question of how that condition arose. The fundamental law-gospel message is “You are a sinner and for Christ’s sake God forgives your sin.” Nothing need be said about Adam and Eve.

Our focus here will be on something more subtle. The language of justification itself does not easily make contact with people who are imbued with a scientific understanding of the world.

“Justification” and “forensic” are legal terms. We are saved, in Barth’s words, because of “the judge judged in our place.”⁹ The common metaphors for the forensic understanding are of the “forum,” the court. The person who stands guilty before the judge is declared righteous because of the righteousness of the judge. Such language is certainly prominent in the Bible and the theological tradition, and has spoken deeply to many people through the centuries.

But it does not speak well to a scientific world. It is not that legal language actually contradicts any scientific truth. After all, our concept of “laws of nature” is borrowed from the realm of legislatures and judges. But those laws of nature do not convict or acquit people.

The point here is not that we should get rid of judicial language or images. I am not suggesting that we need a new “scientific” understanding of salvation to replace the judicial one in all situations. It is rather that we need, in addition to the legal picture, other ways of speaking that are legitimized by the Bible and the Christian tradition and that can make contact with the types of concord between theology and science that dialogue has achieved in connection with the doctrine of creation.

What is called for, in other words, is not elimination of the judicial concept of justification but, in a careful sense, transformation of it. Einstein’s relativity theory in physics allows us to describe phenomena in different reference frames by providing a way to transform observations in one frame to those in another. In a similar way, we need to be able to speak of the reality that the tradition has called justification from the standpoint of those who look at the world in terms of the natural sciences.¹⁰ The conceptuality which we employ must possess scriptural legitimacy and also be able to facilitate communication with scientific understandings of the world.

Though our scientific context is of considerable importance for theology, we should resist any temptation to try to make theology a branch of science.¹¹ Science, what used to be called “natural philosophy,” should have a ministerial role, but never a magisterial one, in theology.¹² The influence of the sciences on our understanding of salvation will be indirect. What I will argue is that science helps us to understand God’s creative activity in creation, and that that activity is paralleled in important ways by God’s salvific work.

Although it is important to be able to speak of salvation in ways that resonate with a scientific picture of the world, it is not necessary to find new “scientific” equivalents for all traditional terms. Such an attempt is likely to give us only clumsy circumlocutions. Instead of “God imputes to sinners the righteousness of Christ” we could say something like “God imputes to people who are in the wrong relationship with God the right relationship of Christ” but little would be gained by that.

Even less helpful would be an attempt to replace the crucial word “faith” with some supposedly scientific equivalent. Of course psychology and the other human sciences can help us to understand the processes of human belief and commitment, but saving faith is not just a psychological concept. The use of words such as faith, sin and

106 righteousness in the following should be a reminder that our goal is not to eliminate or replace the traditional concept of justification, but to restate it in a way that it can be more easily communicated to human beings – not computers - in a scientific world.

II. Creation and New Creation

The connection between creation and salvation can best be expressed by saying that salvation, in its broadest sense, is a work of new creation. The God who carries out this work is the creator. This truth was expressed by Athanasius in the fourth century in a statement so fundamental that I have referred to it as “Athanasius’ axiom:” “The renewal of creation has been the work of the selfsame Word that made it at the beginning.”¹³

The precise phrase “new creation” occurs only twice in the Bible, in the letters of Paul (II Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15), where it describes God’s saving work for humanity. However, references to new birth (John 3:3-8, Titus 3:6, James 1:18, I Peter 1:3 and 23) point in the same direction. In Psalm 51:10 the plea “Create in me a clean heart,” where the verb *br*’ expresses the divine prerogative of salvation (as in Genesis 1:1) is significant.

The idea is not limited to the human race, as promises of new heaven and earth (Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22, II Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1) show. This will not be a surprise if we realize that we are fully human only in our relationships with the rest of the world. We will return to this cosmic dimension of salvation but begin with the renewal of humanity. The work of re-creation begins within the human race with Jesus of Nazareth.

In speaking of “new creation” or “re-creation” here I will be using the terms in a sense broader than those given to related words like “regeneration” and “renovation” in much of traditional Lutheran theology. In several places in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession Melanchthon used “rebirth” and “regeneration” as closely related to “justification.” For example, we are told there that “[B]ecause ‘to be justified’ means that out of unrighteous people righteous people are made or regenerated, it also means that they are pronounced or regarded as righteous.”¹⁴ A bit later Melanchthon says, “Therefore we are justified by faith alone, justification being understood as the making of a righteous person out of an unrighteous one or as regeneration.”¹⁵

The Formula of Concord recognized this usage of the Apology and noted that “*regeneratio* (that is, ‘rebirth’)” had several senses.¹⁶ Narrowly it could mean only “forgiveness of sins and our adoption as children of God” but more broadly it could mean “sanctification or renewal.” It could even “include both the forgiveness of sins because of Christ alone and the resultant renewal.”¹⁷ But in order to avoid any ambiguity and make it completely clear that the righteousness of the new life of the believer is not to be seen alongside the righteousness of Christ as a cause of the believer’s fundamental change of status, the Formula itself distinguished between justification and regeneration or renewal.¹⁸ In the following period of Lutheran Orthodoxy detailed analyses of an “order of salvation” were developed in which “regeneration” and “renovation” were stages.¹⁹

Here I propose to speak about new creation in a way that is similar to the earlier idea of regeneration in the Apology. But it is also possible, as the Formula of Concord observed,

to use the term in a broader sense. Just as the word “creation” itself encompasses God’s act of bringing all things into being (*creatio ex nihilo*) as well as God’s ongoing preservation of creatures and activity with them (*creatio continua*),²⁰ so re-creation can include what the tradition has called justification as well as sanctification. Because of the same concern that prompted the authors of the Formula to make their distinctions, we need to be aware constantly of whether or not re-creation is being used in its strict sense, in which it parallels the traditional term justification, or more loosely, to include what has usually been called sanctification.

It is also important to take into account the dynamic character of creation. God did not create a world of static perfection, but one that was to develop in time toward God’s intended goal. (Otherwise the “Be fruitful and multiply” of Genesis 1:28 would make no sense.) Time and history are intrinsic to creation. Science, as we will see, points in the same direction.²¹ God created the world, and each one of us as part of that world, to move toward its divine *telos*. Scripture gives the crucial clue about that *telos* when it speaks of God’s “plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth” (Ephesians 1:10). Sin means that creation has taken the wrong road, and God’s salvific work points it back toward its intended goal.²² The work of re-creation could then be described more fully as a reorientation of creation toward its ultimate fulfillment of God’s purpose.

Focusing on the work of Christ as new creation helps to answer questions about the “why” of the cross. Try as they might, views of the atonement which see the death of Christ as being necessary to satisfy God’s honor or justice have trouble explaining in a convincing way why God could not simply forgive sinners without those demands being met. But if salvation follows the pattern of the God who creates *ex nihilo*, it is not surprising that it takes place through the creator’s descent into the nothingness of abandonment and death. And when those estranged from God are brought to realize that they have destroyed the source of their life, when they see that the idols in which they trusted have failed them, they are reduced to nothing. Then the fact that Christ crucified is risen can bring about real faith in the real God, who “justifies the ungodly ... gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist” (Romans 4:5 & 17).²³

The fact that justification can be spoken of alternatively as a work of re-creation is an obvious, but nevertheless important, parallel between “the chief part of Christian doctrine”²⁴ and Christian teaching about creation. This means that we can make use of ways in which science has been able to inform the doctrine of creation in order to illumine our understanding of God’s work of salvation. And because of this first parallel we are encouraged to look for others.

III. THE WORK OF WORD AND SPIRIT

The powerful link between the biblical concept of creation by the divine Word (Genesis 1, Psalm 33:6, Isaiah 55:10, John 1:3, Hebrews 1:3) and forensic justification is crucial for our argument. The term “forensic” calls up, as we have noted, images of courtrooms and legal proceedings, but the fundamental meaning of forensic justification is that

108 God *declares* sinners to be righteous. Since God's Word is creative, because it does what it says (Jeremiah 23:29), such an act of justification is a prime example of the creative power of that Word.

The fourth chapter of Romans brings out clearly the intimate connections between the divine works of creation, justification, new life and eschatological hope. The God who "justifies the ungodly" (4:5) is also the one "who gives life to the dead" and "calls into existence things that do not exist" (4:17). And because of this it is possible for us to be, like Abraham, "hoping against hope" (4:18). All of these works bear the same mark of the resurrection of the crucified.²⁵

The idea that God "imputes" or "reckons" the righteousness of Christ to sinners has sometimes been accused of making justification a legal fiction. God supposedly views those who are really sinners "as if" they were righteous. But what God says is never fictitious. The claim that imputation gives only a pretense of righteousness is like a notion that the "Let there be" commands of Genesis 1 created only an imaginary world. On the contrary, God's Word does what it says.²⁶

When God declares a sinner righteous, that person begins in reality to *be* righteous. This is not the traditional Roman Catholic concept of *infused* righteousness, in which God declares the sinner righteous because he or she has been made righteous by the infusion of divine grace. Instead it is the very declaration of righteousness that brings about righteousness. God "justifies the ungodly" and thereby makes them godly.

God creates a new relationship through the Word, but the Word of God does not work alone. We should always picture it together with the Spirit, the two "hands of God" in Irenaeus' phrase.²⁷ In Genesis 1:2 the spirit of God is moving over the primordial deep before God speaks, and in Psalm 33:6 "the word of the LORD" and "the breath of his mouth" are both ways of speaking about the creation of the heavens. The Spirit is seen as being involved especially with living things (Psalm 104:29-30), and in the Nicene Creed is described as "Lord and giver of life."

Faith is the new relationship created by Word and Spirit. "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). And the work of the Spirit in salvation is first of all to bring people to faith, for "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:3). (So the church prays that God would "accompany your Word with your Spirit and power."²⁸) The impossibility of confessing the lordship of Christ without the activity of the Holy Spirit indicates that in this part of the Spirit's work the human subject is passive. As Luther explains this work, "I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my LORD or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith".²⁹ To put it another way, the new life that God will create does not exist prior to God's gift of faith.

Since this new creative work of God comes through hearing the Word, it might seem that it must always be something episodic and discontinuous, and that no constant progress can be involved. As Romans 4 indicates, the justification of the ungodly is a radically new

act like creation out of nothing and the resurrection of the dead. We were “dead through our trespasses” and God “made us alive together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:5). 109

But attention to the parallel with creation will qualify this conclusion. Creation includes God’s ongoing preservation of creatures and cooperation with them in their activities as well as the origination of the universe. Scripture affirms in many places (e.g., Psalm 104) that God is continually working to provide for creatures. That is the aspect of creation that Luther emphasizes in the Small Catechism when he explains the First Article of the Creed.

Traditional doctrines of providence have spoken not only of God’s preservation of creatures and governance of them toward their intended ends, but also of “Concurrence, or the cooperation of God, [which] is the act of Divine Providence whereby God, by a general and immediate influence, proportioned to the need and capacity of every creature, graciously takes part with second causes in their actions and effects.”³⁰

Older theologies understood cooperation to be subordinate to preservation but modern science points us in the other direction. Investigations ranging from the physics of elementary particles and the development of new biological species to the formation of stars and the expansion of the entire universe show that the world does not consist of inert pieces of matter but of dynamic entities whose basic properties depend on interactions with other entities. In view of this reality we ought to understand God’s preservation of creatures to take place through the divine cooperation with their physical processes. God keeps creatures in existence precisely by cooperating with them.³¹

This insight helps us better to understand the work of re-creation. Having begun new life by joining sinners to the death and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:1-11), God sustains that life. This work of preservation through repentance and forgiveness is always a return to the dying and rising of baptism, as Luther emphasizes in explaining the meaning of that sacrament for daily life.³² But there is continuity – not between the old sinful self and the new, but in the life of the new self. The ongoing process of sanctification is now one in which the believer is able to cooperate to some degree with the Holy Spirit. Everything depends ultimately on God but in this work of hallowing believers, just as in providing the necessities of life in the world for creatures, God acts through second causes.

IV. THE INSTRUMENTS OF NEW CREATION

In the previous pages I have tried to follow the Formula of Concord in its concern to distinguish between the beginning of new life in Christ which parallels the origination of the world and the sustenance and growth of that new life which is analogous to God’s ongoing cooperation with, and preservation of, all creatures in the world. The human cooperates in the latter work but is entirely passive in the former. Babies do not cooperate in their own conception. Lutherans have always been alert to the dangers of synergism, the idea that people cooperate in their own justification. The suggestion of the later Melancthon that the human will plays some positive role in conversion was decisively rejected by the second article of the Formula of Concord.³³

110 Our attention to parallels between creation and new creation, however, should warn us not to overreact to the word “synergism.” The term “cooperation” that is used in connection with creation is simply the Latin-based equivalent of the Greek-based “synergism.”

In bringing about new creation God does cooperate with creatures, although not with the human will. Instead God works with and through the “means of grace,” word and sacraments, in order to bring about, as well as to sustain, the new life in Christ. The claim that God does not in general act immediately but through such means is in fact another important feature of the Lutheran tradition. “Therefore we should and must insist that God does not want to deal with us human beings, except by means of his external Word and sacrament” Luther wrote in the Smalcald Articles.³⁴ And the same section of the Formula of Concord that rejects the idea that the human will cooperates in justification also condemns “the ancient and modern Ravers [who] taught this: that God converts human beings without any created means and tools, that is, through his Spirit apart from the external proclamation and hearing of God’s Word.”³⁵

It is through the proclamation of the Word that Christ crucified is made a reality for people and creates faith in them (Galatians 3:1, Romans 10:17). This is true first of the word that is preached and of its written form in the scriptures, but also of the “visible word”³⁶ of Baptism or the Lord’s Supper. “Through these, as through means, [God] gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel.”³⁷ This does not mean that we can explain how preaching, let alone the use of water or bread and wine, can bring about faith. (The difficulty is especially obvious with the baptism of infants, a difficulty which is, however, ameliorated when we understand faith as essentially trust and not simply an intellectual act.) Unlike God’s use of water in nature, in which God limits divine cooperation to the natural capacities of that substance, the Holy Spirit does something with ordinary water that is more than “natural” when it is joined to the word in baptism. In this sense the effects of the sacraments, and also of spoken or printed words, are “miraculous.”³⁸ But these are hidden miracles. While we may observe a change in a person’s attitude, we cannot detect faith scientifically, and thus do not observe any effects that exceed what our scientific understanding of nature would allow.

It is worth noting, however, that the use of physical elements, and even of human technology,³⁹ in the sacraments provides a significant point of contact between creation and its renewal. The God who makes life in the world possible through water and food uses the same elements in special ways to create and sustain new life in Christ.

VI. THE NEW HUMANITY

The focus of many discussions of justification and sanctification on what takes place for a person who responds to the gospel has often resulted in neglect of the corporate aspect of salvation. However, the New Testament speaks of the result of God’s saving work not simply as an assortment of regenerated individuals but as a new humanity, the Body of Christ. The role of the sacraments as the means of this renewal is notable.

For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.

(I Corinthians 12:13)

The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?
Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all
partake of the one bread.

(I Corinthians 10:16-17)

Paul's biological image of the Body of Christ is significant. It suggests, as Paul discusses in some detail in I Corinthians 12, that individual persons are brought together to form a super-personal organism of which Christ is the head.

Billions of years ago single celled organisms were the only form of life on earth. Symbiotic relationships eventually gave rise to multicellular organisms in one of the major transitions of evolutionary history. (The mitochondria in our cells, with their own DNA, are probably one result of this process.) The development of more complex lifeforms eventually made it possible for intelligence to emerge in a species. Teilhard de Chardin suggested that in an analogous way the Body of Christ should be seen as the next stage in evolution.⁴⁰ We should not, however, see this as simply the next step in a more or less direct process of development. Bearing in mind the fact that God's work of new creation is a correction of the sinful course of history, we should see it rather as a reorientation of the historical process by which humanity is turned back toward the end for which God intended it.

The formation of a corporate entity does not mean that individual personality is to be crushed out. On the contrary, as Paul's elaboration of the image in I Corinthians 12 brings out, being part of one body means that each member can be fully her or himself. As Teilhard put it, "Union creates ... differentiates ... [and] personalizes."⁴¹

The church is much more than the passive object of God's work of re-creation. It is also the "workshop" of the Holy Spirit.⁴² In this new community the Spirit continually brings to birth, renews and strengthens faith in Christ. Luther's explanation of how the Holy Spirit brings "me" to faith that was quoted earlier continues with an emphasis on the corporate aspect of the work - "just as he calls, gathers, enlightens and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith. Daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins - mine and those of all believers."⁴³ Again God works with ordinary means, a community with all too many imperfections and one that can be studied with the tools of the human and social sciences, in order to reorient creation toward its intended goal.

Luther continues, "On the Last Day the Holy Spirit will raise me and all the dead and will give to me and all believers in Christ eternal life."⁴⁴ We might have emphasized earlier the fact that the new relationship brought about by Christ is eschatological, one proper to God's final future.⁴⁵ The event of Christ with whom the believer is united by faith is the breaking in of that future upon the present world. A full exploration of that theme would require discussion of Ted Peters' theology of prolepsis and his thesis that "God creates from the future, not the past."⁴⁶

112 Here we may simply note that by reorienting human history, the work of Christ leads us again toward the goal that God intends for creation. Human rebellion against, and alienation from, God, sin that extends back to the beginning of humanity, meant that we were on the wrong road, moving away from that goal.⁴⁷ We are now back on track. Led by the Spirit, we are, as the old gospel song puts it, “bound for the promised land.”

I have waited until now to introduce this theme instead of doing so when the idea of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to sinners was discussed in order to avoid the error of making this participation in eschatological righteousness a purely individual matter. It is not just that “the sinner” is a new creation but that she or he is part of God’s new humanity. And our awareness of the corporate character of this new creation prepares us to think about the even broader scope of this work of re-creation, the renewal of the whole world.

VII. NEW EARTH AND HEAVENS

God’s saving and hallowing work extends beyond the human race. We have already noted the biblical texts that promise new heavens and a new earth and should add to these Ephesians 1:10 and Colossians 1:20 which speak of God’s plan to unite “all things” in Christ and the accomplishment of the reconciliation of all things through the cross. Romans 8:18-25, which speaks of the liberation of “the creation” from decay and futility, is also relevant.

Unfortunately the Christian understanding of creation has often been narrowed, with a tacit understanding that all the rest of creation is here simply for our use and enjoyment, and that only humanity has any ultimate value.⁴⁸ The idea that the “dominion” given to humanity in Genesis 1:28 is a license to exploit nature has, with some truth, been blamed for our modern environmental crisis.⁴⁹

Some trends in twentieth century theology suggested that theology had little to say about such matters. Bultmann, for example, said that one can confess God as the one to whom one’s existence is owed, but that “Statements which speak of God’s actions as cosmic events are illegitimate.” We cannot affirm God as creator of the world in general.⁵⁰ If this were the case then there would be little reason for the church to be concerned with the natural world, or for theology to take into account the sciences that study the world.

Those sciences have shown us, however, that we are who we are only in our relationships with the rest of creation. The atoms of the essential element carbon in our bodies, as well as those of heavier elements, were formed in the cores of ancient stars and spread through the galaxy by supernova explosions. Through our evolutionary history we are organically related to all other life on earth, and the environmental problems of our modern world have forced us to realize that what happens to one species of an ecosystem affects all its other members. We are creatures who owe our existence to the God who is the creator of the universe.

And we are creatures of God who in our evolutionary history have sinned, straying from the path that God meant for us to walk. As sinners we are saved by the participation in

that history of the Word of God who assumed our evolved flesh, who dies in solidarity with the losers in the “struggle for life,” and whose resurrection gives hope that the whole creation will be rescued from futility (Romans 8:18-25). 113

How the whole creation beyond humanity is to be renewed is something about which we have only hints. Excessive speculation will not be helpful. We can, however, begin by realizing that we are called afresh to the commission given to humanity in Genesis 2:15 and 1:26-28. We are to “guard” and “serve” the terrestrial garden and to exercise responsible dominion over it.⁵¹ That dominion is part of our task of representing in the world the God who came not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45). As the church helps to make people aware of the need to care for creation, the damage done to the world by sinful uses of technology can begin to be healed.

Beyond the earth, the words of Ephesians 3:9-10 about the calling of the church to proclaim God’s wisdom to the “rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” may, when suitably demythologized, point to a cosmic mission for the Body of Christ.⁵²

The work of creation’s renewal is God’s but it is also a work for which God calls us to be intelligent participants and instruments. One of the offertory prayers in *Lutheran Book of Worship* expressed this conviction in somewhat provocative language.

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, maker of all things. Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts. With them we offer ourselves to your service and dedicate our lives to the care and redemption of all that you have made, for the sake of him who gave himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.⁵³

There is some similarity here with the concept in the Jewish tradition of *tikkun olam*, “the mandate to be an active partner in the world’s repair and perfection.”⁵⁴ Today that is a task that will certainly involve science and science-based technology.

¹ Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era*, abridged edition (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957), p. 196.

² Quoted by Carl E. Braaten, who also describes this outcome as a “fiasco” and “farce,” in *Principles of Lutheran Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), pp. 38-39.

³ John M. Mangum (ed.), *The New Faith-Science Debate* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), p. vi.

⁴ “Survey: U.S. grows less religious, less Christian,” *Christian Century* (April 2, 2009), p. 15.

⁵ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 2006); Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Viking, 2006);

114 Victor J. Stenger, *God: The Failed Hypothesis. How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2007).

⁶ David Wilcox, "Finding Adam: The Genetics of Human Origins" in Keith B. Miller (ed.), *Perspectives on an Evolving Creation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003).

⁷ George L. Murphy, "Roads to Paradise and Perdition: Christ, Evolution, and Original Sin," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 58 (2006), p. 109.

⁸ Two such arguments against Christianity are H.G. Wells, *The Outline of History – Being a Plain History of Life and Mankind*, 4th ed. (London: Cassell & Co., 1926), p.616 and "Evolution or Genesis" by Louis W. Cable at <http://home.inu.net/skeptic/genev.htm>. Two uses of the idea to attack evolution are Ken Ham, *The Lie: Evolution* (El Cajon CA: Master Books, 1987), p.73 and Wilbert H. Rusch, Sr., *Origins: What is at Stake?* (Terre Haute, IN: Creation Research Society Books, 1991), pp. 25-26.

⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.1 (Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark, 1956), § 59.1.

¹⁰ George L. Murphy, "What Can We Learn from Einstein about Religious Language?" *Currents in Theology and Mission* 15 (1988), p. 342.

¹¹ Such attempts are not unknown today. See, e.g., the overstated claim of Frank J. Tipler, *The Physics of Immortality* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), p. 339, "Religion is now part of science."

¹² Siegbert H. Becker, *The Foolishness of God* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1982), pp. 196-198.

¹³ Athanasius, "On the Incarnation of the Word" in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, Volume IV (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978 reprint), 36; George L. Murphy, "Chiasmic Cosmology and Atonement," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 60 (2008), p. 214.

¹⁴ "The Apology of the Augsburg Confession" in Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert (ed.), *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), pp. 132.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.133. A very similar statement is on p. 139.

¹⁶ "The Solid Declaration" of "The Formula of Concord," Article III in Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, p. 565.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 565-566.

¹⁹ Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 3d ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), pp. 441-461.

²¹ George L. Murphy, "Time, Thermodynamics, and Theology," *Zygon* 26 (1991), p. 359.

²² Murphy, "Roads to Paradise and Perdition: Christ, Evolution, and Original Sin" and "Chiasmic Cosmology and Atonement."

²³ Gerhard O. Forde, "The Work of Christ," Section 4, in Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (eds.), *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

²⁴ "The Augsburg Confession – German Text – Article XXVIII" in Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, p. 100.

²⁵ George L. Murphy, *The Trademark of God* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1986).

²⁶ Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), Vol.1, pp. 274-279.

²⁷ E.g., Irenaeus, "Against Heresies" in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), IV.20.1, p. 487.

²⁸ "The Litany" in *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), p. 171.

²⁹ "The Small Catechism" in Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, p. 355.

³⁰ David Hollaz, quoted in Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology*, p. 172.

³¹ Murphy, *The Cosmos in the Light of the Cross*, p. 77.

³² "The Small Catechism" in Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, p. 360.

³³ "The Solid Declaration" of "The Formula of Concord," Article II in Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, pp. 543-562.

³⁴ "Smalcald Articles" in Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, p. 323.

³⁵ "The Solid Declaration" of "The Formula of Concord," Article II in Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, p. 544.

³⁶ For the term "visible word" here see "The Apology of the Augsburg Confession" in Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, p. 220.

³⁷ "The Augsburg Confession – German Text – Article V" in Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, p. 40.

³⁸ In an even stronger sense the conversion of sinners itself could be called miraculous because God does it not only without their cooperation but in spite of their resistance. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), First Part Q.106,

116 Art.1, p.544, affirms that “the justification of the unrighteous” is done by God alone but argues that it is not, properly speaking, a miracle because it could not be brought about by another cause. Obviously one’s definition of “miracle” is critical here.

³⁹A.R. Peacocke, *Science and the Christian Experiment* (New York: Oxford, 1971), Chapter 7.

⁴⁰Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1969), pp.16, 66-72; George L. Murphy, “The Church in Evolution,” *Seminary Ridge Review* 5.1 (2002): p. 380.

⁴¹Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Activation of Energy*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), pp. 115-116.

⁴²James A. Nestingen and Gerhard O. Forde, *Free to Be: A Handbook to Luther’s Small Catechism* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975), pp.113-115.

⁴³“The Small Catechism” in Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, pp. 355-356.

⁴⁴Ibid., p.356.

⁴⁵Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Vol.1, pp. 274-279.

⁴⁶Ted Peters, *Anticipating Omega* (GQ’ttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), p. 12.

⁴⁷Murphy, “Roads to Paradise and Perdition: Christ, Evolution, and Original Sin,” pp. 115-116.

⁴⁸H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

⁴⁹Lynn White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis”, *Science* 155 (1967), 1203.

⁵⁰Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958), p. 69.

⁵¹Murphy, *The Cosmos in the Light of the Cross*, Ch. 11.

⁵²George L. Murphy, “The Signal,” in *Pulpit Science Fiction* (Lima, OH: CSS, 2005).

⁵³*Lutheran Book of Worship*, p. 68.

⁵⁴Laurie Zoloth, “Science and Ethics in Judaism” in Ted Peters and Gaymon Bennett (ed.), *Bridging Science and Religion* (London: SCM Press, 2002), p. 219.

Review Article: Resources in the War and Peace Debate

By *Ward (Skip) Cornett III**



Transforming the Powers: Peace, Justice and the Domination System. Edited by Ray Gingerich and Ted Grimsrud. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press (www.augsburgfortress.org), 2006. 240 pp. ISBN 978-0-8006-3817-7 \$21.00 (Paperback).

War, Peace and God: Rethinking the Just-War Tradition. By Gary M. Simpson, Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress (www.augsburgfortress.org), 2007. 112 pp. ISBN 978-0-8066-5110-1 \$11.99 (Paperback).

The Future of Lutheranism in a Global Context. Edited by Arland Jacobson and James Aageson. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress (www.augsburgfortress.org), 2008. 218 pp. ISBN 978-0-8066-9060-5 \$19.00 (Paperback).

Transforming the Powers is actually a collection of 11 articles or chapters written around the topic of peace and justice, power and domination. The notable writers include Walter Wink, who is most well known for his trilogy on naming, unmasking and engaging the powers. The origin of these essays was a conference at Eastern Mennonite College in March 2001 (prior to 9/11!) where the writers presented papers on Walter Wink's thought. If you have never read anything by Wink, this is a good place to start since this book includes two articles by him and a series of articles about his work.

Critical to this collection of essays is the attempt to deconstruct the reality in which we find ourselves, the implicit set of assumptions, preconditions and foundational understandings that make up our worldview, according to Wink, and shape our understandings about peace and justice. Worldview consists of the pictures in our mind, the myths we live by, and it provides the elementary basis of our thought for an entire epoch (p. 17).

The writers include Glen Stassen and Nancey Murphy, both at Fuller Seminary, among others. The editors, Gingerich and Grimsrud are both at the Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, VA and represent the historic peace church tradition.

In the opening chapter, "The New Worldview: Spirit at the Core of Everything", Wink discusses five worldviews that have impacted Western societies. The Traditional Worldview is reflected in the Bible and in traditional societies and is material and spiritual, consisting

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118 of this world and the other world, heaven and earth, and up and down (p. 18-19). The Dualistic Worldview he says is more accurately the Gnostic or Manichean Worldviews. Spirit is good; matter is evil. Spirits have fallen from the good heaven and are trapped in this world, the material realm. Asceticism is a reflection of this worldview (p. 19). The Materialist Worldview denies the spiritual or heavenly realm. One form of materialism, the most insidious, is the blatant form that expresses itself in the pursuit of material pleasure and satisfaction. Wink cites David Ray Griffin who characterizes this worldview as nihilistic, relativistic, mechanistic and more (p. 20). The antithesis of the Materialist is the Supernaturalist Worldview, which results in a rejection of any scientific view that seems to contradict the biblical understanding (p. 21). The Integral Worldview is the merger or synthesis of the material and spiritual, the heavenly and earthly. It is a corporate or wholistic worldview in which everything is related, inside and out. The universe is suffused with the divine. However, this is not pantheism, but panentheism, meaning everything is in God and God is in everything and everything is related. The Integral Worldview is grounded in process theology, as Wink calls upon Whitehead, Cobb, Teilhard de Chardin and others, including some who have worked in the dialogue between science and theology such as Peacocke and Polkinghorne (p. 21-24).

Wink's Integral Worldview provides the capacity to understand creation and science, prayer, the other person and everlasting life. In essence, the Integral Worldview allows humans to honor life, the environment, and the universe as the revelation of God. Wink provides parallels between physics and religion. Neither is adequate alone to discern truth about the nature of the universe and the nature of God. The next best step is metaphor, which scientists take from theology and poetry to describe the universe, and God also becomes a metaphor because "all language fails in the presence of the final and absolute Mystery—the God beyond all Gods—the God beyond even our God" (p. 27).

The Integral Worldview is foundational for Wink in the movement toward the realization of peace and justice in the world. It has the potential to "lead along lines that honor life, the environment, and the very universe itself" (p. 28).

The series of articles that follow the new worldview discussion offers a varied set of perspectives on worldviews, powers, and peace and social justice.

Chapter 2 – "Social Science, Ethics and the Powers" by Nancey Murphy is a brief foray into the questions of truth and power in the realm of social science using Wink's power paradigm as a backdrop for analysis.

Murphy makes an important argument about the intrusion of the secular on the religious and theological. Social science, she argues, is distorted because of its separation from the Christian tradition. Her discussion is quite elaborate and detailed, even if it is only nine pages of the book. Critical to her discussion is an argument taken from John Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory*. Milbank argues that there is a counter biblical theology underlying modern social science. To quote her rendition of Milbank "Whereas the typical assumption of the social sciences is that the secular is the natural and religion is an intrusion, it is more accurate to say that the secular realm had to be invented; it was first created by inventing the category of the natural over against the theological or

religious.” Murphy continues this line of argument by citing Alasdair MacIntyre who ¹¹⁹ says that it is necessary to know something about the question of the purpose of human life in order to know what is good for humankind. The scientific naturalists, he argues, claim that there is no purpose at all (p. 37-38).

Chapter 3 – “Principalities and Powers: A Social Scientific Perspective” by Daniel Liechty offers an investigation of the human problem of living with the knowledge of death. The way we deal with it, he argues, is by sublimating the anxiety into forms of violence, oppression and injustice. The natural tendency is the desire to overcome and eradicate evil, yet, according to Liechty, humans often “commit their worst evil acts out of heroic intentions, the very desire to eradicate evil” (p. 48). For Liechty, the natural antidote or response to this inclination is to assume the posture of the pacifist tradition. The wisdom of the pacifist tradition is seen in the predisposition toward nonviolent, moral action rather than grasping for more power, which often leads to the exercise of more violence.

Chapter 4 – “A Pacifist Critique of the Modern Worldview” by Ted Grimsrud extends the discussion of the role of pacifism in the modern world. Peace, he argues, is an ultimate value. However, the predisposition in our world is toward violence. He offers a critique of “three aspects of the modern worldview.” The first assumption is that we live in an impersonal universe that had been objectified, which in turn leads to “profoundly destructive ramifications” (p. 58). The second assumption that he highlights in the context of understanding the basic predisposition is the question of nature and the inclination toward the domination of the natural world. He provides some rather graphic and disheartening examples of how this happens with regularity. The third assumption concerns how the modern, rationalistic worldview is manifest in a destructive fashion in the world. This is an important chapter for analyzing and understanding the inherent destructive tendencies in the modern worldview. Grimsrud offers a pacifist way of knowing as an alternative to “uncritical living within the modern worldview” (p. 62).

Chapter 5 – “Providence and the Powers,” another essay by Walter Wink, is a fascinating discourse on what some might refer to as “the God of the parking lot.” This is a cynical reference to exuberant expression heard on occasion from someone who makes the claim that God found a parking space for them. At a more profound and significant level, Wink is talking about divine providence and the significance of synchronicity. Synchronicity is a term attributed to Carl Jung who observed that there is on occasion a concurrence or coincidence of events that are not causally connected. Causality is a statistical hypothesis of how events evolve one out of another. Synchronicity is a neutral element within the constitution of the universe that can be evoked for good or evil purposes. The bigger question concerns how God is active in the world. Why are some saved from violence, and others are not? Why did Hitler survive 12 separate attempts on his life while others can claim that God spared them as the result of a series of coincidences that resulted in their avoiding an accident that otherwise would have taken their life? Wink does not necessarily answer the question. He simply raises it for further discussion and analysis.

Chapter 6 – “Traditions, Practices and the Powers” by Nancy Murphy uses the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and *Three Rival Versions*

120 of *Moral Enquiry* in an epistemological analysis of the question of the Powers. This is an excellent effort at trying to understand the existence and character of the Powers. MacIntyre is concerned about the use of human reasoning in assessing moral claims, which is problematic because reasoning reflects competing traditions. MacIntyre addressed this concern in *After Virtue* which is his documentation of what he identifies as the failure of the Enlightenment in providing a foundation for modern moral discourse. Social practices, argues MacIntyre, are a reflection of the intellect. The practices result in the realization of goods that are internal to those practices, including truth. Murphy is critical of MacIntyre as being overly optimistic in his evaluation of social practices and of the capacities of the intellect. She turns instead to Wink's trilogy on *Naming the Powers* as a better source for analyzing and restoring social practices in a way that will lead to peaceful outcomes rather than violence. Murphy's essay is one of the more complex, yet carefully nuanced articles in this collection.

Chapter 7 – “Jesus Christ: Victor over Evil” by Willard M. Swartley uses some fundamental New Testament teachings to demonstrate an altered worldview that is evident in the ministry of Jesus. The Beatitudes or the Sermon on the Mount reflects a new worldview and opposition to evil, as do other critical elements of the biblical narrative including the writings of Paul. Swartley also visits learnings from the early church and finds a contemporary example of the church opposing oppression in its activity in East Germany in 1989 prior to the collapse of the Wall and the Soviet communist system.

Chapter 8 - In “The Economics and Politics of Violence: Toward a Theology for Transforming the Powers”, Ray Gingerich offers a theological analysis of the Powers at work in the Peasants War of 1525. He is critical of Luther for his role in legitimizing and apparently encouraging the war and he includes a section in which he advocates that the Powers can be redeemed and transformed in what he identifies as a paradigm shift.

Chapter 9 – “Jesus’ Way of Transforming Initiatives and Just Peacemaking Theory” by Glen Stassen returns to the biblical discussion of the way of Jesus in peacemaking. Wink and others have identified a third way which involves peacemaking as creative, transforming and surprising initiatives rather than simply renouncing, even as this style of peacemaking clearly involves the renunciation of violence or retribution (pp. 130-131). Stassen also recalls Ten Practices of Peacemaking that were articulated by a group of interdisciplinary scholars who collaborated to develop a consensus on just peacemaking (p. 133). Like others in this series of articles Stassen cites the importance of John Howard Yoder's renowned work *The Politics of Jesus*. But he goes quite a bit further by highlighting numerous examples of the church's transformed work of peacemaking in a variety of settings globally and historically.

Chapter 10 – “Resistance and Nonresistance: When and How” by Willard M. Swartley looks closely at biblical perspectives on government and the question of when to resist, primarily from a Mennonite perspective. Swartley engages in a thorough and detailed review of the range of scriptural directives on questions around resistance, nonresistance and the state.

Chapter 11 – “The Kind of Justice Jesus Cares About” brings Glenn Stassen back to discuss further the style of Jesus’ ministry of justice which he identifies as fourfold consisting of nonviolence, confrontation with the wealthy, confrontation with those who dominate others and his inclusion of the outcasts (p. 167-170). In further elaboration on the public ethic of fourfold justice, Stassen utilizes the work of Michael Walzer, ethicist at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University, the public intellectual most known for his work in the just-war tradition.

Transforming the Powers: Peace, Justice and the Domination System is filled with an array of resources for the church to consider if it is to play its sometimes-oppositional role in relation to war and peace and social justice. The message of peace, reconciliation and renewal is fundamental to the message of the gospel, and this collection of articles is an effort at calling the church to its biblical and theological traditions for addressing these concerns.

Realistically, if the church is to take advantage of these profound religious and theological resources and assume its role as the conscience of society in relation to these issues, it must also look critically at its current position and practices in contemporary society, and particularly in the arena of international affairs. It is there that decisions are made about war and peace and social justice in the global community. It is there that the church must give practical application of its wealth of resources in thinking about peace and justice.

There are a number of factors that diminish the church’s capacity to act on issues of peace and social justice in a way that it can help to ameliorate the situation of violence and war. One is the church’s basic predisposition. It is an inherently conservative organization. It has a history of siding rather uncritically with the status quo and the established order and is often not able to distinguish between religious and nationalist convictions. A few examples will substantiate this assertion. Christians in Nazi Germany, with the exception of the small Confessing Church movement, Bonhoeffer, Niemoeller and others, are notorious for their uncritical support for Hitler in the movement referred to as the Deutsche Christians. The Reformed church in South Africa developed a full blown theological rationale to support the system of apartheid.

Recent polling data furthers this argument. According to opinion polling conducted by the Bliss Institute at the University of Akron entitled *The Religious Landscape in 2004*, religiously affiliated respondents demonstrate much stronger support for preemptive military action by the U.S. than secular, agnostic and atheist respondents.

The report indicates that “overall, more than three-fifths of the entire sample in 2004 agreed with the statement ‘Given the threat of terrorism, the U.S. must be able to take preemptive military action against other countries,’ and just one-quarter disagreed. One sixth had no opinion.” Notably, 72% of Evangelical Protestants agreed with the statement. The cumulative response for Mainline Protestants, which was divided into Traditionalist, Centrist and Modernist, was 62% in support of the statement. Modernists Mainline Protestants were the least supportive at 47%. The religiously affiliated contrasted markedly with Secular respondents at 59% and Atheist, Agnostic respondents at only 40% in

122 support. The so-called preemptive or preventative military doctrine was part of the rationale for invading Iraq. (p. 34-35, *The American Religious Landscape and Political Attitudes: A Baseline for 2004*, John C. Green)

An April 2009 study by The Pew Forum for Religion and Public Life reinforces the conservative predisposition of religious people in their analysis of polling data on the torture debate. "The Religious Dimensions of the Torture Debate" (<http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=156>) reports that 16% of the population that attends worship services at least weekly says that torture can often be justified and 38% says it can sometimes be justified. White evangelical Protestants give the highest approval for the use of torture at 18% and 44% respectively for a total of 62%. Meanwhile, in the population sample that seldom or never attends worship services, only 12% report that torture can often be justified and 30% says that torture can sometimes be justified for a total of 42% giving approval for the use of torture on suspected terrorists.

Meanwhile, according to many commentators and scholars, including Thomas Ricks, the *Washington Post* Pentagon correspondent, the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq may go down in history as the biggest U.S. foreign policy blunder ever committed. (*Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*, 2006) It has resulted in the death of a few hundred thousand Iraqis (numbers are difficult to discern) and created as many as 3 million refugees. All of this is not to mention the loss of over 4,000 American soldiers, and the billions of dollars the U.S. has spent to maintain this war. Joseph E. Stiglitz, Nobel Prize economist at Columbia University places the cost much higher in his recent publication *The Three Trillion Dollar War: The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict*, (2008:W.W. Norton).

From the beginning of this military adventure, the mainline churches did little or nothing to voice their concern, consternation or opposition to the pending invasion of Iraq. In fact, church people were more likely part of the majority that supported the invasion as suggested in the data cited. ELCA Bishop Mark Hanson, who took a public stand in opposition to the pending invasion, was reportedly inundated with e-mails criticizing his outspokenness and opposition to the invasion.

If the church is a more conservative institution than the general public, the question also arises whether it is more or less knowledgeable than the general public. The general public is abysmally ignorant of public and global affairs. This reality has been documented in a number of ways in recent years. An extensive earlier work by Carpini and Keeter at Yale (*What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*, 1989, Yale University Press) draws important distinctions between historical knowledge, political institutions and processes, and foreign affairs. The discovery was that Americans generally are woefully ignorant of people, players, nations, and treaties and agreements in the arena of foreign affairs. For example, in 1988, only 20% of respondents could identify the location of El Salvador on the map. Nicaragua was identified on the map by only 36% of respondents, Poland only 28%. Yet these were all hotspots of U.S. foreign involvement at that time. (Carpini and Keeter, p. 87)

A recent assessment of the state of political knowledge is more forthright in its assessment. *Just How Stupid Are We? Facing the Truth About the American Voter* was published in

2008 by Rick Shenkman at George Mason University. (Basic Books, 2008) Shenkman 123
covers a number of areas, but significantly, he addresses the confusion of the general American public about the relationship between Iraq and Saddam Hussein and the 9/11 terrorists attack. Even as late as 2006, according to a Zogby International Poll, 46% of Americans continued to believe that there was a link between Saddam Hussein and the 9/11 terrorist attack, an assertion that has been thoroughly repudiated by “The 9/11 Commission Report” and numerous other sources (Shenkman, p. 4).

Transforming the Powers is a rather complex and high-minded analysis of the worldview and the nature of powers. It is a valuable work for those who want to give leadership to the church’s ministry of social justice and peace making. But in taking on this specialized ministry, it is probably equally important for the leadership to come to terms with the state of the world and the knowledge of the electorate as it is lived out in the life of the church. If it is difficult to grasp the nature of the powers and the worldviews that shape the church’s approach to peace and justice, the other difficult challenge is resident in the attitudes, predispositions and knowledge base of the American public that finds itself at home in the church. To some degree those attitudes reflect the worldview concerns that are addressed in *Transforming the Powers*. But another way of understanding the problem of worldview is through quantitative analysis.

Still, the church is called to do something, and there are other resources available to assist with the task of addressing questions of war and peace and social justice. One resource that may have a much more practical application in the parish is *War, Peace and God: Rethinking the Just-War Tradition*. A relatively small reader of 108 pages that is part of the Lutheran Voices series by Augsburg Fortress, Gary Simpson at Luther Seminary has provided a concise overview of the just-war tradition from a confessional perspective. This is an excellent little study that would serve congregations well when the country is faced with the prospect of military action such as the invasion of Iraq, which has gone awry in terms of the level of death and destruction that it has precipitated.

Simpson is very careful and deliberate in his use and definition of terms surrounding the just-war tradition, which he identifies as JWT for short. It is “just-war tradition” as opposed to just-war theory because, he argues, “the subject matter is more reflective of moral tradition than ethical theory, though theoretical considerations play a role” (p. 26).

The problem with the church and war and peace is that it is too complicated; the issues themselves are complicated; who is on whose side; whether or not there is a real threat to U.S. national security is not always clear; what domestic and international law says about a given situation; and sometimes even the most basic information such as where a given adversary is located in the world is an unknown for the majority of the population.

Nevertheless, if the church is to be a community of moral deliberation, if it is to take seriously its confessional tradition, it needs to do something. Doing something involves creating a safe space for talking about war and peace and impending military action, where differences of opinion can be expressed freely. It also means providing some kind of structure for talking about these rather complicated issues. Simpson has provided a good tool for carrying on this much needed conversation. His “Questions for Discussion

124 and Reflection” at the end of each chapter are one part of a structure for such conversations. Critical to any discussion of an imminent military action are the ten criteria for a just-war, which will assist any pastor and/or adult education leader in raising the conversation beyond the level of emotions of fear, anxiety and nationalistic pride.

There is a strong argument to be made for why the church ought to be engaged in these conversations. Simply put, it is part of the historic faith tradition, even if that tradition has failed repeatedly to come down on the right side. It is ecumenically confessional to do so, argues Simpson. *Transforming the Powers* makes the case that it is fundamental to the faith tradition to engage the powers, the system of domination and the worldviews that contribute to violence as solutions to our problems and differences. Another strong consideration for Lutherans to be engaged in the peace making enterprise is the simple recognition that we are a global church. Arland Jacobson and James Aageson at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minn. have documented this reality in a fine little reader published by Augsburg Fortress in 2008 entitled *The Future of Lutheranism in a Global Context*. Once again, a series of articles by different writers, including ELCA Bishop Mark Hanson, Bishop Younan from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, Winston D. Persaud at Wartburg Seminary, and numerous others who document the place of Lutheranism in the global community. In about 200 pages divided into sections on Africa, Asia, Latin American, the Middle East, Europe and North America, this is a nice piece of work for reminding our congregations of the historic and demographic reach of Lutheranism. Jacobson and Aageson have also been considerate enough to provide an appendix in which they share statistics on global Lutheranism taken from the Lutheran World Federation.

From *Transforming the Powers* to *Rethinking the Just War Tradition*, to *The Future of Lutheranism in the Global Context*, there is enough here to remind the church that the Christian vocation is global and it includes a concern for our neighbors near and far, and that it urgently calls us to a ministry of peace and justice.



Faculty and Alumni Publications

40-Day Journey with Julian of Norwich. Edited by Lisa E. Dahill. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Books (www.augsburgfortress.org), 2008. 112 pp. ISBN 978-0-8066-8047-7 \$12.99 (Paperback).

Extraordinary! Insightful! Personal and relevant, yet scholarly!

Editor Lisa E. Dahill, and Julian of Norwich, take the traveler on a 40-day (or 40-week, or 40-month) journey of prayer, reflection and meditation.

Each day's entry comprises an excerpt from Julian's writing, focusing one day on Jesus' crucifixion, on another, God's extravagant love, the desire for God, our fallen state, true humility and so on.

Next in the daily entry is a short verse of *Biblical Wisdom*. Then, *Silence for Meditation*. *Questions to Ponder* point to the possibility that this volume may serve as a valuable study guide for small groups. A *Psalm Fragment* follows. *Journal Reflections* are so aptly directed to the traveler's own journal that new insights and growth are likely to take place. Short *Prayers of Hope and Healing* and a *Prayer for Today* conclude one stop on the journey.

Although many readers skip the introduction to whatever they choose to read, I strongly recommend your reading this one. This slim volume may lead you to think you might be able to read it in a day. If you did, you would miss many of the gifts contained therein.

Imagine traveling on a hot afternoon of a long journey and you come upon a beautiful lake. Ahhh! You might choose to use the row boat nearby and catch a breeze in the middle of the calm water. When you return to shore, you might take off your shoes and walk along the edge of the water, getting wet up to your ankles. Refreshed, to be sure. However, there's more. How about walking in up to your waist, or going for a swim? The more involved you are, the greater benefit you will get from each day's stop. The same is true for this journey. I found that involvement with each day was most beneficial when I allowed more time than I thought I needed.

Professor Dahill has plumbed the depths of Julian of Norwich and Scripture. She understands people. She has brought to the reader treasures arranged so that you might deepen your relationship with God, learn about yourself, come to a deeper understanding of how extravagantly God loves you, and transform your faith and practice.

126 Neither Julian nor Dahill present a journey that is out of touch with the exigencies of life. Julian is much quoted as saying "All will be well". I prefer the following:

And these words: You will not be overcome, were said very insistently, and strongly, for certainty and strength against every tribulation which may come. He did not say, you will not be troubled, you will not be belabored, you will not be disquieted; but he said; You will not be overcome. (p. 92)

Each day's *Prayer for Today* written by Dahill is a blessing. "O God, my Mother, my Father, thank you for creating me in your image and for loving me in all the ways I most deeply need" (p. 75).

Make time. Stop a while. Dive in! Your journey will indeed be refreshed and energized.

Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

Jane Gaeta

Love's Pure Light: Christmas Candlelight Sermons and Service. By Mark William Radecke. Lima, OH: CSS Publishing (www.csspub.com), 2008. 64 pp. ISBN 978-0-7880-2559-7 \$7.95 (Paperback).

Every pastor, in preparing a Christmas message, deals with the balance of telling the timeless story of God incarnate while placing it in contemporary circumstances. We don't need a lot of new material, just something that stirs the heart to revisit the manger afresh. Mark Radecke has placed a decade of his Christmas eve sermons into "Love's Pure Light," giving us a handy helping of illustrations and images that will inspire the preparing preacher.

The sermons, delivered to large town and gown gatherings at traditional candlelight services at Susquehanna (PA) University, contain carefully crafted comments appropriate for academia; the date placed at the beginning of each sermon allows an interesting backward chronology of the world's situation as they are read.

Themes of journey play prominently in the messages, confronting the wandering of our multitasking, technology enriched lifestyles that prevents our wondering about the significance of this baby's birth. In a message called "No More Senseless Journeys," Radecke contrasts the seemingly meaningless ventures many took within the Christmas story – wise men, shepherds, Mary and Joseph – with the remarkable journey of God from the throne to the womb, and then alongside us, bringing the only sense to our journeys.

Images abound of light shattering the darkness, and one can envision the seasonally decorated chapel with 1500 candle lights being passed one-to-the-others to the refrains of "Silent Night." Particularly poignant is the image of the angels, not as robed choir, but as legion of God's warriors, proclaiming peace, real peace, in the midst of a Roman-made Pax. There also is a description of how the physical properties of light literally shatter the darkness, and a reminder of the message of the rainbow.

I also know that the definition of the magician's term "abracadabra" as the Aramaic phrase that means "I create as I speak" will find its way into an upcoming sermon; that is etymology that can excite anyone in the pew. 127

While these are not sermons that lend them themselves to full-fledged piracy (not the politically correct term), they are rife with tidbits that will easily find their way into your messages, pastor, to the benefit of your parishioners, and, I presume, with Mark's blessing, as long as you buy the book.

Mansfield, Ohio

Paul Lintern

History / Theology / Society

The Writings of the Apostolic Fathers. Edited by Paul Foster. London: T & T Clark (www.continuumbooks.com), 2007. 159 pp. ISBN 0-567-03106-3 \$ 35.95 (Paperback).

The articles included in *The Writings of the Apostolic Fathers* appeared originally in the journal *The Expository Times*. The editor and publisher have provided a real service in making the articles available in a convenient, one-volume format.

Following an introductory chapter by Helmut Koester on "The Apostolic Fathers and the Struggle for Christian Identity," which charts the significance of the Apostolic Fathers for our understanding of the early church, each succeeding chapter introduces a single text or an author's collected writings. The chapters reflect the expanded list of Apostolic Fathers found in the latest Loeb Classical Library edition (Bart D. Ehrman, ed. and trans., *The Apostolic Fathers* [2 vols.; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003]). The Fragments of Papias and the *Apology of Quadratus* are the newcomers.

While there is no common order to the chapters, each chapter discusses the manuscript tradition, historical setting, authorship, content, history-of-research, and theological significance of the documents under study. Although at times the scholars may devote more space to textual history than many readers would prefer (the chapter on Ignatius is a good example), still it is good to have that information on each document in one volume. Each chapter provides very helpful, usually brief histories of scholarship on the topic at hand. The discussions were also quite up-to-date at the time of publication. The book has footnotes and a subject index, but no bibliography. In addition, the authors of the chapters are responsibly modest about what they know and do not know about the texts and those who wrote them. The discussions and conclusions are balanced and are therefore reliable guides for readers new to the Apostolic Fathers.

Although the proof-editing of this collection does not meet the standards one expects from T & T Clark, my major criticism has to do with the allocation of space. Granted that several pages are needed for even a fragmentary collection, the amount of space proportionately devoted to each document or collection varies widely. A comparison of the number of original language pages in the Loeb edition with the number of pages devoted to the document in the Foster volume shows that each page of the Loeb text for

128 Diognetus has .67 page in Foster; for the Didache, .57 page; for 2 Clement, .56. Polycarp is the winner of the space race, at 1.64 pages for his *Epistle to the Philippians* and 1.17 for his *Martyrdom*. What is most striking is that Papias and *Quadratus* (dealt with together) have .71 page in Foster devoted to them, whereas the Shepherd of Hermas is dead last at .06. While sheer length of chapter is not an absolute criterion of quality, it is also clear that 150 pages of Hermas text cannot be dealt with adequately in 9 pages, especially when other works receive so much more attention. Barnabas (at .25 page) and 1 Clement (at .19 page) are also underdeveloped.

The authors of the articles obviously appreciate the documents they are studying and want to invite readers into them. The chapter on Polycarp's *Epistle to the Philippians*, by Michael Holmes, is an especially good example but not the only one in this reliable introductory volume.

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Walter F. Taylor Jr.

Crazy Talk: A Not-So-Stuffey Dictionary of Theological Terms. Edited by Rolf A. Jacobson. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Books (www.augsburgfortress.org), 2008. 184 pp. ISBN 978-0-8006-8037-8 \$12.99 (Paperback).

Review: An article that takes 2 minutes to read, took 2 hours to write, and barely summarizes something that took 2 years to produce.

You will not find the above definition in *Crazy Talk*, partially because it isn't a theological term but mostly because it isn't as funny as the definitions Rolf Jacobson and his team came up with for all those theological terms that inflict their pain on pastors, theologians and the laity.

Crazy Talk is amazingly funny. And the best part is that, unlike some of the other funny theology books on the market, this one was meant to be funny. For example, Jacobson's team defines "baptism," in part, as "the only rinsing your soul will ever need" (p. 25). Another excellent example of their wit is found in their definition of "heresy" as "The official teaching that there are unofficial teachings that are officially contrary to the official teaching of the Christian faith" (p. 82).

Had this book been nothing but glib one-liners directed at all-too-serious theologians, it would have been enough. But the book goes much further, adding detail to the definitions that, while witty, still get to the heart of the matter. Getting into the details under the definition of heresy, Jacobson's team starts by asking if the reader has ever been headed somewhere and taken a shortcut, but ended up some place other than they wanted to – such as setting out for a friend's vacation house and ending up at your mother-in-law's. Using this common ground, Jacobson and team then help define heresy in terms anyone can understand: "A *heresy* is, at heart, really a wrong way that leads to a bad destination. That is, it is an alternate route that takes you someplace you don't want to go" (p. 83).

Jacobson and team are not afraid to tackle anything and everything theological, and their entries in this dictionary go from “A” (Absolution) to “Y” (YHWH). They tackle the easy terms – offering, thanksgiving, etc. – and the most difficult – inerrancy, predestination, The Holy Trinity, etc. 129

In this dictionary you will also meet a fictional character called, “Duh,” who helps with some of the more difficult definitions. Duh may be fictional, but there is probably a little “Duh” in all of us, so it is helpful to have him appear in the book so that we don’t feel like we are the only ones not understanding theologians and their jargon.

It is wonderful when a book can enlighten and still be light-hearted, and this one succeeds very, very well in that realm. Because it is about theological terms, theologians get the brunt of their wit. But pastors and the laity get their share of jabs as well. If you can’t laugh at yourself, this book isn’t for you. And frankly, I wouldn’t recommend this for a Systematic Theology class. But I would recommend it as a text for an Introduction to Theology class, regardless of the age level. And I definitely recommend this to pastors as a wonderful source of easy explanations usable both in and outside of the pulpit, and for anyone who wants to learn a little more about theology without the often dreary prose that theology is written in. I read this book cover-to-cover, not something that I often do with dictionaries. But it was well worth the read. Now the book sits on my reference shelf, somewhere between *The Lutheran Handbook* and *Strong’s Concordance*. Then, when I need to look up a theological term, I may reach for McKim’s *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* first, but will check *Crazy Talk* immediately afterwards.

Westerville, Ohio

Dave Kirk

The Genius of Luther’s Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church. By Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic (www.bakeracademic.com), 2008. 240 pp. ISBN 978-0-8010-3180-9 \$21.99 (Paperback).

Professors Kolb and Arand have discussed the genius of Luther’s theology with each other (and their students) for years. With this important book, the Concordia Seminary professors invite the world into the discussion.

[This volume is] ... a conversation about the genius of Luther and Melancthon’s way of thinking ... For amid the crises that the people of God face in various parts of the world at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we believe that Luther’s approach to the questions of the meaning of our humanity and God’s way of communicating with us can guide the formulation of our thought in decisive ways. We believe that these essays will demonstrate that Martin Luther is indeed a man for this season in the history of Christ’s church (p. 20).

And this conversation is multi-faceted. It begins with God—as the Creator initiates a saving relationship with creatures. It continues in the church—as the people of God converse about what God has said in Christ. It moves into the world—as believers invite

130 all people to be part of the conversation. It happens cross-culturally—as the people of God face the global crises of our age.

Moreover, the book is part of a larger research conversation in late 20th and early 21st century Luther scholarship. This focus seeks to identify the factors that undergird Luther's theology and reformation program. Gerhard Forde's *Theology is for Proclamation* does this sort of thing in the realm of practical theology. Somewhat earlier, George Forell's *Faith Active in Love*, did it in the realm of social ethics.

Now Kolb and Arand endeavor to bring Luther's (and Melancthon's) theological voice(s) to the table. They intend to contribute the "genius" of Wittenberg theology to the discussion. To that end, Kolb's and Arand's book identifies

...two fundamental presuppositions that guided what Luther proclaimed and recorded from the late 1510s onward. The first of these presuppositions defines what it means to be human. Luther's distinction of two dimensions of humanity, in relationship to God and in relationship to God's creation, determined how he viewed both his Creator and himself, along with other human beings (part 1). The second of these presuppositions describes God as he relates to his human creature, namely, through his Word in all its forms and functions (part 2) (p. 222).

This dynamic between Luther's understanding of the human and Luther's understanding of God's Word energized the Wittenberg Reformation. Kolb and Arand make a compelling case that such an understanding could energize the church for its mission in the 21st century.

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William R. Russell

The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia – And How It Died. By Philip Jenkins. New York: Harper One (www.harpercollins.com), 2008. 315 pp. ISBN 978-0-06-147280-0 \$26.95 (Hardcover).

Western Christians know little or nothing of the great Assyrian Church of the East (Nestorian) that followed the Northern and Southern Silk Roads from Syria across Mesopotamia (Iraq), Persia (Iran), Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Mongolia and reached China in 635 A.D. Nor do we know much about the Coptic Christians of Egypt and Ethiopia or the millions of believers who at one time sang the praises of Christ in North Africa, Armenia, Syria, Iraq and Iran! It is too easy for us in the West to dismiss the latter as Monophysites. If there ever was a "martyr church," it would have to be the Christians in these regions.

Closely linked with the spread of Christianity outside the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire is the on-going political rivalry between the Byzantine and Persian Empires that

went back to the western invasions of the Middle East by Alexander the Great of ¹³¹ Macedonia in the 4th century B.C., and those of the Roman emperors, Trajan and Hadrian, in the 2nd century A.D. Christians in the Persian Empire were constantly under suspicion by the Persian rulers of being loyal to Rome and the West and were mercilessly slaughtered as a result. One Persian martyr called “James the Cut-in-Pieces” indicates how many Christians died. However, after the Council of Ephesus in 431, when the so-called “Nestorians” were expelled from the Catholic/Orthodox church of the West for Christological heresy, the Persian rulers came to see Nestorian Christians in their midst as loyal Persian citizens and relaxed their persecution of the Assyrian Church of the East, ushering in the Golden Age of Nestorian Mission across Asia “to the ends of the earth.”

Twenty years later at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the second permanent schism in Christianity occurred when the opponents of Nestorius were condemned as well by the Catholic/Orthodox who took what has sometimes been described as a middle theological position between the two. These so-called “Monophysites” also considered themselves to be “orthodox.” They too were zealous in spreading the orthodox Christian faith drawn up at Nicea across North Africa, Egypt, the Near East, the Middle East and down into southern India.

The rivalry between the Persian and Byzantine Empires culminated in 624 when they delivered simultaneous knock-out blows to each other enabling the followers of Muhammad to sweep out of Arabia and dominate the Middle East and North Africa. After the initial political changeover, Islam was surprisingly tolerant. This was to change radically after the fall of Acre in 1291 and the expulsion of the Christian crusaders (Muslims call them *jihadists*). Persecution set in with a vengeance and has continued with varying degrees of intensity up to our own time.

In the Far East, Nestorian Christians became close advisors to Mongol emperors such as Genghis Khan and Kubla Khan. When the Mongols subsequently swarmed across the Middle East in the 14th century, Christians (this time Nestorian) were once again seen as the mortal enemy of Islam. When the Mongol Empire came crashing down in 1368, Nestorian Christians found themselves on the wrong side politically and a holocaust ensued that for all practical purposes wiped out the Nestorian Church of the East especially after the genocide across Asia wrought by Timurlane in the 15th century.

As Jenkins closes his well-researched and well-written account, he asks why some Christian churches in Asia and North Africa have managed to survive over a millennium to the present day while others have completely disappeared. “What gave some churches the flexibility and fortitude to endure for so long ... ? Persecution and discrimination could indeed destroy Christianity, but decisions by Christian churches themselves contributed to the outcome” (p. 227). And therein lies “the mystery of survival” to use the author’s title of one of his intriguing concluding chapters. Vistas of insight for contemporary Christians and especially American Christians are opened by this awesome, tragic and sobering book.

The author of *The Lost History of Christianity* holds a doctorate from Cambridge University and has taught at Penn State University since 1980 where he is a Professor of

132 the Humanities in History and Religious Studies. In 2002, his book, *The Next Christendom*, was acclaimed that year as one of the top books in the field of religious studies.

Pickerington, Ohio

Trygve R. Skarsten

The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament. By Gerhard O. Forde; Edited by Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (www.eerdmans.com), 2007. 329 pp. ISBN 978-0-8028-2821-7 \$32.00 (Paperback).

I recall a snippet of conversation I had years ago, when I was a student at Luther Seminary. It concerned Dr. Gerhard Forde, who spent his career at Luther shaping students into theologians of the cross who “do” the Word in preaching, rather than merely talking about it, and an international conference where he had recently spoken. Reportedly, his address had not been entirely well received, because the conference attendees deemed his emphasis on the preached word as the essential means by which God’s eschatological future breaks into human lives, bringing forgiveness and reconciliation, as insufficiently relevant to the situation of people today, especially those in the Third World.

The person talking to me (I no longer remember who it was) ended the story by saying, “You know Forde. He only has one song to sing, but he sings it beautifully.” It struck me as, at best, a left-handed compliment. The clear implication was that Forde had a narrow niche of old-style Lutheran theology nailed down, but had little to say to a world that had moved on to other, more pressing concerns.

In reading the collection of Forde’s essays and sermons in *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament*, I remembered that conversation and was struck by how true that description is, but in a way my conversation partner did not intend. Forde did indeed have one “song to sing.” The essays in this book cover a wide range of subjects, from politics to the sacraments, ecumenism to sexuality, but in all of them, he turns the topic toward the essential need of sinners to hear the preached word of absolution and reconciliation with God in Christ Jesus.

Forde also sings his one “song” beautifully. His engagement with the issues raised in these essays is not superficial or manipulative. Rather, his analysis reveals how every important aspect of human life is inescapably connected to our relationship with God. The connection may be quite direct or it might be several steps removed, but as creatures who stand always *coram Deo*, we cannot finally avoid the question of our alienation from and/or reconciliation with God. As Forde writes in his essay, “Absolution: Systematic Considerations,” “The only solution to the problem of the absolute is actual absolution” (p. 152). The need to deal with our dependence on and rebellion against our Creator is primary and must be addressed in order to find a faithful way to move forward through any issue or controversy. The only way finally to address that primary need is the preached Word of God’s saving work in Christ, crucified and risen.

At that point, the implication of that conversation of years ago was incorrect. This one “song” of Forde’s is neither some ivory tower theorem nor a narrow matter of systematic theology that is of doubtful relevance to people today. Rather, it names the essence of the human predicament that underlies all of our struggles, issues and controversies. Forde was not only a great Lutheran theologian, but also a brilliant analyst of the human condition, recognizing that our sinful nature finally affords no true solution other than God’s eschatological future breaking in through the proclamation of the Word.

Forde’s emphasis on the central role of proclamation makes the inclusion of a number of his sermons in the third section of the book an invaluable addition. It helps the reader connect Forde’s theological writings, which always drive toward preaching, with preaching itself and in his own words. The opening section by editors Mark Mattes and Steven Paulson is also very helpful in setting out the key elements of Forde’s theology and providing background material on the included essays.

As one deeply concerned about the theological health of the ELCA and all of mainline Christianity today, I found reading Forde’s essays to be a bracing reminder of the power of Lutheran theology when it is done rightly, in a radical, theocentric, cross-focused way. I strongly encourage Lutherans of every stripe, but especially those charged with preaching the Word, to read, digest and apply *The Preached God* and other books by Gerhard Forde.

Hutchinson, Minnesota

Scott Grorud

The Wit of Martin Luther. By Eric W. Gritsch. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, (www.augsburgfortress.org), 2008. 112 pp. ISBN 978-0-8066-8047-7 \$12.99 (Paperback).

Gritsch uses “wit” as the single word to describe Luther’s humor.

In his very first paragraph Gritsch gives us a key to Luther’s humor. Jokes, jesting, riddles and playfulness are often said when we have reached the end of understanding. This is when our minds are able to make room for something ludicrous, absurd that is irrational and has no meaning. Referring to many of us, Gritsch writes: “They (we) know what is rational; but they also know the limits of their thinking. So they smile – maybe even laugh – after experiencing an intellectual dead end. Humor is thus anchored in a self knowledge that indicates one’s limitations” (Introduction). This insight is helpful to all who enjoy jesting, riddles, parables and the incongruous.

Wit is a “net” that keeps us from falling into the despair of not knowing. “A sense of humor is a measurement of the extent to which we realize that we are trapped in a world almost totally devoid of reason. Laughter is how we express the anxiety we feel at this knowledge” (p. 1-2). This sentence unlocks Luther’s humor as well as our own wit, which clergy so often enjoy.

¹³⁴ Chapter one shows Luther's humor as an interpreter of the Bible. Chapter two illustrates his use of humor in pastoral care, interpreting the Bible. Chapter three shows why humor made Luther more free in understanding the 'theology of the cross,' which he referred to as a 'theology of freedom'. (Preface)

Throughout the 133 pages Gritsch introduces selected quotations of Luther with helpful insight, so each quotation is all the more meaningful. Thus it is true that the wit and imagination of Luther becomes my own. I am even more friendly to the absurd.

After his condemnation by church and state in 1521, he signed his writings under the title "ecclesiastic," as if he still was a priest in good standing. Luther writes: "Now that I am deprived of my titles through papal and imperial disfavor and my bestial character is washed away with so many bulls that I need never be called either Doctor of Holy Scripture or some kind of papal creature, I am almost as shocked as an ass who has lost its bag" (p. 34).

He published his own bull against the papacy which for Luther was the true heresy. His words are graphic.

Luther's imagination was carried away in retelling the story of Noah and the flood. How children then must have loved his story times. Here is a graphic understanding of Luther. Luther created his own hierarchical arrangement of birds and animals in the ark.

It is likely that Noah and the birds occupied the uppermost, the clean animals in the middle part, and the unclean animals the lowest, although the Rabbis would maintain that the lowest was used for putting away manure. I myself believe the manure was thrown out, perhaps through the window (p. 47).

He even speaks to the inside of the ark. "We shall put aside other countless questions. But what was the nature of the air in the ark, since that mass of water, when it went down, gave off a great pestilential stench?" (p. 47).

Luther admitted that God's laughter made him nervous. But he learned from the Bible it is better to laugh than to despair over the incongruities in life.

What a comfort for us in this time of incongruities!

A year before Luther's death a friend sent him an Italian pamphlet by an anonymous author saying Luther had requested that his body be placed upon an altar and be worshiped but that Christ had intervened and handed the body over to Satan in a noisy ceremony and there was a sulphurous smell that remained at Luther's empty grave. Luther responded: "I, Dr. Martin Luther, testify herewith in my own hand that I am of one mind with the devil, the pope, and all my enemies, for they wish to rejoice over my death. I begrudge them their joy from the bottom of my heart and would willingly have died ... but God was not yet ready to sanction such joy" (p. 66).

Katie's garden was a symbol of God's divine goodness. His children enjoying a peach at table modeled the joy of the last day. Luther was thinking *green*. "How pleasant the trees are! How delightfully green everything's beginning to be! It's like a charming day in May ... Ah, would that we could trust God! If God can take such delight in our earthly sojourn, what it must be like in the life to come" (p. 101). 135

What has this reading meant to me? I know Luther better, Incarnation as God coming into our mind and thought patters, and the close relationship between sacred and ordinary in sacramental thought and life.

The Wit of Martin Luther is a good book for personal enjoyment, small group reading and sharing, and creative people who will smile at the end of their knowing.

Bloomington, Minnesota

Herbert Brokering

London, 1933-1935. By Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Edited in German by Hans Goedecking et al. Edited in English by Keith Clements. Translated by Isabel Best. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Volume 13. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press (www.augsburgfortress.org), 2007. 524 pp. ISBN 978-0-8006-8313-9. (Hardcover).

This recent addition to the *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* series in English provides a glimpse of a relatively lesser-known period of Bonhoeffer's life: his pastorate in two German-speaking congregations in London during the early Hitler years 1933-1935. As such, the volume reveals faces of Bonhoeffer also perhaps less familiar to us: namely, Bonhoeffer the parish administrator, Bonhoeffer the ecumenical bridge-builder, and Bonhoeffer the preacher. Of course, perhaps the most familiar of all Bonhoeffer's roles in the popular imagination is that of the courageous church leader, fearless in resisting Hitler and tireless in his attempts to mobilize Protestant Christians to stand up to Nazi encroachment against the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This side of Bonhoeffer shines clearly in this volume as well, primarily in the dozens of letters he sent and received in the attempt to shape the German church's response to Nazi edicts and to agitate for the appointment of leaders who could stand up to Hitler. Those interested in the efforts leading up to the formation of the Confessing Church in 1934 will find this volume fascinating; at many places it reads like a novel as the progress of letters interspersed with Bonhoeffer's church council minutes or pastoral newsletters unfolds from page to page. In April of 1934 he is already foreseeing, in a letter to his close friend Erwin Sutz, the necessity of a very long ordeal of resistance, and writes: "I believe that all of Christendom should be praying with us for the coming of resistance 'to the point of shedding blood' [Hebrews 12:4] and for the finding of people who can suffer it through" (p. 135). A letter from Karl Barth expressing scathing disapproval of Bonhoeffer's decision to take this pastorate (rather than remaining to fight directly in Germany); correspondence with Bishop George Bell of Chichester, who would prove a pivotal figure in the later efforts of the conspiracy; the ways Bonhoeffer uses Reformation theology to try (unsuccessfully) to convince church leaders of the heresies of a Nazified church; and the inclusion of Bonhoeffer's proclamatory call in 1934 to the ecumenical Church to renounce all preparations for war in the name of Jesus Christ show some of the range of the volume. And Bonhoeffer's correspondence

136 with friends and acquaintances regarding his developing passion for developing “a new kind of monasticism” (p. 285) points to what will emerge as the life together grounded in disciplined spiritual practice he would soon create at Finkenwalde.

Yet, as truly engaging as the (300!) pages of letters and documents are, the real treasure of the volume is its collection of Bonhoeffer’s sermons. Like all great preaching, his reveals the heart of Bonhoeffer’s own faith – directly and indirectly – as he strives to give voice to the Gospel with clarity and humanity to his London parishioners. The editorial notes include revisions to nearly every sermon: wording changed and sections crossed out, revealing how Bonhoeffer worked with his manuscripts in preparing for the pulpit. Particular gems include his first sermon to the congregations on his view of the role of the pastor; the Advent sermons of 1933; a four-Sunday series on 1 Corinthians 13 culminating in his Reformation Sunday sermon for 1934; and a powerful Trinity Sunday meditation in which, among other things, he explores the fullness of God moving between mystery (German *Geheimnis*) and home (German *Heim*). He writes:

[This] is the unrecognized mystery of God in this world: Jesus Christ ... A mystery, because here on earth God became poor and lowly, small and weak, out of love for humankind; because God became a human being like us, that we might become divine; because God came to us, so that we might come to God. God who becomes lowly for our sake, *God in Jesus of Nazareth – that is the secret and hidden wisdom ...* “what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived” – God’s glory in lowliness and poverty ... *God’s love and closeness – that is the mystery of God. ...* The mystery is being loved by and loving God; but being loved by God means Jesus Christ, and loving God means the Holy Spirit. ... the name of God’s mystery is Holy Trinity (pp. 362f).

Here we see – in excellent translation from the German throughout, as well as Bonhoeffer’s own original English in various places – the deeply Lutheran center of this pastor who would soon stretch his church’s heritage in new directions. Highly recommended for those interested in exploring Bonhoeffer or the roots of the Confessing Church more deeply.

Professor of Worship and Christian Spirituality
Trinity Lutheran Seminary

Lisa E. Dahill

Repentance in Christian Theology. Edited by Mark J. Boda and Gordon T. Smith. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, (www.litpress.org) 2006. 411 pp. ISBN 978-0-8146-5175-9 \$39.95 (Paperback).

Although this book was published in 2006, its contents will provide insight for ministry for many years!

To review it is daunting; there is so much in it. For example, see the many aspects to this primary doctrine and the Reformation, especially regarding Luther's first thesis nailed to the church door. 137

The scholars each put their best foot forward in their discipline as shown by the contents. To summarize each chapter would mean a massive and deadly reading. So we have an encyclopedia on the central issue of the church. Use it that way as you do Advent, Lent and Holy Spirit seasons for counseling, for preaching and leading.

Special excerpts of the book to save: in the chapter entitled "Repentance in the Former Prophets" by Terence E. Fretheim is this nugget of hope,

There will be a future because of this promised word which does not fail ... The punishment (correction) is for a moment. The promise of fidelity is forever ... The kerygma of "good" places the call to "turn" (*shuv*) in a context which can evoke repentance in Israel, enable her to change ... [God's] faithfulness makes repentance possible and attractive (p. 33).

In the chapter entitled "The Penitential: An Evangelical Perspective" by Gordon T. Smith, the reader will find the following gem which may speak to us especially in these days of economic worldwide crisis. "The call to repentance is inherent in the gospel; the gospel is not preached unless there is a call for repentance. This call is not demoralizing news but, ultimately, good news; it is a declaration that there is hope in the midst of failure and brokenness" (p. 281).

Another bit of grace is found in the following hymn by Charles Wesley:

Depth of Mercy! Can there be
Mercy still reserved for me?
Can my God his wrath forbear?
Me, the chief of sinners, spare?

I have long withstood His grace,
Long provoked Him to His face,
Would not harken to His calls,
Grieved Him by a thousand falls.

Lord, incline me to repent;
Let me now my fall lament,
Deeply my revolt deplore,
Weep, believe, and sin no more.

Still for me the Saviour stands;
Shows His wounds, and spreads his hands;
God is love, I know, I feel
Jesus weeps, and loves me still (p. 283).

138 Last, but not least, is a reflection by Walter Brueggeman found in the 17th chapter aptly named “The Summons to New Life: A Reflection.”

The socioreligious environment of consumer culture in the United States makes penitence an urgent topic and, in general, as unwelcome as it is urgent. That environment is dominated by strident moral certitude, by unrestrained polemics toward those who think differently, and by an unashamed self-indulgence toward one’s own autonomous way in the world, all of which makes our theme seem odd and incongruous. I have been thinking, moreover, that this self-indulgence, including the self-indulgence of moral certitude and rectitude, is not far removed from the “sale of indulgences” that triggered Luther’s response in the sixteenth century. The parallel is more than the recurrence of the term “indulgence,” for the religious-ethical pretense in both cases is the assumed capacity to purchase[!] well-being, to “purchase” by payment to the church as moral guarantor or as “purchase” to the mall, or to “get purchase” through ideological claim; all such “purchases” subvert the truth of God’s rule and distort the true posture of each of us before that holy truth (p. 347).

Professor of Pastoral Care, Emeritus

Leland E. Elhard

Saving Power: Theories of Atonement and Forms of the Church. By Peter Schmiechen. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, (www.eerdmans.com), 2005. 371 pp. \$38.00. ISBN 0-8028-2985-6.

Like other recent treatments of the subject (for example, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, by Mark Green and Scott Baker), Schmiechen rejects the idea that there is one comprehensive atonement theory into which all theories can be rolled. He also challenges the tendency to “neatly package” them into three theories in the spirit of Gustaf Aulén’s *Christus Victor*. Rather, there is a “breadth of vision regarding the saving power of Jesus Christ” in the myriad of theories that have been proposed throughout Christian history to account for the event of Christ’s death and that point to different ways that Christian communities have perceived our human need and the saving power of Christ. Like Green and Baker, he sees this rich variety of theories and images as positive, for “the multitude of interpretations therefore becomes an opportunity to proclaim the gospel to all of the people” (p. 365).

In Part One (which comprises more than three-quarters of the book), Schmiechen offers a careful examination of ten such theories (which he does not intend as “definitive” theories but as theological case studies) according to their symbolic, evangelical, and theological value. These are then classified into four groups based on the central issue or theme contained in each: the forgiveness of sins, liberation, the purpose of God, and reconciliation. His Reformed tradition is reflected in the inclusion of Friedrich Schleiermacher and H.R. Niebuhr. The juxtaposition of Peter Abelard, John Wesley, and Jürgen Moltmann in a single chapter on “Wondrous Love” is interesting if perhaps

a bit of a stretch. Lutheran readers will find his treatment of Martin Luther engaging and insightful. It may be one of the best non-Lutheran presentations in print of Luther's doctrine of justification by grace. 139

Part Two is split into two sections, the first of which serves as a conclusion to Part One. He argues that any given theory has a general structure and integral components. Out of these he develops norms for assessing the viability of a theory, specifically how it develops a basic image into a comprehensive interpretation of the saving death of Christ; how it shows the correlation between a problem and Christ's saving power; how it places the problem and its resolution in the broader vision of God's purposes for creation; how it connects the saving power of Christ to the community of believers; and finally how it affirms God as the primary subject, rather than the object of, Christ's death and resurrection. Unlike the aforementioned Green and Baker text, he does not include context as one of these norms, which to this reviewer is a major weakness.

Instead of privileging one (or more) theories, he proposes that they demonstrate different aspects of the saving power of Jesus Christ. If this is the case, then it is possible to view them as parts of a larger whole. However, he recognizes that they "stand in tension with each other, expose the omissions, and inspire criticisms of one another," as well as complement each other. The tension between grace and power (in the reconciliation versus liberation themed theories) is probably the most decisive issue in the current ecclesial debates (p. 362). He notes that the lack of precision in the use of these images or themes has led to great misunderstanding, e.g. sacrifice, satisfaction. However, he does not sufficiently address the seeming irreconcilable differences between the penal substitution theory and for example, the Abelardian theory. Are these really compatible theories?

In the second section he explores the connection between theories — especially how the saving power of Christ is transmitted to believers — and forms of the church. This is a distinctive contribution of this study though one which could have been developed more fully. A typology is proposed but not developed, leading this reviewer to wonder if perhaps this will be the topic of a future volume.

Nonetheless, *Saving Power* is a significant contribution to atonement studies and is recommended for seminary and upper-level college courses and for pastors who wish to broaden their horizons on this doctrine.

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Cheryl Peterson

Ministry / Leadership / Worship

The Church of All Ages: Generations Worshiping Together. Edited by Howard Vanderwell. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute (www.alban.org), 2008. 245 pp. ISBN 978-1-56699-358-6. \$17.00 (Paperback).

Part of the “Vital Worship, Healthy Congregations” series, this book is a compendium of essays by a variety of authors, primarily with a Reformed Church background, who advocate strongly that conventional congregations need greater involvement of the children and youth in the worship life of the community in order to keep them in the church when they are older. The book assumes that there are young folks who are already part of the community, and the book’s focus is why and how to make them an integral part of the church’s worship, not just on special “Youth Sundays,” but every week of the year.

The authors share a common disdain for separated worship services that have different styles and music that cater to differing tastes, calling this division of the congregation a “tragedy” that caves in to a consumerist model of church. Instead, they recommend a blending of the old and new, where the old ways are honored, but flexibility and adaptation are utilized in order to keep the various age cohorts engaged. In addition, they are adamant that all ages should be in worship together, and that youngsters should never be exiled to Sunday School or a separate Children’s Church during the regular service.

The one “elephant in the room” that a number of the authors pick up on is the essential attitude of older adults toward young children and teens. For any efforts on age inclusion to work, all adults (not just the kids’ parents) must genuinely value and appreciate the presence of young people and accept them as they are. No matter how many intergenerational program offerings a parish might have, if the basic mind-set of the adult members is to merely tolerate, rather than celebrate, the younger generations, then the kids will not feel valued and will leave as soon as they have the freedom to do so. The book offers a few community-building ideas to address this matter, but before anyone adopts the technical fixes they need to do an honest assessment of the congregation’s culture in this regard.

If you are in a traditional, liturgical congregation where the adults in power believe that children should be seen and not heard, this book may help you to find the theological rationale, ecclesiological imagination and practical advice you need to change the congregation’s thinking to one that routinely involves children in the course of worship. There is practical advice on the stages of faith, forming worship committees, telling faith stories, expanding the music repertoire, and involving parents.

If, like me, you are in a congregation that already offers both high-quality contemporary and traditional worship services, this book will probably not resonate with your experience or be of extensive practical application. It seems to me that once a congregation offers very different styles, there is almost no likelihood of convincing those folks that they really should all go to a blended format. Indeed, they did not persuade me, as one of the pastors, that such a move was necessary. If the authors have any ideas about why or how to change situations like mine, however, they did not choose to include them in this book.

That said, there were some excellent pointers, suggestions and reminders for how to make any service or congregation more age-inclusive. These include: 141

- use a variety of ages to do the readings and lead the prayers of the people and ushering, including family teams;
- involve people from different age cohorts, including teens, on the worship design/planning committee;
- ask various age groups to tell the pastor the topics and issues they would like to have addressed in a sermon or educational offering;
- rotate leadership membership and actively recruit people of different ages so that one age cohort does not have a lock on all the decisions.

In sum, the authors focus on traditional congregations that need to change in order to adapt to new cultural patterns, but who also want to retain much of their current character of worship. If that speaks to your situation, this book is likely to be helpful. However, the conventional perspective of this book is not geared toward addressing the issues facing congregations that have already made big shifts to contemporary patterns of worship.

Fort Meyers, Florida

Becky Robbins-Penniman

Healthy Disclosure: Solving Communication Quandaries in Congregations. By Kibbie Simmons Ruth and Karen A. McClintock. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute (www.alban.org), 2007. 260 pp. ISBN 978-1-56699-346-3 \$18.00 (Paperback).

The problem with communication is that we all think we are good at it until we discover we aren't, and then it is too late. I mean, how hard can it be? I talk, you listen – mission accomplished. Anyone who has spent much time in a congregation, however, quickly discovers that good communication is never a given, and is often the exception. Unfortunately, the multiple sociological and emotional forces at work often make it difficult to recognize, let alone practice, good communication when we most need it. For this reason alone, *Healthy Disclosure* will make a valuable addition to your library.

Ruth and McClintock take time to talk about the types and causes of poor communication, examining the personal and systemic forces underlying each. The most valuable aspect of the book, however, for those of us hip-deep in the soap opera of daily parish life, are the numerous, detailed examples. What is the difference between a secret and a confidence? When is it appropriate to break a confidence? How does one handle “sensitive” personal information? What is the difference between gossip and rumor, and how does one handle each? What causes information leaks, and how does one clean them up? The book offers clear, easily understood solutions for these and many more such situations. Ruth and McClintock also offer suggestions for putting proactive systems in place to avoid many of the situations they talk about, and the possible lawsuits in their wake.

¹⁴² Next time you find yourself embroiled in the latest communication drama, don't pull your hair out, and don't make it worse. Reach for this book instead.

Fort Wayne, Indiana

Martin Gehring

Tribal Church: Ministering to the Missing Generation. By Carol Howard Merritt. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute (www.alban.org), 2007. 164 pp. ISBN 978-1-56699-347-0 \$17.00 (Paperback).

Anyone who takes seriously the life and ministry of Christian communities today should be concerned about those whom Carol Howard Merritt calls the “missing generation.” She uses the phrase “missing generation” in this text to refer to adults in their twenties and thirties: those persons often absent in our church communities but very present — in fact, alive and well — in God’s world. As I have suggested elsewhere (cf. *Across the Generations*, Augsburg Fortress, 2001), generational thinking is but one conceptual construct to help human beings better understand one another and talk to one another more intelligibly and effectively. Merritt nicely resists an all-too-common temptation to claim generational thinking as more definitive than perspectival and, in so doing, she probes and exposes generational *realities* without buying into wooden generational *categories* (which are most often designed to scaffold some marketing initiative). The end result is a rich and ample ecclesiology that affirms the value of congregations as inherently intergenerational communities of faith and practice

Merritt opts for the term “tribe” in describing the “generation” about whom she is mostly concerned in this book. “Among a new generation, ‘tribe’ has become a term for subculture, a network of relationships, or a group of people who care for each other in the most basic ways” (p. 7). She identifies specific commitments or characteristics operative in Christian communities that seek to better understand and reach out to the nomadic culture of adults in the twenties and thirties. Thus the term “tribal” in church reflects “(1) gathering around a common cause and belief, (2) a ministry shift to basic care, (3) the practice of celebrating and remembering spiritual traditions, and (4) a network of intergenerational encouragement” (pp. 8-9). Carol Howard Merritt offers a faithful and fertile ecclesial imagination: congregations are places that foster intergenerational relationships, encourage economic understanding, cultivate unambiguous inclusion, discover affirming traditions, promote shared leadership and nurture spiritual community. Chapters are devoted to each of these six “marks” of the church envisioned by the author. In addition, each chapter concludes with reflection questions that make the book useful in group settings.

If you appreciate the fine work of Diana Butler Bass then you are apt to appreciate and gain valuable insight from this book as well. *Tribal Church* is written from the perspective of a thirty something pastor of Western Presbyterian Church (Washington D.C.). It is written from a mainline church perspective and, in many ways, for mainline churches. I want to conclude by stringing together a series of quotes from the book that, in my estimation, captures the essence of the hope that this book embraces: “There is a new generation looking for spiritual community, and many of them are looking for small to

medium, traditional churches ... Even the smallest churches — especially the smallest churches — have the resources to respond to young adults in meaningful ways when they understand their contexts and make a place for them ... Young adults do not need an entertaining experience that happens to them; rather, they need connection, a place where they can be grounded in a spiritual community” (pp. 9, 16, and 136 respectively). 143

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Nathan C.P. Frambach

The Honest to God Church: A Pathway to God’s Grace. By Doug Bixby. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute (www.alban.org), 2007. 130 pp. ISBN 978-1-56699-344-9 \$17.00 (Paperback).

I have never met Doug Bixby and have not visited the church he pastors, Salem Covenant Church in Washington, Connecticut, but I would like to do both. One fact about me that comes into play in my review of this book is that I have been Lutheran all my life and except for rare visits to other non-Lutheran churches, I really don’t know any other way than *our way*, the Lutheran way. Having said that I find Bixby’s book, *The Honest to God Church: A Pathway to God’s Grace*, a refreshing look at what grace ministered out liberally must look like, and I must say, it sounds attractive.

The short, easily read 130-page book is divided into two parts. The first part is entitled, “Honest to God Churches” and contains six chapters that challenge the very definition of some of the key concepts that have shaped the church I know. For example, in chapter one Bixby points out the difference between grace and graciousness; in chapter three he clarifies the difference between being radical and being fanatical; and in chapter six he succinctly lays out the relationship between pain and redemption. In these first six chapters, Bixby describes a church that I do not know, but would like to get to know.

The second part of the book is entitled, “Honest to God Disciples” and contains another six chapters of how the church’s members must be taught to be agents of God’s grace. Initially I was confused on the order of the two parts. Does the church define the discipline of its members or does the discipline of its members define the church? All too often in the church I know, direction comes from congregational meeting where the majority vote wins the day. I believe that in Bixby’s church the leadership defines liberal godly discipline in such an attractive way that the church defines the discipline of its members, and then as the church’s members grow in their understanding of grace and are impacted by the lives of those in the community who may need grace the most, their own lives are won over anew by grace which continues to redefine itself.

Throughout the twelve chapters Bixby uses practical personal experience and borrows the twelve step model successfully used in recovery programs to illustrate how any church can become an honest to God church.

Although I read the book independently, I suggest that the book be considered as continuing education reading by elder boards or church councils. Each chapter ends

144 with an action step and several discussion questions that make this book perfect for group study, especially if that group leads the church in its mission and vision.

When I was in seminary learning to be a pastor of the church I know, questions would occasionally come up that professors must have heard from every class before mine; “Should we baptize the dead baby of grieving parents?” “Do we commune someone who has come forward for the sacrament when we know he or she is un-baptized?” And of course, the question of our day, “What do we do with the homosexual or lesbian couple who comes to worship and how do we handle the members who noticed them?” (By the way, in the Epilogue Bixby does indeed answer how his church answered the latter question.)

These are questions that cause consternation for the church I know, but they do not trouble the church Bixby pastors. In his book, Bixby describes a church that, while definitely more liberal than the one I grew up in, sounds refreshing and unapologetically driven by grace. Martin Luther, the founder of the church I grew up in, is regarded as the one who excavated grace from the heap of the Catholic Church. Bixby might well be the one who continued the dig started by Luther but then brought grace to the hands-on lab of our complicated life.

Cortland, Ohio

Duane Jesse

The Yellow Leaves: A Miscellany. By Frederick Buechner. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox. (www.wjkbooks.com), 2008. 124 pp. ISBN 978-0-664-23276-4 \$17.95 (Hardcover).

Frederick Buechner has been a favorite author since happening upon *Wishful Thinking* early in my ministry. Now in his 80s, Buechner admits he has neither the inspiration nor perspiration to pen books. Yet he is able to rake together a miscellany of short pieces and poems like dry autumn leaves. Buechnerphiles will be grateful for the effort, glad for even a small sampling of his ability to find the transcendent in the everyday.

He begins with the tale of a road-trip he takes with his 90+ year old mother, a leaf that flutters down and lands upon the heart of nearly every child with aging parents and our eventual struggle with their deaths. Another describes Presidents he has seen or met, beginning with a glimpse as a six-year-old of FDR, supported by two men, from which Buechner learns that “*even the mightiest among us can't stand on our own unless we have someone to hold us, our flimsy legs buckle*” (p. 21). In still another he describes pulling the covers over his head upon seeing a ghostly presence in Edinburgh's Drumlanrig Castle. Far along in another he takes us to St. Peter's on Christmas Eve where he sees Pope Pius XII, his eyes eagerly searching faces in the crowd as if among them he expects to glimpse the face of Christ himself.

He remembers his teachers, describing them with his usual gift of making such long dead saints come alive again, and as he does, I find sages of my own past flickering upon the screen of memory. My favorite is his description of the Lawrenceville headmaster

who, “No matter how briefly you saw him . . . left you with the feeling that you had genuinely met” (p. 55). Thumbing through photographs pinned haphazardly to his bulletin board, he discovers one of Frank Griswold, former Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, who told Buechner he once heard a distinct voice in the shower ask, “Why do you take your sins so much more seriously than I do?” (p. 61), a question that moves the Bishop first to laughter and then to tears.

While sharing the stage with Maya Angelou at a conference for ministers, she tells how slaves in some plantations were forbidden to laugh. When they could contain their mirth no longer, they would find a barrel and pretend to be looking for something deep down inside where they would safely release the laughter beyond earshot of their masters. Angelou remarks that earlier in the day at opening worship while witnessing the parade of clergy, marching down the aisle in all their ecclesiastical finery, she began looking for such a barrel!

His final section turns to family poetry including one in which he asks questions of a grandfather, silent as his tomb. Don't we all wish we could sit in a parlor with our long-gone saints and ask questions whose answers might give us clues, not only to their lives, but also to our own? Another describes four aunts including one who could “stare down a bishop” and “out swear a groom”; still another, struck dumb by a stroke, “spoke never again/But each time she broke wind, clucked for joy like a hen” (p. 105).

While some might quibble with the publisher's classification of this small volume under the heading of “spirituality/literature,” it is “spiritual” chiefly in the way much of literature can resonate covertly with the gospel, such as when Buechner says in a final poem: “Suppose we lose less dying than we find.” and, “Life should be wondered at, not understood.” (p. 123). Though *Yellow Leaves* is a bit of a hodge-podge, I am glad to have sampled another taste of vintage Buechner.

Dublin, Ohio

Terry L. Morgan

Bible

Tell It Slant: A Conversation on the Language of Jesus in His Stories and Prayers. By Eugene H. Peterson, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, (www.eerdmans.com), 2008, 297 pp. ISBN 978-0-8028-2954-2, \$24.00 (Hardcover).

Eugene H. Peterson's production of books is a little like a prolific hen's production of eggs: every time you check the nest you discover another one! The surprise is that he keeps up the quality with the quantity! *Tell It Slant* is no exception as Peterson, translator of *The Message*, focuses on the language of Jesus in the parables of the Lucan travel narrative and in his prayers. He decries the division of speech into the “godspoke” of Sunday and the “regular speak” of Monday. Jesus makes no such division.

Rather Jesus takes Emily Dickinson's advice to “Tell the truth but tell it Slant” in his parables as a way of snaring those unchurched “Samaritans” we brush up against everyday.

¹⁴⁶ He tells stories of unproductive fig trees (Luke 13:6-9) (which Peterson calls “a blunt, unadorned, uninterpreted manure story”) to warn us in a “slant” way that the journey through Samaria is less likely to be a tickertape parade than a journey of frequent hostility and rejection. His novel interpretation counters our tendency to impetuosity, our love for springing into action to solve the problem or to draw battle lines. He sees the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) as the subversive telling of an old Egyptian folktale that, in the retelling, shifts its focus from poor Lazarus to the rich man’s unrepentant brothers! His framing of the Gold Coins (Luke 19:11-27) is brilliant with the key verse being, “We don’t want this man to rule over us!” A preacher would be well repaid by using this book as a companion when preaching in year C on the parables.

In the second half of the book, Peterson turns to prayer, understanding it not as begging God to do something for us that God is either unaware of or is reluctant to do, but rather as placing ourselves in divine care, confident that God is already acting right now on our behalf. His explication of the Lord’s Prayer is one of the best I have ever read and would make for an eye-opening Sunday School class. Peterson’s exposition of Jesus’ exuberant thanksgiving prayer (Matthew 11:25-26) in the face of massive rejection is alone worth the price of the book! In an age that favors free-form prayers for their spontaneity (“We just pray, Oh Lord, that you would lay your hands on poor Matilda’s gall bladder...”), Peterson argues the virtues of “set prayers” as gifts to keep our praying “congruent with the authentic life of prayer, helping us to distinguish real prayer from its imposters.”

Of course, there are a few disappointments. Peterson calls the parable of The Friend at Midnight (Luke 11:1-13) “a simple parable” even though scholars continue to debate the meaning of the word variously translated as “shamelessness” and “persistence” and whom it describes, the petitioner or the sleeper, for clues as to its meaning. He regrettably divides Luke 15 into four parables by splitting the last into *two* stories of wayward sons: the prodigal and the elder brother. He follows Bailey’s strained interpretation of the Dishonest Steward in Luke 16, making his employer a model of abounding graciousness rather than another scoundrel. And his traditional analysis of the Pharisee as a pompous hypocrite in the tale of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14) would rightfully give scholars like Amy-Jill Levine dyspepsia. But these are quibbles in an otherwise remarkable book that will repay its readers again and again.

Dublin, Ohio

Terry L. Morgan

Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels. By Pheme Perkins. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (www.eerdmans.com), 2007. 328 pp. ISBN 978-0-8028-1770-9 \$28.00 (Hardcover).

Dr. Perkins has composed a thought-provoking analysis of the synoptic gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. It is her goal in this book to explain “the what and the why methods used by scholars when [approaching] the Gospels” (p. xiv) and to offer serious lay readers, who “have a difficult time figuring out how ... authors arrive at the claims they make about passages in the bible” (p. xiv), a critical look at popularized scholarly literature and rational insights into synoptic gospel study.

Dr. Perkins begins in the first chapter by defining “gospel.” The term translated “gospel” (Greek, *euangelion* [p. 1]) does not refer originally to a literary genre but to “a proclamation of an event of major importance” (p. 1). This suggests that each synoptic gospel, or “biography” (p. 2ff), contains recorded oral traditions about the life and teachings of Jesus. She goes on to explain in chapter two that each synoptic gospel was composed in a context void of both composition and circulation evidence (p. 40), and there was no effort made on the part of the early Christian community (before Irenaeus [p. 26]) to make any “sharp distinctions between canonical [i.e., the synoptic gospels] and non-canonical writings” (p. 34). Thus, the recovery of an original synoptic gospel text by modern text critics is doubtful (p. 44).

In chapter three, Dr Perkins stresses the apparent ambiguity in what the synoptic gospel writers used as source material. She points out that the “scattered, loosely affiliated house-based communities that made up the church in various cities did not have archives, official records or even a set collection of Christian texts” (p. 55). In response to academic studies that treat “Q” – a collection of stories about, and sayings of Jesus, believed to have been used by the synoptic gospel writers – on par with the synoptic gospels (p. 85), Dr. Perkins points out that since there was such a vast array of both written and oral traditions about the life and teaching of Jesus, any reconstructed Q today that would have been known to the synoptic gospel writers near the end of the first century is doubtful (p. 85).

In chapters four, five, and six Dr. Perkins plunges into the critical analysis of Mark, Matthew, and Luke respectively showing that regardless of what is known there is much that is yet to be known about each gospel’s origin and composition. She concludes in chapter seven by addressing mass media reporting on the publication or discovery of new religious writings which supposedly demonstrate “that the materials in question will rewrite our understanding of Jesus” (p. 254). In this chapter (seven) on second and third century gospels, Dr. Perkins points out that such documents were not intended to replace the synoptic gospels but were composed against a diverse Christian community backdrop where there were “different views of Jesus and his message” (p. 255).

In the course of seven chapters Dr. Perkins offers to synoptic gospel study a rational, non-technical approach for serious lay readers and bible study groups which offer rational conclusions based on available evidence. Her book is dense in critical thought and history although one can lose sight of where Dr. Perkins wants to go, especially in chapters four, five, and six. But her overall presentation of the historical origin and development of the synoptic gospels does provide many sound insights.

148 **From Jesus to the Gospels: Interpreting the New Testament in Its Context.** By Helmut Koester. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press (www.augsburgfortress.org), 2007. 320 pp. ISBN 978-0-8006-2093-6. \$39.00 (Hardcover).

The twenty collected essays in this book by Dr. Helmut Koester, a leading German NT scholar and long-time professor at Harvard, are all highly technical expressions of NT scholarship. To be more specific, we find here refined examples of form and redaction critical approaches to both the canonical and non-canonical Gospel traditions. Three observations may describe the varied essays in the book.

First, Dr. Koester's approach makes clear his assumption that there is no longer a clear or legitimate distinction between canonical and apocryphal Gospels. Neither gets us back to the historical Jesus, both express understandings of Jesus in a diversity of ways (teacher of wisdom, apocalyptic visionary, the victim, and others), both contain some early (possibly) authentic traditions by and about Jesus, both impose later dogmatic traditions on the Jesus tradition or kerygma. The author mildly mocks Joseph Fitzmeyer for his support of the traditional distinction between canonical and apocryphal Gospels.

Second, woven into many of the essays are some valuable summaries of German NT scholarship of the 19th and 20th centuries. These sections do much to help one understand the continually emerging critical issues of NT scholarship. (Some bits are fascinating. For example, Johannes Weiss, whom Albert Schweitzer credited with ending the "old quest" for the historical Jesus, held off publishing his critique of Jesus as a moral teacher until after the death of his father-in-law, Albrecht Ritschl, for fear of hurting his feelings.)

Third, there is little here of direct value to one seeking devotional or homiletical insight. There is much here that challenges the confessional Lutheran understanding of the authority of the canonical scriptures.

Bloomington, Minnesota

James A. Bergquist

The New Perspective on Paul. By James D. G. Dunn. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (www.eerdmans.com), 2008. 551 pp. ISBN 978-0-8028-4562-7 \$36.00 (Paperback).

Since at least 1982, James D. G. Dunn has been defining and refining his understanding of Paul, developing what Dunn calls "a new perspective." Starting with the work of E. P. Sanders (*Paul and Palestinian Judaism*), Dunn has built his new perspective by carefully examining Paul's writings from the new concept of the Jewish community that Sanders presents. This volume is a collection of essays by Dunn expounding on this new perspective.

This edition starts with almost 100 pages of Dunn answering his critics. Here he methodically addresses those that find fault with his perspective, sometimes agreeing with them, sometimes explaining himself in different terms to counter their arguments, sometimes adding nuance to his arguments in light of their objections, but never abandoning his belief that Paul needs to be viewed from this new perspective to fully understand what Paul was writing about.

The first article after this critique of his critics is from a lecture he gave in November 1982, where he first presented the basic premise of this new perspective. Dunn starts from the premise that “Sanders’ basic claim is not so much that Paul has been misunderstood as that the picture of Judaism drawn from Paul’s writings is historically false, not simply inaccurate in part but fundamentally mistaken” (p. 101). Dunn goes on to say that we misunderstand 1st century Judaism if we think that obedience to the law was a way of entering into a relationship with God. Instead, the correct way to understand 1st century Judaism is to realize that obedience was a way of *maintaining* one’s place in the special relationship Israel has with God. If this new understanding is more accurate, then we must reinterpret Paul’s writings based on this. 149

One area that gets much of Dunn’s attention is Paul’s dismissal of “works of the law.” Traditional interpretation places the emphasis of Paul’s writings on this as pointing to faith as the basis of acceptance by God, and Dunn does not entirely dismiss this notion. However, Dunn argues that “works of the law” should not be interpreted as good works in general, but that Paul refers to the outward “badges” that Judaism has that sets them apart. Rituals and observances that were originally meant to set Israel apart from her neighbors as God’s chosen have become exclusionary; one cannot be a part of God’s accepted unless you do these things. For example, circumcision, while once a mark of inclusion, had become a method of exclusion.

Once the groundwork of this new perspective is presented, other articles are presented that refine this new perspective or apply it to various areas of Biblical study. Dunn’s new perspective leads him to reaffirm that “justification by faith” is not necessarily a new concept with Paul, but that this is at the heart of Judaism (Lutherans may want to skip Chapter 7: “The Justice of God: A renewed Perspective on Justification by Faith”). The final article is new to this volume, and applies this new perspective to interpreting Philippians 3 partially to extend the boundaries of the new perspective and partially to silence critics who claim that Dunn’s perspective was too narrow because most of his articles are based on Romans and Galatians.

It should be noted that not only does this new perspective challenge our ideas of what Paul was arguing against, but also reminds us that the Damascus Road experience was not a conversion, but should be seen as “a prophetic calling” (p. 368). If the experience is understood in this manner, Paul’s arguments take on a different perspective. He is not arguing that the Gentiles should become Christians as much as he is arguing that the Gentiles should become a part of the covenantal people of God: Judaism redefined by Christ. The conversion is not about external symbols – circumcision, food laws, etc. – but about the circumcision of the heart that true faith will bring about. Paul is what Israel was supposed to be: “a blessing to all nations.”

In this volume, Dunn’s arguments are thought provoking and often convincing. We see Paul from a different perspective, one that may be uncomfortable as he challenges traditional interpretations, but one where we might just find that Paul’s message, though different, is still powerful and perhaps even more powerful than we had ever imagined.

150 **Acts in its Ancient Literary Context.** By Loveday Alexander. (T&T Clark biblical Studies). New York, NY: Continuum (www.continuumbooks.com) 2005. 290 pp. ISBN 978-0-567-08219-0 (Paperback 2007 edition).

The subtitle of this collection of essays is “A Classicist Looks at The Acts of the Apostles,” which seems a fair summary of the bulk of Loveday Alexander’s publishing career, including her doctoral dissertation. She is not, by far, the only scholar doing this kind of work; indeed, in the modern era critical New Testament commentators routinely stay in close dialogue with the larger world of classical research. In most papers, commentaries, and monographs, however, such references typically appear as footnotes or asides in a supporting rather than lead role. It is unusual for a scholar to treat a biblical book as a classical writing and to do so with such consistency over the course of an entire publishing career.

Throughout the ten essays that are presented here (one new and nine reprinted), the methodological assumption is that if we attempt to read Luke-Acts sequestered from other writings of its time, we will miss subtle but important features of Luke’s theological message that are suggested by his use of generic forms and tropes. Alexander regularly shows how these have implications for how we should read the Lucan compositions – Acts in particular – and more accurately feel the force of the author’s intent. One of the more impressive features of Alexander’s work is her insistence on continually refining and testing the definitions of the various genres, attempting with exactitude to isolate what features of a classical form are truly constitutive of it, and then getting at the implications of an author’s use of that form. This is work that requires enormous patience and impeccable competence in the Greek language on the part of the author, so it is an impressive piece of scholarship that should be seen at least as much as a contribution to the world of classical studies as it is to that of biblical studies. The bottom line for Alexander is that Acts was an apologetic work, written with a skilled ability to weave between Greek “scientific” patterns and the code language of “biblical historiography.” Along the way, she treats several problems as emblematic of the need for this work, for example the thorny and persistent question of the relationship between Luke’s pledge to provide an “orderly account” at the beginning of the gospel and the sudden fade-to-black at the end of Acts, almost Markan in its abruptness.

Alexander’s work has not been universally embraced over the years and, of course, observers could argue forever as to whether this resistance is due to legitimate criticism or paradigm inertia on the part of the scholarly guild. I tend to think it is the former. Every proposal Alexander makes is intriguing and the questions she asks are important ones, yet there are enough irksome little gaps in her arguments to occasionally keep the reader from closing the deal. I suspect, for example, that she can account for the lack in Luke-Acts of the eulogy form that plays such a prominent role in classical lives, but we have not seen any such account yet. She also draws literary parallels that sometimes seem too quick and easy to some scholars. One hopes that in her future work she will provide a more thorough response to her critics; an author who proposes a theory that is rather divergent from the mainstream in the field should expect to have to do that. Her work suggests that she has those adequate responses, and we would definitely benefit from hearing them.

Those writing on Luke-Acts may have been able to sidestep or politely nod to Alexander's work in the past, but with the publication of this collection in anticipation of her upcoming major book on the audience of Acts and a full-scale commentary from Continuum, more direct engagement will be necessary. As to whether the average interpreter could benefit from owning *Acts in its Ancient Literary Context*, it should be noted that though the book does not require a classics background, the arguments will be hard to follow without the ability to read and pronounce Greek. Furthermore, those with a fair knowledge of the landscape of Acts research will probably be able to figure out the domino effects implied by Alexander's narrowly defined problems and analyses, but not without some imagination, so only the exceptionally curious and dedicated student of Acts should probably undertake to read it. Such a student would, however, find here ideas that may change the way we think about Luke's second volume.

Youth and Young Adult Ministries
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David K. Delaney

Mark: A Commentary (Hermeneia Series). By Adela Yarbro Collins. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press (www.augsburgfortress.org), 2007. 800 pp. ISBN 978-0-8006-6078-9 \$80.00 (Hardcover).

Adela Yarbro Collins, Buckingham Professor of New Testament Criticism and Interpretation at Yale Divinity School, has written a welcome though uneven commentary on the Gospel of Mark. As with commentaries in the Hermeneia series, this volume may provide more technical information than the typical pastor wants or needs and its price is as hefty as its size.

Collins believes Mark was written from Rome or Antioch in a persecution context in the latter 60s prior to the Temple's destruction to reassert the Messiahship of Jesus over against the Messianic pretenders of this time. The commentary proper is well done and while her treatment of some pericopes I regard as "misses," she also gives some notable "hits."

In the "miss" category I would list: reading Mark as an eschatological historical monograph modeled after lives of Greek philosophers; her exegesis on the parable of the sower in Mark 4 which misses the "shock" of it and leans toward allegorical interpretation; noting on the raising of Jairus' daughter (5:21-43) that many Hellenistic miracle-workers were reputed to have raised the dead, then giving two examples which fail to prove the point; arguing against seeing eucharistic overtones in the feeding of the 5000 (while admitting to them in the feeding of the 4000); reading the Transfiguration in line with Greek and Roman parallels when it has far greater correspondences to the OT texts she cites; Jesus' welcome of the children in 9:36-37 as a polemic against infanticide; translating the Syrophenician woman's address, "*Kyrios*," in 7:28 as "*Sir*" rather than "*Lord*" when in the 14 other occurrences in Mark it means "Lord"; dismissing literary critics as exaggerating the degree to which intercalculated stories are intended to interpret one another (such as the withering of the fig tree framing the cleansing of the Temple) and asserting such framing as a feature of oral storytelling which allows the listener to determine when both stories have concluded (huh????!!!); regarding the cleansing of the

152 Temple as a protest against the use of Tyrian silver coins to pay the tax; understanding the words of institution in 14:22-25 as referents to a communal rather than a sacramental rite (a reading that is about as credible as suggesting it was a pig roast!); seeing the tearing of the Temple veil in 15:38 as symbolic of the vindication of Jesus, rather than the destruction of the Temple.

In the “hit” category, I would list: connecting the healing of Simon’s mother-in-law (1:29-31) with exorcism seeing the fever as an unclean spirit; the excursus on the title, “Son of Man,” regarding it as a cryptic riddle for the scribes understood by informed members of the crowd as a Messianic allusion to Daniel 7:13; the parable of the mustard seed (4:30-32) which she sees as a parody of glorious messianic expectations; linking the reception of children (Mark 10:13-16) with the tale of the rich man (10:17-25), contrasting those divested of possessions with one who refuses to do so; her interpretation of the question of the Sadducees about the wife with 7 husbands; reading the widow’s mite (12:41-44) as one who “gives all” contra the scribes who “take all” (12:38-40); her treatment of Peter’s denial (14:53-72), although she would have better described him as the “ultimate insider” (not an “outsider” at all) who doesn’t get it while the “ultimate outsider”, the centurion in 15:39, *does*; regarding 16:8 as the end of Mark, a credible conclusion most scholars (but not all) affirm, but then arguing that it was a standard practice in ancient literary writings to allude to events which occur after those narrated without actually narrating them (apparently Matthew, Luke, and John didn’t get that memo!).

This commentary is sure to provoke a continuing lively discussion on the Gospel of Mark.

Dublin, Ohio

Terry L. Morgan

1 Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical & Pastoral Commentary. By Anthony C. Thiselton. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (www.eerdmans.com), 2006. 336 pp. ISBN 0-8028-2682-2 \$30.00 (Hardcover).

The first question a reader might ask of this book would be of title – shorter than what? This ends up being an important question from which to review Thiselton’s newest contribution to scholarship on 1 Corinthians. Weighing in at 325 pages, including the indices, this volume is considerably shorter than his majestic 1400-page New International Greek Testament Commentary volume on 1 Corinthians. Thiselton is quick to point out, however, that this is “no mere summary” of his earlier work, but rather intends a balance of scholarly work with pastoral and practical concerns. This is a commentary for working preachers that seeks to be aware of “the pressures of time that they face” (p. xiii).

Thiselton begins with an introduction that has as its intent “to transport the reader into the ‘worlds’ of Corinth and Paul” (p. xv). On many levels, Thiselton is successful in this goal. His descriptions of the city and culture of Corinth are detailed and vivid and locate the reader quite viscerally in the hustle and bustle of this hub in the Greco-Roman world. Regularly, Thiselton interjects Paul and other persons (e.g., Chloe, Priscilla, and Aquila) into the discussion, situating them not simply as characters in the letter but

real life people in first century Corinth. Perhaps the most important feature of the introduction is his attention to the “ethos” of the Corinthian church and how it reflected the cultural surroundings on numerous levels. He does so by putting specific words of Paul from the letter itself into conversation with the values, worldview, and traits assumed by the culture of Corinth. As a result, one realizes just how situational and occasional Paul’s rhetoric was. Less helpful, especially for the necessities and realities of sermon preparation, is the specific discussion of rhetoric and Paul’s use thereof. While it is true that reading and interpreting Paul demands a certain grasp of the rhetorical devices available and in use, the intent to locate ancient rhetoric within the context of post-modernity is too large a project for the space at hand. However, further and more expansive deliberation on these connections would be fascinating and points to one of the strengths of this commentary. Thiselton seeks to show the similarities between the challenges that the Corinthians faced and those of churches today. The merit of the commentary could rest on this aspect alone.

The rest of the volume is text and commentary, with small portions of the letter examined for textual and exegetical issues by pulling out key terms and phrases for discussion. What makes for the self-designation “pastoral” in the title of the book is the list of “suggestions for possible reflection” at the end of each section. The nature of these suggestions varies, from questions for further deliberation to additional commentary on terms or ideas not addressed directly in the expository work. It is the hope of the author that these reflection sections “will facilitate a practical and formative impact for thought and life today that genuinely arises from careful exegesis of the text” (p. xiv). This is another feature of the commentary that earns its place in a pastor’s library. Users of the volume will find in these sections not only helpful possibilities for preaching but also interesting “jumping off points” for Bible studies in their congregations. In fact, Thiselton notes that some of these sections were “road-tested” in his own church.

A critique of the volume comes in the exegetical sections where the challenge of a “shorter” commentary comes to light. Much of the discussion is with other commentators and makes less clear how the author sought to prioritize his “own views” for this work (p. xiii). Rather than formatting the text so that the views of others, as well as significantly long “technical” notes, are located as endnotes, author names and book titles are consistently referenced, making for a cumbersome read. In the end, however, we are the benefactors of Thiselton’s extensive work with this letter and perhaps left wanting a longer, “shorter” commentary.

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SEPTEMBER 8-10 *LAKESIDE THEOLOGICAL CONVOCATION

Lakeside, Ohio

Wealth, Class and Values: American Culture Wars and the Church.

Dwight Billings, Professor of Sociology, University of Kentucky

Mary Hughes, Professor of Christian Education, Trinity Lutheran Seminary

Darrell Jodock, Professor of Religion, Gustavus Adolphus College, Minnesota.

SEPTEMBER 24 TRINITY DAYS

Kantonen Lecturer: Elsa Tamez, Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies, Latin American Biblical University, Costa Rica

NOVEMBER 6 ALL SAINTS CHORAL EVENSONG

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