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SEMINARY RIDGE REVIEW



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Sermon for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Convocation, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, April 1, 2009

Maria Erling

John 12: 20-33

Lo and behold, some Greeks wanted to “see” Jesus. Miracle worker? Yes, they had heard about that. Healer? No doubt they knew. Rumors flew.

These curiosity seekers are just “some Greeks” – they have no name. Without a name they never really belong – they were true outsiders. Still, even they wanted to “see” Jesus, and so the disciples, who knew that Jesus was not stuck on ceremony, did not act as gatekeepers.

Listening in on their exchange, it really doesn't quite seem like they knew what to do. For these kinds of seekers the disciples must have had a few rote phrases: “the master is busy now,” or, “the rabbi is praying now,” or, “maybe later after the session with the disciples,” but these Greeks could not as easily be bounced out of the circle.

These “Greeks” found the one friendly disciple, the man from Bethsaida in Galilee, a crossover place, and this Phillip told Andrew, and Andrew went with him to tell Jesus that he had a few foreign visitors. OK, the Greek's request to “see” Jesus is now a request that will involve some kind of cross cultural awareness. Something unexpected. Maybe Jesus will show his power, and convince the skeptics. But no. Instead of becoming a figure in someone else's story, Jesus sees the moment as a time for teaching the world a message about his mission. This is the culmination of what he is supposed to do, and be, for the world.

He gives them a cryptic answer. Jesus spoke in parables so often that his disciples had a hard time understanding him, and strangers were not likely to get closer to him. John's Gospel is unique because the writer doesn't really use parables to shape his Gospel, or tell us much about this feature of Jesus teaching. But this time it is like we're reading a transcription. When the anonymous Greeks come to him, John's account actually brings us into the confused moment just as it would have played out.

"The Hour has come for the son of Man to be Glorified." Something about this request – the audacity of it, the simple hope it conveyed, triggered the moment.

"Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies it bears much fruit."

Then Jesus reflects on the role of the disciples, on following, and on service.

Hardly an answer to the poor Greeks. They don't get an explanation. We don't get a very good Sunday School lesson out of it. And, they don't really get to "see" Jesus in the flesh in this story. They disappear, except as a suggestion to us that a real desire to "see" Jesus, to behold him, is a spiritual question, a faith question.

Seeing Jesus will result in someone's sacrifice. A grain of wheat, even, has to fall into the earth to die. And so it is with simple requests, too. Holding onto the grain, keeping things simple, and inert, like holding onto a Sunday School level of faith – this will bring you grief.

"Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world – will gain it for eternal life."

Sacrifice. Following. Discipleship. All because of the simple audacity of some Greeks wanting to share in the excitement of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. It was a heady time, but the dynamic of God's story was pushing Jesus and his message, his work, into the final, culminating clash with a world bent on spectacle, on glory, on triumph, on succession.

Give me Jesus – they all want something from him. The crowds want this – they want a Jesus they can hold onto, keep around, and enlist for their own purposes. Give me Jesus, they ask, not knowing the way that Jesus will go.

His soul, now, is troubled. The moment has arrived, so that all those asking, demanding, expecting something of him will get their final answer.

So, today, we sing: "In the morning, when I rise, give me Jesus." And, this Lent, we hear: "Unless a grain of wheat dies..."

We reveal ourselves in the questions we ask of God. We lift ourselves up to God – it is our moment, too – and Jesus had these questions, needs, and desires, confronting him throughout his mission work with the people. We

still come to him, ready to receive anything he'll give us, needy, eager, quick to calculate. But Jesus tells us we should be wary of the cost.

The cost of discipleship is high. This is what Jesus tries to tell the Greeks – tries to tell us. This caution, this word of truth, can hardly get through to us in this loud, banging world – a world with every kind of distraction.

The cost of discipleship is high, that it can mean death. Utter loneliness. Abandonment. Misunderstanding. But the life that flows from 'seeing' Jesus cannot be quenched.

The spiritual, "Give me Jesus," has long been a favorite of mine. I learned it during my college years. We sang it in college choir on our concert tour one year. Any of you who have been in a touring choir know that the bonds among the singers are very strong, that the music, and texts, become so deeply ingrained in your heart and mind that you know something of the soul of the music. You can intuit the power that pushed the song into the world. And this song was a favorite. Even though it didn't "belong" to us in the historical sense, we joined in the history, through the music.

I guess we could do this, sing a spiritual with conviction even though we were a group of mostly white singers, because we were strangers, naive to the darker history, like the ignorant Greeks, maybe. We young people were not so slotted into categories. I hope such innocence still lives, and that young people learn to love whatever moves them, and do not sing only the songs that their grandparents would sing.

Music has power to lift up a meaning, and a sense of belonging, so that it is available to all. I hope that is true. At least we felt powerfully the line, "And when I want to sing, give me Jesus."

Then the tour was over, and the choir tried to sing this at home. All the feeling and passion were there as usual, but then my friend and roommate, Laura, said something that really cut into me, and showed me how hard it is to just be a person in this world. She said, "How can a white choir sing that song?"

Yes, I realized, sort of, that something was missing. I can't remember if we had our "black" tenor that year – so culturally isolated we were in our Lutheran ghetto education. But we also had some kind of authentic experience, but, maybe not what we expected.

How do we get from here to there? What is the path?

We singers were Greeks who wanted to "see" Jesus. And, in the Gospel writers' world, who were those Greeks anyway but outsiders who could hardly understand, but who somehow had an inkling? Was this the future – are we getting there?

We all know how far we have yet to go. This is the week when we mourn the passing of John Hope Franklin, the historian who changed the

way that Americans understood the history of slavery in this country. It wasn't just an aberration in our story. It was woven into our destiny as a people. It is not something to skirt around, ignore, or confuse.

We make progress, then there are twists and turns. We hear Jesus say the obvious – sacrifice is necessary – a seed must fall into the earth and die – and we come away thinking, “I’m lucky to be alive.”

What part of us has to die, to live?

There is a power that came to Jesus when he knew he was going to die. And, Martin Luther King also felt this power when he realized that he had committed his life in the struggle. He had come to the mountain but knew he might not reach the promised land. He could see, but not possess.

Nelson Mandela knew this power, too. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, with time for reflection, called his realization, “stages on the road to freedom,” because the fear that keeps us bound to the life we know will erase our hope.

Jesus faced his hour not as a serene mystic, but as a deeply troubled, stirred-up soul. He prayed out his passion. This text gives us John’s version of the anguish in Gethsemane. He wonders if he should pray for release, and then, the moment again comes. “No, for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify thy name.”

A booming answer: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”

I like this editorial remark: “Some thought they heard thunder.”

So this is the time of Judgment, when everyone will see. “When I am lifted up,” when I am on the cross, when I have come to the completion of my witness, then you, and the Greeks, and the crowd, and everyone afterward will “see me.”

Give me Jesus – when I am alone, when I come to die, when I want to sing, when I rise, – then I can see Jesus.

Jesus raised up on that cross tore down the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Greeks, between strangers and pilgrims, between white and black, between old and young, between male and female, between married and single, between gay and straight, all those identity walls we so carefully maintain. Jesus is lifted up beyond them, so that all can “see.” Jesus can see, God can see, also. There is no condition, nothing that can separate us from the love of Jesus. Neither death, life, principalities, powers, anything in all of creation.

All of creation. This is the height that Jesus attains when he is lifted up on that cross. What the world tells us we are doesn't matter, because it is our belonging in Christ that makes the real difference.

So, the song – but really our desire to “see” Jesus is a universal hope with a universal answer – it is possible that our heart can find the right tune, and it will be in harmony. And all the signs of separation, the walls, the

identity politics, the subtle ways we try to detach ourselves from God’s great mercy and fellowship, all this constant negotiating and struggle, it is all a discord that can cease when we become those Greeks who stood on the edge and asked, the confounded disciples: “We want to see Jesus, too.”

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“I Brought You Into the Garden Land (Jer 2:7)”¹

Jack R. Lundbom

Jeremiah in a very early oracle has Yahweh recalling the Wilderness Trek, at which time he led Israel through “a land of desert and pit, a land of drought and death shadow, a land through which a person does not pass, and a human being does not dwell there” (Jer 2:6). Yahweh goes on to say:

Then I brought you into the garden land
to eat its fruit and its goodness
But you came in and polluted my land
and made my heritage an abomination (Jer 2:7).²

Jeremiah doubtless knows Deuteronomy, where Moses tells the people:

For Yahweh your God is bringing you into a good land
a land with flowing streams,
with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills,
a land of wheat and barley,
of vines and fig trees and pomegranates,
a land of olive trees and honey,
a land where you may eat bread without scarcity,
where you will lack nothing,
a land whose stones are iron,
and from whose hills you may mine copper.
You shall eat your fill and bless Yahweh your God
for the good land that he has given you (Deut 8:7-10).

The spies had reported as much, having returned from Canaan with bunches of fruit and telling Moses and the people: “It is a good land which the Lord our God gives us” (Deut 1:25). Jeremiah calls it “the garden land,” that is, a land filled with fruit trees and vineyards. Israelite tradition called it “a land of milk and honey” (Exod 3:8 et passim).

But Jeremiah says that centuries later, after the people settled this land, they made a mess out of it. He uses the term “abomination,” a strong word often denoting idol worship, but for the prophet meaning any detestable activity (Jer 6:15 = 8:12; 7:10; 32:35; 44:2, 22). We can only imagine what the Israelites had done to the environment. At the time of the Conquest the hill country was forested with trees, and the Jordan Valley, particularly between Jericho and the Jordan River, was a lush, semi-tropical forest where lions, leopards, bears, wild boars, hyenas, wolves, jackals, foxes, and other wild animals lived. This rift valley from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea was a verdant grassland with patches of trees and underbrush. In Hebrew it was called “the Pride of the Jordan,” or “The Jungle of the Jordan” (Jer 12:5).

Jeremiah spoke often about the land “mourning,” which has generally been taken to refer to the grass having turned brown, crops having withered, and trees and shrubbery having died (Jer 12:4, 11; 14:2; 23:10). But the image could have broader reference to empty waterbeds, hills bare from soil erosion, and much more.

In the modern day we can see how much of this once-beautiful land has become a barren, unsightly wasteland. The same is true in Transjordan, where the lush tableland of Moab that supported Naomi and her sons when they left famine-stricken Canaan has become a barren, treeless wasteland – an environmental disaster.

Today the Jordan River, which in ancient times swelled its banks (Ezek 47:5) in both spring and winter, and even as recently as the 19th century rose and fell dramatically, has become a trickle. Bishop Tristram from Durham (UK) reported in his travels through Palestine a 14 foot fall of the river in early January, and he said the river was still above its normal level.

Lions could still be seen in the Jordan Valley at the time of the Crusades, but by the 13th century they had disappeared completely. In the 19th century bears, too, were gone, surviving only east of the Jordan in Gilead and Bashan.

The Dead Sea today is falling at an alarming rate; a land bridge now cuts off its southernmost portion. Experts say it may dry up altogether, and the talk currently is about piping in water from the Red Sea. Israelis are taking quantities of water from the Jordan, and the Jordanian govern-

ment, with two newly-built dams on the Wadi Mujib (River Arnon) and Wadi el-Hasa (River Zered), is keeping mountain water from entering the Dead Sea. Frankly, I am not overly exercised about the Dead Sea drying up, but I am concerned about the dwindling water supply in the Jordan River. Its waters originate in the snow-peaked Mount Hermon, and leave the Sea of Galilee at its southern end to flow southward into the Dead Sea. Israelis are taking precious water here and elsewhere to maintain green lawns around their settlement homes, and West Bank Arabs are left with less water for their much-needed field crops.

Jeremiah was deeply troubled about a massive ruination of the created order, in one vision seeing the entire creation returning to primeval chaos (Jer 4:23-26). On another occasion he wept over the hills and pastures that had become ruined wastelands (Jer 9:10). If he were a modern environmentalist, he would doubtless weep bitter tears over the ruination of trees and plants from pollutants, over contaminated rivers, seas, and oceans, and over global warming. Who knows, we might even see him signing on with the Green Party.

But this extraordinary man of God had another message, which does not render invalid the message I have just spoke about, but does put it in a larger perspective. It also adds to it a distinctly religious dimension, which in much of today's ecological discussion is muted or left out entirely. Jeremiah was concerned about a people who have forgotten Yahweh's covenant, which, as we learn from reading on in chapter 2, had brought about life-threatening pollution of another sort.

In these verses are clear echoes of the prophet Hosea, whose concern was about pollution created by men, women, new brides, and lustful young males committing adultery, harlotry (= casual sex), and trying out other forms of sexual adventurism they learned from the Ba'al cults. Jeremiah says this pollution was occurring on "every high hill and under green tree" (Jer 2:20; cf. Hos 4:13).

If Jeremiah were preaching in our day, I believe he would say that one cannot cry out loudly about polluted rivers and streams, dirty air and global warming, and care not a whit about the immorality awash throughout our world. If Jeremiah were a Christian, I believe he would be pointing us to the One who called for a higher righteousness than what is currently being practiced (Matthew 5-7), and would follow Paul in telling us to cast off the old polluted man and woman and put on the new man and new woman in Christ Jesus (Eph 4:22-24). He would also quote Paul who told the Corinthians: "If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come" (2 Cor 5:17).

I find it ironic that people so exercised today about pollution and other environmental issues often say nary a word about human behavior bringing on an even greater pollution. And what is worse, this behavior is, in some cases, defended with convoluted arguments about it pleasing a God who loves any and every passionate feeling welling up in the human breast. The rabbis spoke of the "evil imagination," and Paul confessed doing not the good he wanted, but the evil he did not want (Rom 7:19). Both reveal a deep consciousness of sin, about which we hear little or nothing today.

If the wrath of God is kindled over the mess we are making of the good land God has given us, and surely it is, how much more will it burn because of polluted human behavior violating the Old Covenant and the New? The prophets knew this; Jesus knew it; and Paul spoke to it directly when writing to the churches at Corinth and Rome.

Finally, our Jeremiah passage concludes by saying that godless and reckless living will bring judgment on our children and grandchildren (Jer 2:9), repeating the Old Testament retribution formula that the sins of the fathers (and mothers) will be meted out on their children and grandchildren (Exod 20:5; 34:7). This is a sobering reminder for all of us to build up credit and not spend the capital that belongs to our children and grandchildren.

We seem to know this when it comes to the pollution of rivers, killing of trees, and poisoning of the air, but how well do we assess the long term damage resulting from polluted human living? Those of us who are pastors have heard the sad tales of men and women whose reckless and immoral living have had a devastating effect on their children. We do not have to tell them about collateral damage; they tell us. And many of these children never get over the hurts for which they bear no responsibility whatsoever.

Those of you preparing to be pastors – I do not care where you are going – you will hear similar stories in the days ahead. I am not engaging in pious moralizing. I am speaking from personal experience, having listened myself as a pastor to stories from people who had no idea whatever where their actions were taking them. Jeremiah knew about this, speaking as he did to people who "knew not their (latter) end" (Jer 5:31; cf. Deut 32:29).

I close with a question from the prophet who wept over lands in mourning and fields become withered wastelands. Jeremiah asks:

How long will the land mourn
and the grass of every field wither

from the evil of those who dwell in it?
Beast and bird are gone.
For they thought,
'He will not see our (latter) end' (Jer 12:4).

Notes

- 1 Chapel talk given to seminary students and faculty on "Ecology Day" at the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Hong Kong, September 28, 2007.
- 2 Translations are the author's.

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Confess, Confess, Confess: Tenure Induction Lecture at The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, May 1, 2007

Robin J. Steinke

President Cooper-White, Bishop McCoid, board members, faculty and staff colleagues, students and friends, I want to thank you for the privilege of serving my call in this place at this time in Gettysburg's long history.

It seems that I have been involved with this Seminary for more than the last eight years. My initial connection here was during the summer of 1995 following my first year at Cambridge University. I spent the summer at the Collegium Oecumenicum and discovered a handful of brochures from the Seminary in their library. Little could I have imagined that 12 years later I would have the privilege to stand before you on this occasion. I am deeply humbled and thankful.

I would be delighted just to sit down at this point, and we can all go and have an early lunch, but then you would be left wondering what in the world the title "Confess, Confess, Confess" is all about. I would not want to leave you all in the dark about this, so bear with me for a bit as I "say more about that."

Introduction

There were three different directions that I considered for this tenure lecture. The first would have been to map out a distinctively Lutheran approach to theological ethics. Another avenue I considered would have been to explore the interplay between ethics and administration. Yet a third ap-

proach would have been to select a challenging ethical issue facing the church and attempt to sketch biblical, confessional and theological foundations to be considered.

In the classes I have taught I have endeavored to think with students and teach in all those areas. For this lecture, what I will do is explore in some depth just one theological term and, through that exploration, hope to uncover with you a subterranean web of multiple theological and ethical connections and implications. This approach of beginning with only one theological term seems to be in keeping with Joseph Sittler's comment that "one has to think more about less."¹ The term that has captured my imagination for over ten years is *status confessionis*. The more I read about this term and see it used in current ethical debates in the church, the more I am convinced we either need much more theological work on this or we need to abandon its use altogether. The reason for thinking through *status confessionis* is that this term has been employed in recent ethical debates on issues such as poverty, hunger, sexuality, war and violence.

In this paper I will (1) describe multiple meanings of this kind of confessing; (2) demonstrate the links with conscience that are employed when *status confessionis* is used in our current ethical debates; (3) show the relationship to community; and (4) describe how we might understand conversation, not only conversation with others but also conversation with God, that is, prayer. Confessing, conscience, community and conversation will serve as the outline for our thinking together today.

Confessing: Definition

When the term "confessing" is used it can mean admitting to God or to one another the sinful things we have done. In the *Small Catechism* Luther writes in response to the question, "What is confession? Answer: Confession consists of two parts. One is that we confess our sins. The other is that we receive the absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the confessor as from God himself and by no means doubt but firmly believe that our sins are thereby forgiven before God in heaven."² In our liturgy this kind of confessing is reflected in the opening order for confession and forgiveness at the beginning of the service.

This confessing of sin is not simply the occasion for individual confession in a large gathering, so that we might expedite the service. It is, rather, deeply communal. It is why when you are late for service and miss the confession, we do not send you to the back to engage in private confession before we let you join the rest of the congregation. When we say, "I confess...," this is indeed personal, but it is by no means private. Dietrich Bonhoeffer offers some reasons for understanding this kind of confessing as communal.

In Bonhoeffer's writing, "I" is always in relationship. In *Discipleship* he writes, "[Christ] stands in the center between the other person and me."³ Even in talking about death, Bonhoeffer notes that we are in community. He often quoted both of Luther's sermons, "Every one of us must be prepared for the time of death" and "If I should die [in the faith-community], I am not alone in death, if I suffer, they suffer with me."⁴ My sin is borne in Christ's own body and since Christ exists as church community (*Christus als Gemeinde existierend*),⁵ then my brothers and sisters also bear my sin and I bear theirs. "Now the community bears the sin of the individual believer, who is no longer alone with this evil but has 'cast off' this sin by confessing it and handing it over to God."⁶ This kind of confessing is deeply personal but by no means private.

There is another kind of confessing to which we will turn our attention for our remaining time. Though in English we make no distinction, German has two distinct words for two different types of confessing. What has just been described is *Beichte* or confession of sin. *Bekennnis*, on the other hand, is to confess the faith, not sin.

This kind of confessing is reflected in the whole of the liturgy, not simply and most obviously in the Creed when we say "I believe" or "We believe." "Because Christian faith takes place in the Church, it is necessarily a communal concern... confession is essentially the act of a community."⁷ Confessing is testifying publicly to God's actions in the world. Confessing is testifying to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The challenge for confessing the faith comes when there is a time of crisis. There may be either an intra-church crisis where, because of some practice or doctrinal development, the conditions for confessing are compromised. An example of this kind of internal church crisis is reflected in a minority statement of *In Statu Confessionis* in the Missouri Synod.⁸ I was with a District President recently who lamented the fact that many pastors in his district were refusing to commune with other pastors in his district over an intra-church conflict which for some was deemed a central matter of the faith and thus precludes them from fellowship with one another.

There may also be an external church crisis where something interferes with the church's witness to the risen Christ. This second type was evident in the church crisis in 1933.

Confessing: A Brief History of Status Confessionis

A key question in this debate is whether *status confessionis* is only about doctrinal issues and practices that interfere with the church's confessing or if *status confessionis* can legitimately be invoked in disagreements over ethical is-

sues such as poverty, nuclear arms, war, violence, sexuality, homelessness and ecological disasters.⁹

The question of what we can legitimately claim or call a crisis in confessing determines whether or not something can be referred to as *status confessionis* or a “special case of confessing.” The conference called for in 1981 by the Lutheran World Federation and summarized in the document, *The Debate on Status Confessionis: Studies in Christian Political Theology*,¹⁰ was an attempt to respond to the very mixed reception of the 1977 statement from the LWF Assembly in Dar es Salaam. This 1977 statement called for all member churches to recognize the apartheid system in South Africa as a situation of *status confessionis*. This exhaustive summary statement details the complex history of the term and suggests criteria which may be considered when *status confessionis* is used as an ethical category. There is significant disagreement on the historical origins of the term and its current meaning. For our purposes today, I want to highlight the work from the study that makes a case for *status confessionis* as an ethical category.

Status Confessionis as an Ethical Category: Criteria

There are five conditions or criteria for *status confessionis* as outlined in the LWF document. The two that I think are most germane to this discussion are: When the truth of the gospel is no longer expressed in its wholeness; and When a church by its conduct... (Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8), so loses its credibility that it contradicts the gospel. These two criteria suggest that when hunger, violence, HIV/AIDS, and poverty are left to run rampant, the church’s confession indeed loses integrity and is contrary to the gospel. This suggests that an ethical *status confessionis* is appropriate.

The LWF documents add additional criteria, including when force or coercion are used through violent persecution, or when societal pressures for conformity lead to an accommodation of the gospel that is inimical to the church’s proclamation, teaching and structure. Situations such as these constitute a time of *status confessionis*. The caution is that *status confessionis* “... degenerates into a self-defined, unevangelical code-word for ethical zealotry or can be used as a linguistic club.”¹¹ Alternatively, engaging in scaremongering does not contribute to the flourishing of persons. “In fear there is no revelation. The gospel wants to rescue us from paralyzing fear or blind zeal. Our own life and death have been decided by Christ’s death and resurrection. We can only retain our certainty of salvation if we do not annex it for our own conjectures.”¹²

Status Confessionis as an Ethical Category: Who Decides?

When conditions for the church’s witness are threatened there are occasions when decisions are made by the church with which some individuals may not agree. What is invoked is a so-called “conscience clause.” I will summarize briefly a rich description of the background of such a conscience claim from a recent article by Marty Stortz, which first appeared in *Dialog* and subsequently in the on-line *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* in July, 2005.

Understanding of Conscience

Stortz describes conscience as beleaguered rather than overly confident. Her provocative title, translated “Christ Alone or Guts Alone,” offers an indicator of the classic Lutheran interpretation of conscience that she will argue. She makes very modest claims about what one can actually know about conscience and, more importantly, how one should act. She cautions against the notion of conscience as the “inner voice that prods us to challenge authority in the name of individual autonomy.”¹³ That notion of conscience is a product of the Enlightenment.

Stortz maps conscience according to Luther in three distinct areas: conscience captive, conscience instructed, and conscience informed. I highlight three aspects of her summary of Luther’s understanding of conscience:

1. a knowledge gained and held in common with other Christians – not annexed to the individual;
2. confident in Christ and doubtful about its own conclusions – not confident in its own conclusions and wary of all else;
3. welcoming of instruction from the indwelling Spirit – not suspicious of instruction as propaganda.

This plea to return to Luther for re-appropriating the use of conscience so that conscience is understood as a “mystery of the Trinity, instructed by the indwelling Spirit, formed by the promises of Christ and directed by the created image of God and plain reason in concrete service to the neighbor rather than the Enlightenment”¹⁴ may open the way for renewed exploration of the possibilities and promise of identifying and responding to special cases of confessing. It is key to note that conscience is not how I feel about something.

Conscience is not how I feel about something

In a seminar on Catechetics taken in the 7th semester of his 9 semesters at the University of Tübingen in 1926, Bonhoeffer’s teacher Professor Mahling is

leading a session on Matt 8:18-22, which is Jesus' encounter with the scribe who wants to be a disciple of Jesus and Jesus responds, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." Another scribe comes, but first he must go and bury his father. Jesus responds to the second one: "Let the dead bury the dead."

Professor Mahling explains to his students, "We have to consider very carefully every little thing that we do. How much more important is it to consider carefully an important decision, like the one the scribe was making!"¹⁵ Mahling is contrasting this to *feeling*. He says, "...Jesus says about feeling that it is not thoroughgoing enough. One also has to have considered it carefully. What happens with people who don't think carefully about something that they decide to do based on emotion? They don't finish it. They become disappointed.... Conscience tells Christians that there is a lot that they should be doing and are not... their conscience is always accusing them so that they would rather suffer great external pain than the great misery that arises from the battle of the heart."¹⁶ Mahling summarizes this teaching on conscience by saying: "To follow Jesus is *sometimes* outwardly difficult but *always* inwardly difficult."¹⁷

What emerges is a picture of conscience that is first about thinking carefully in community, then acting humbly. Inherent in this is the recognition that conscience will inevitably create challenges and difficulties for followers of Christ.

Bonhoeffer returns to this theme of conscience in his second dissertation, *Act and Being*. He writes, "The knowledge of what sin is comes solely through the mediation of the Word of God in Christ; and that knowledge overrules the dissenting conscience."¹⁸ There is a sense in which the tendency to understand conscience as an act of solitude and individual deliberation on an ethical matter is in fact *contrary to* Luther's notion of the conscience, which is always in relationship. Bonhoeffer cautions against this solitary notion of conscience: "The conscience and repentance of human beings in Adam are their final grasp at themselves, the confirmation and justification of their self-glorifying solitude."¹⁹

What this means is that the faith community becomes the location where the conscience is nurtured and formed for enacting confession into a responsible life of faith that is continually shaped by the Word and Sacrament in the visible community. Conscience cannot be used as a trump card to assert one's individual opinion or disagreement.

How do we move forward as people of faith, together, when deep divisions, in times of crises, threaten schism? Ethicist, Dean of Duke Chapel and Research Professor in Ethics, Samuel Wells, describes this discernment in terms of "taking the right things for granted." In his book, *Improvisation:*

The Drama of Christian Ethics, he describes Christian ethics as "...not about helping anyone act Christianly in a crisis, but about helping Christians embody their faith in the practices of discipleship all the time."²⁰ This formation in the habits and practices of theological imagination opens the way to confessing in community. We cannot know what conditions or crises we may face, but what we can do is be diligent in our study, attentive to renewing our minds, as our reading from Romans suggests.

I was reminded this fall of what it means to take the right things for granted. I attended a play on the John Irving book, *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, which I read a number of years ago. Two boys growing up just as the Vietnam War is erupting meet on the basketball court almost daily to practice a basketball shot. The shot was rehearsed again and again until one day the automatic reflexes honed by years of repetition were used in a totally unexpected way. The two were at an airport when a deranged person threw a hand grenade toward a group of Vietnamese children. Owen leaps in the air, just as he had done day after day on the basketball court, and catches the grenade as it explodes and ends up saving the children.²¹

Doing the routine things, like going to chapel every day, praying the daily office, attending diligently to study, doing our research, writing and teaching day in and day out, helps shape our confessing and conscience in the context of others so that when crises erupt we are not left simply to ourselves to discern what action to take but can readily employ a theological imagination that has been shaped by taking the right things for granted.

Communal Notion of Conscience

If conscience is not simply to be my own introspection and discernment but is rather about being bound together through the work of the Holy Spirit into a church community, then how is one formed or "apprenticed" in this way?

Catechesis becomes crucial for the ongoing formation of character in community. We each continue to grow in faith through being apprentice to one another in the faith. We "learn to take the right things for granted" as new situations emerge in cases where the biblical and confessional witnesses are silent or veiled. Learning to take the right things for granted occurs in the ongoing formation in the church community through Word and Sacrament.

What Does the Church Say About This?

The church's way of being is confessing, not primarily adherence to confessional statements. In this confessing, it is the active Word of God that is operative, not doctrinal formularies. Bonhoeffer consistently asks, "Who is Christ?"

The “I” in the communal confessional statements is grounded in Christ existing as community. Creeds and confessions become historical exemplifications that invite openness for a renewed vision of theological imagination in the light of contemporary issues, rather than an ossified historical artifact.

Conversation: Prayer and the Ethics of Participating in the Reign of God

Learning to take the right things for granted occurs in the ongoing formation of character in community.²² This ongoing formation invites a kind of “holy conversation” with others in the community and beyond as well as with God. That conversation opens ways to discern together our ethical responsibility in the world. The location where we struggle about ethics is prayer in the name of Jesus.

Prayer, especially intercessory prayer, raises fundamental questions of God with which ethics must begin and with which it must deal to the end. Because it raises this fundamental question, there are two aspects with which it must deal.

The first aspect to which prayer must give attention raises questions about who God is. Is there a Being to whom prayers, petitions, requests, intercessions can be meaningfully addressed? Are our words of prayer simply wishes wafted into a vast, void, empty space? “Your cravings as a human animal do not become a prayer just because it is God whom you ask to attend to them.”²³

The second aspect to which prayer must give attention raises questions about exactly what this means. Suppose that we can confess that Jesus is the Lord of history because life, not death, will have the last word, because the final victory of the Reign of God is assured. The question remains whether that assertion and that confession have anything to do with the concrete realities of daily existence. Is it meaningful to think that the Triune God, the *alpha and omega*, the beginning and the end of all history, is concerned with the *minutiae* of my own daily life? Is it meaningful to believe that Jesus can intervene in concrete history in response to individual petitions and requests? If we do believe it, how terrible if Jesus does not, in our case, intervene! Jesus promised: “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened” (Luke 11:9-10). What does that promise mean? And is it not worse if the promise seems to come true for some and not for others, worse if some prayers seem to be answered, and not others?

There is a significant disconnect if there is no apparent relationship between what we confess, what we pray, and our own action. Thus, the very notion that prayer is the locale for the Christian ethic seems meaningless because, as religious persons, we think of it as turning our world over to God, asking God to act, in fact coming to the end of our responsibility, involvement, and action.

The problem is then compounded because prayer is transformed into some way to manipulate God, to secure the desired *answer* to our petition, to have God arrange the world in such a way that we receive whatever it is that we want. This understanding of prayer involves the misuse of the name of God. It asks how to gain some advantage from God through prayer, and it distorts everything associated with prayer. We think there must be a “right way” to pray, using the “right words,” or getting the “right people” to pray for us. “Faith” is the condition that determines whether prayer is answered or not. “Whatever you ask for in prayer and with faith, you will receive” (Matt 21:21-22). Success stories encourage this understanding. Popular religious books like *The Prayer of Jabez* solidify this misguided notion.

The Psalmist reminds us that the “answer” to such prayer may be a sign of God’s judgment rather than a sign of God’s blessing. (Ps 106:13-15). In Psalm 37 we read “Take delight in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.” This does not mean one will get whatever she wants but rather, through God’s grace, our own wants will be changed.

To confess, to deliberate matters of conscience in community, and to enact this confessing through prayer “with faith” (Matt 21:22), means to trust Jesus’ way of being in and for the world. To believe in Jesus means that the things we want will change.

Hence, the intercessions of those who pray in the name of Jesus are shaped by the Word of God in community, formed by the word and sacraments, and through the struggle of faith in conversation with others. That is why the prayer offices of the church, Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, begin with Psalms and Hymns and Scripture and Canticles *before* we come to intercession. We can begin by asking about whatever is on our minds. But when that asking is shaped by the Word and the meal in the context of community, both the things we ask *about* and what we ask *for* will be shaped by the coming Reign of God.

Scholars have long pointed out that in Mark’s Gospel, most of what we call miracles, “the *signs* of the Reign of God,” occur in the first six chapters. Perhaps this can be interpreted to mean that as the community continues to be shaped by the stories and mission of Jesus the less need there will be for dramatic demonstrations of God’s activity in the world. Confessing in all its refractions opens the way for us to “take the right things for granted.”

Prayer, therefore, is about enacting confession in the context of community and participating in the Mission of Jesus. Prayer is the *struggle and strategy* of discipleship. Prayer means both *asking about* the will of the Triune God and *acting out* the will of the Triune God.

The "Lord's Prayer"

In Luther's explanation to the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer in the Small Catechism, the question "How does this come about?" is only asked in these three petitions. Luther's response to how this comes about is that we live holy lives, we believe God's holy word, and God strengthens us and keeps us steadfast in his word.²⁴ Enacting confessing through prayer includes all of us in the work of bringing about God's Reign and reinforces the emphasis that we are part of God's redeeming project for the world.

Conclusion

I conclude with a few comments about where this leaves us. I have described the complexities of confessing and the special case of confessing in times of crisis. Often conscience is invoked as an objection to the way the church has acted. I argued that conscience is shaped in the context of the church community and never is a decision about how I feel. Conversation with others and with God, that is, prayer, is where we enact our confessing. This means that when we pray for an end to hunger or for the flourishing of peace, we are compelled to be part of the response.

This leaves unsaid much about the debates where so much is at stake. What is clear in this discussion is that the disagreements over ethical issues can indeed be matters for a special case of confessing. The challenge is that we may not know what those issues are or even which side is most faithful. Our call is to continue to be open to learning how God is at work in the world and to engage in the habits and practices of ordinariness in confessing so that when the crises come, we have honed our theological and pastoral imaginations so that we might respond in ways we cannot yet see.

Bonhoeffer faced the ambiguity of discerning when the appropriate time for a special case of confessing (*status confessionis*) should be made. In a sermon preached in Berlin on July 23, 1933, on Matt 16:13-18 he is clear that we are called to confess Christ. "We should confess – Christ builds. We should preach – Christ builds. We should pray – Christ builds. We do not know his plan. We do not see, whether he builds or pulls down." Our task in obedience, in discipleship under the Word and Sacraments, is to confess Christ, Son of the Living God, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

"Whether the load [*Haufe*] is great or small, inferior or high, weak or strong, when he confesses Christ, so he remains victorious in eternity." Confessing Christ, in all of its richness and ambiguity, is the church's mandate. It shaped Bonhoeffer's ministry and sustained him through the vicissitudes of life.

In the final portion of this sermon, Bonhoeffer summarizes the challenge of confessing, the complexity in attending to conscience, the centrality of Christ existing as church community and the character of conversation as prayer. It is also the portion of the sermon from which I have taken the title of this address: "Not only Church stay a Church, but Church confess, confess, confess... Christ alone is your Lord, from his grace alone can you live as you are. Christ builds..."²⁵ This strikes me as a helpful and humble way to proceed. It does not presume to have the confidence of being right but simply acts with courage in the promise of Christ. Thank you.

Notes

- 1 Joseph Sittler, *Gravity and Grace: Reflections and Provocation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986) 64.
- 2 Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000) 360:16.
- 3 *Discipleship, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (ed. Wayne W. Floyd et al; trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001) 4:98. Hereafter *DBW*.
- 4 Quoted in *DBW* 1:180-181.
- 5 *Sanctorum Communio*, *DBW* 1:199.
- 6 *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible*, *DBW* 5:110.
- 7 Ronald Modras, "The Functions and Limitations of Credal Statements," in *An Ecumenical Confession of Faith* (ed. Hans Küng and Jürgen Moltmann; New York: Seabury, 1979) 40.
- 8 See Paul F. Nus, "A Minority Statement on *In Statu Confessionis*: A Response to Questions from the Praesidium of the Synod." Adopted April 15, 2005. Placed online May, 2005. <http://lcms.org>
- 9 See Bernd Wannenwetsch, "Ecclesiology and Ethics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics* (ed. Gilbert Meilaender and William Werpehowski; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 57-74, esp. 68-72 on 'The Problem of an Ethical *Status Confessionis*.'
- 10 Eckehart Lorenz, ed., *The Debate on Status Confessionis: Studies in Christian Political Theology* (Geneva: Dept. of Studies, Lutheran World Federation, 1983).
- 11 *Ibid.*, 130.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 142.
- 13 Marty Stortz, "Solus Christus or Sola Viscera? Scrutinizing Lutheran Appeals to Conscience," *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* (July 2005) Par. 6. <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Journal-of-Lutheran-Ethics/Issues/July-2005/Solus-Christus-or->

Sola-Viscera-Scrutinizing-Lutheran-Appeals-to-Conscience.aspx

- 14 Ibid., Par. 7.
 15 *DBW*9:482-483.
 16 Ibid., 483.
 17 Ibid., 484.
 18 *DBW*2:145.
 19 Ibid., 139.
 20 Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2004) 15.
 21 In Wells' book the same illustration is used.
 22 See Wells on "Forming Habits" in *Improvisation*, 78.
 23 Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings* (trans. Leif Sjöberg and W. H. Auden; New York: Knopf, 1974) 11.
 24 Kolb and Wengert, 356-357:4-11.
 25 *DBW*12:470.

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Proclamation and Dialogue: Biblical Postures

Lawrence D. Folkemer

I

A World Council of Churches research article boldly asserts that "God is active, creatively and redemptively, in the life of all people everywhere and God's mission in and through the Church should be regarded as part of His total mission to all mankind."¹ If the statement merely affirms that the Gospel of Christ is at work throughout the wide world, few would debate. There is scarcely a nook where the Gospel has not been proclaimed. If, on the other hand, as it seems, it is meant to affirm that in some way God is redemptively active even where the historic message of Jesus has not been fully heard, the statement is subject to much debate.

Indeed the theology of missions since the World Missionary conference at Tambaram in 1938 has occupied itself precisely with that debate. At issue is not merely whether there has been a pre-gospel activity of God among the peoples of the world (pre-, extra or post-biblical), but whether God has been redemptively at work there. How is "creatively and redemptively" to be understood? Can one speak of God "creatively" at work in an altogether "non-redemptive" sense? Or again, is God at work "in and through" the diversity of religious traditions and experience or "outside," perhaps even "in spite of" them?

The range of the debate on this issue has been extensive, and we shall give considerable attention to it in a critical way further on in the study. Our present concern is with the biblical context of the problem since all theological discussion in the debate moves out of a biblical framework either as a *terminus in quo* or a *quo*.

The Bible furnishes no precedent for theological reflection on organized systems of religious tradition as such. That such organized systems existed in abundance and diversity during biblical times may be unquestioned. There were “gods many and lords many.” Biblical writers, however, seemed not concerned to write about them as such. One ought not conclude thereby that Scripture is interested solely in the human being and not in the human being’s religious context.² There is sufficient evidence in Old and New Testament alike to indicate that the writers had a keen awareness of the religious thought and practice of their times and did not hesitate to reflect upon them in the communication of their own message.³ Biblical writers apparently assumed that the word of God would be heard in terms of the particular religious practices and positions that people embraced.

Several examples may help. First, in his speech at Athens before the court of the Areopagus (Acts 17:16-31), Paul refers to an altar bearing the inscription “To an Unknown God” (17:23). He quotes some of the Greek poets while proclaiming his message of the one living God, who has created, sustained, is immanent in and will judge all the world, and who provides assurance for all in raising Jesus from the dead.

Discussions of the passage involve such questions as whether the doctrine found in the speech is derived in part from popular Gentile philosophy (Martin Dibelius) or the Jewish Hellenistic world (Hans Conzelmann); whether the phrase “very religious” (17:22) used of his hearers is meant to be complimentary or derogatory; or whether the speech is really Paul’s or the product of the early Church through Luke.⁴ For our consideration the point is that Paul is consciously aware of the problem involved in addressing a sophisticated Gentile, not Jewish, audience in an attempt to lead his hearer to a true worship of God the creator-sustainer and redeemer of the world.

In a deutero-Pauline passage (Col 1:15-27, parallel in part in Ephesians 4), the writer is intent on dealing with the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in its cosmic dimensions against the background of a syncretizing tendency fostered by the presence and propaganda of the mystery cults in the city of Colossae. “The whole atmosphere at the time was against religious exclusiveness.”⁵ The burden of the passage is to present Jesus in terms of his cosmic fullness as the very “image of the invisible God,” who has “the primacy over all created things” (Col 1:15 NEB).

In the context of a syncretistic, anti-exclusivistic setting Christ is presented in cosmic dress to obviate the need for the additional religious insurance from other cults against the powers that threaten human existence. Neither the rightness or wrongness of prevailing religious belief in Colossae nor even the truth content of the author’s special way of presenting Jesus to

the believing and inquiring community is our concern here. What is important for our study is the seriousness with which the writer dealt with the religious milieu of the people whom he was addressing.

Scripture offers neither systematic doctrinal formulations of the Christian faith nor a systematic reflection upon other-believing faiths; it witnesses to the story of God’s activity in human history and the corresponding testimony of faith and unbelief and the consequences of both. Therefore it would be futile to search the Scriptures for an explicit model that would serve the present age of the Church in its encounter with people and systems of religious faith.

The absence of a systematic model does not mean the poverty of significant criteria in the Bible to serve the church in its modern theological task. The criteria will be found, however, not in formal declarations and propositions but where one would expect to find them in a record-book of the lively, dynamic history of God’s ways and means with people and of them with their fellows, namely, in the concrete events and experiences, the interrelationships that make up that history.

A dialectical tension exists in the Bible on the position and destiny of the nations of humankind in relation to the people of God. More than any other sacred scripture, the Bible is often accused of being exclusivistic and intolerant. The God of the patriarchs and of Jesus is seen as a partisan God who, if he is interested in the other-believing peoples, uses them as ploy or pawn for the benefit of his own covenant people. He appears before many people as a “superior sort of tribal God.”

The Gentile world is most often negatively assessed for its idolatry and immorality and roundly condemned by prophet and apostle. It may be argued that any account of God’s relationship with humankind focused upon a particular people who are in some sense God’s “chosen” is destined to mean at best a negation of other religious experience, and at worst, in the interest of the destiny of the chosen, an exposure and condemnation of other religions as false.

One form of the tension apropos the religious “outsiders” throughout Scripture is the tension of the particular and the universal. The prophetic preaching of judgment is clearly leveled at the Gentiles. Just as clearly it is affirmed that God entered into covenant with his “chosen,” a covenant that God steadfastly maintains despite the periodic faithlessness of the people. But the universal principle is never absent with respect either to judgment or covenant. The same judgment, which is visited upon the Gentile, is leveled initially and just as sternly, if not more so, upon Israel. God is no respecter of persons or peoples. Indeed Gentiles at times emerge as those who participate in the fulfillment of the divine will. Just as the earth is full of the

steadfast love of God (Ps 119:64), so the favors of God extend to all the people of the earth.

As the prophetic preaching developed, reaching its spiritual apogee in the message of Second Isaiah, the universal, although often confounded by a nationalistic particularism, was seen to be not the contradiction but the depth dimension of the particular. If one is to accept the analysis of Gerhard von Rad, the signal theological achievement of the Yahwist tradition within the Pentateuch or Hexateuch was the insight into the universal dimension of God's covenantal love.⁶

Before the election of Abraham (Genesis 12), which in a special way marks the beginning of saving history whereby "all the families" of the earth would be blessed, the divine covenant with Noah guaranteed the continuance of the world for the whole of humanity, with "every living creature... for all future generations" (Gen 9:12).

It is not to the Israelite only but to humankind as a whole (Adam) that the Yahwist applies the promise of the seed who will crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). The particularity and universality of God's covenantal love are thus interwoven in the fabric of the Yahwist and Priestly traditions. The Tower of Babel and the judgment of the Flood are paradoxically not the final break in the relationship between God and the nations. "The end of the Biblical primeval history is therefore not the story of the Tower of Babel; it is the call of Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3; indeed, because of this welding of primeval history and saving history, the whole of Israel's saving history is properly to be understood with reference to the unsolved problem of Yahweh's relationship to the nations."⁷

The immediate account of the Table of Nations (Genesis 10) following the covenant with Abraham thus weaves in concentric circles the destiny of the nations with the patriarchal history of God's chosen instrument of redemption, Israel. In this sophisticated theological conception, the writer of Genesis comprehends the scope of God's covenantal grace embracing the whole of humankind, interlocking all human history with God's redemptive promise and activity. The particularity of the special election of one people (Israel), therefore, is embraced in and only properly understood through a universal covenant (Noahite) that reaches back to the creation and out to all nations.

In his celebrated commentary on Genesis, von Rad emphasizes the powerful significance in the Priestly tradition of God's covenant with Noah and its connection with the vast international world (Genesis 10):

The sign of the covenant with Noah, absolutely, without any confessing appropriation by the earthly partner, is high above man, between heaven

and earth, as a pledge of a true *gratia praeveniens*! God's gracious will is made visible to give mankind, terrified by the chaotic elements, renewed assurance that God will support this aeon and to guarantee the duration of his ordinances.... Man knows of the blessing of this new gracious relationship in the stability of the orders of nature.... The *natural* orders fixed by God's word, mysteriously guarantee a world in which in his own time God's *historical* saving activity will begin.⁸

Therefore, it may be said that the Gentile world was never "outside" God's justice, judgment, and love much as it may be affirmed that in its ignorance or disobedience God was "outside" their world.

To be sure this perception of the universal reach of God's covenantal grace for all humankind flows out of Israel's, or at least the Yahwist's, own unique historical self-consciousness and experience of that covenant. Still that grace must be seen at work beyond the borders of the "chosen" of God. The presence of "holy pagans" throughout the Old Testament attests to the reign and work of God's grace even if in a way hidden from human eyes.

The full implications of the dialectic of the universal and the particular in covenantal, redemptive history find expression in the later prophets, especially Second Isaiah and Jeremiah. There, in effect, the concept of universalism understands all the nations and their cults as within and subordinated to the claim of God. No longer were the nations "under the jurisdiction of their gods," for the horizons of the nations and of the world were subsumed under the sovereign sphere of Yahweh. So God was able to say, "Nebuchadnezzar, my servant," and "Cyrus, my anointed" (Jer 27:6, Isa 45).¹⁰

Thus, the epitome of the prophetic and priestly traditions of the Old Testament gathers up in covenant theology the whole of humankind. Under the signs of Noah and Abraham, the Gentile and the "chosen" both are objects of God's grace.¹¹ It is not to equate the significance of the two covenants with Noah and Abraham, or God's affair with Israel and with the nations. There are different forms of covenant implying different meanings. It is to affirm rather the comprehensiveness of a divine grace that takes all humankind into its embrace.

II

The dialectical tension in which the destiny of the Gentile world is held in terms of the particular and the universal covenant is matched in Jesus' teaching by a tension of spirituality in terms of faith and unbelief, love and unconcern. It is often pointed out that Jesus restricted his ministry to Israel (Matt 15:24) and instructed his disciples to limit their activity to "the lost

sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 10:7). The few incidents to the contrary when he ministered to the Gentile community may be considered not a rejection of *that* policy but exceptions to it proving the rule.

Is there here a real contradiction in that despite the self-imposed limitations on his activity God nevertheless spoke clearly and continually of the participation of the Gentiles in the coming reign of God? “I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness...” (Matt 8:11-12).¹² To “sit at the table,” table fellowship, meant fellowship before God; in the deeper sense it meant inclusion in the community of salvation.¹³

In the message of Jesus, questions of whether Jew or Gentile, whether all, many or few are included in the banquet feast of the eschatological people of God seem questions of secondary consequence. Universal divine grace supersedes any claim of national particularism, and faith and love take precedence over national identity.¹⁴

The real question is not whether one is an “insider” or an “outsider,” the important question is, when is the insider “out” and the outsider “in?” The surprising thing about Jesus is that he shook and abolished standards and limitations that had become sacred to pious believers. Nowhere is that more pronounced than in the case of some of his own people who nursed the illusion that they had inalienable legal rights to the kingdom established by ancestry, pedigree, and privilege. In countless words and parables he attacked that illusion at the roots.

A turncoat tax collector is justified while Pharisees go empty away. A hated Samaritan, considered unclean by tradition, wins God’s favor to the shame of Priest and Levite. A harlot enters the kingdom before a respected religious authority. Not everyone who piously exclaims, “Lord, Lord,” but the one who does the will of the heavenly Father will gain admittance.

Protestations of piety, orthodoxy, or family title are not enough. In the strong language of John the Baptist even sons of Abraham are warned that God is able from stones to raise-up children to Abraham (Luke 3:8). God needs no genealogical tree. Those who are now at the back will be in front later, and some in front now will be far behind later.

What constitutes a pagan? On Jesus’ terms it has really nothing to do with things like religious identification, tradition, sociology or even theology. It has little to do with stratifications like Christian or non-Christian. Rather it has to do with the gracious acts of God and human spirituality, faith, and love. The “pagan” manifests him/herself as pagan when he/she greets the “good news” negatively. If he/she wants to be gathered into the future of Christ, he/she is “inside;” if not he/she is “outside.”

The surprising thing is that when the Son of Man makes his place and time of appointment with people, he does not always give his name. “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and fed you, or thirsty and gave you drink, a stranger and took you home, or naked and clothed you?” (Matt 25:37 NEB). The casteless find true caste through faith and love and are counted “in” as “soul-brothers” with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the banquet of the kingdom. And the apparent caste, those who call themselves “brethren,” are ultimately “outside” despite claim to table fellowship.

Our real brothers and sisters are not our religious kindred but those who do the will of the Father: who love and sacrifice, who renounce self in taking on the burden of their fellows. People are not to tie themselves to where the name of the Son of Man is actually pronounced, but to where his will and love is being exercised; not, as in the parable of the two sons (Matt 21:28-32), with those who say “Yes” and really mean “No,” but with those who although they may be saying “No” are really acting “Yes.”

The world has been naively divided between Christian and non-Christian, therefore the mission of the church has often been understood in terms of making the non-Christian world (the majority) Christian. The biblical perspective is best interpreted under the rubrics of repentance and unrepentance, believing and unbelieving, love and unconcern.

In the message of Jesus, belonging to the chosen race of God obviously does not solve the weightier issues of faith and love. It may even becloud them. Imagine the startled look of dismay, indeed animosity on the faces of Jesus’ countrymen at the glimpse of the “unqualified” seated with the patriarchs and prophets at the messianic feast and themselves excluded! (Luke 13:28). Or the fate of the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon, and even Sodom, better than that of Capernaum “brought down to the depths” (Matt 11:23, 24)! Not the point of one’s origin but the intensity of one’s selfless love for the neighbor was the true mark of the elect in the judgment.

Love was the criterion under the reign of God. And the boundlessness of that love was its determining trait. Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan is the classic illustration of it. The model of the crossbreed Samaritan of all people, was “a blow in the face for any Jew with self-awareness” and the demonstration, par excellence, “that the commandment to love knows no limits.”¹⁵

III

In his letter to the Romans, Paul deals initially with the problem of the destiny of the Gentile (pagan) world in terms of knowledge and responsibility. Two things must be stated straight away: Paul is not laying the rudiments

for a natural theology, nor is he justifying continuation in the Gentile position. On the contrary the burden of the letter for Gentile and Jew is acceptance of salvation in Christ. But the apostle is grounding his message of divine judgment in the theological assumption that through creation there is available to all people a knowledge of God's power and deity made visible to "the eye of reason, in the things he has made" (Rom 1:21NEB).

All may know God's will. Therefore all are responsible. None are exempt. The retribution from heaven falls upon the wickedness of all. The term used is *anthropoi*, the general term for people. He does not say "Gentiles" (*ethnē*). Nor is his reference to "Gentile Christians," as some have argued.¹⁶ In this regard, all people, believer and pagan, stand equidistant from God and equally responsible to God.

To charge people with "stifling the truth" (Rom 1:18) only makes sense when one affirms that the truth was known to all. To say that the knowledge of God and God's will was distorted and inverted is to say that it was not only available to people but indeed plain to them. God was not only knowable but known, if not in himself, then certainly in his works. God is known because God makes himself known to the human mind.

This making himself known (*kathoratai*) to all through his works is not in order that God may accuse all of their unrighteousness but to "prevent them from seeking vain excuses and to convince them that they are without excuse."¹⁷ Only in this way can one speak of all human responsibility before God. All that is known of God, God has disclosed in their hearts and laid on their consciences.

One can say that what God has traced upon the fabric of the visible creation God has also paralleled by a sensitivity in the human mind and conscience. God has made this so plain that it is impossible for people "to escape the responsibility or ignoring it."¹⁸ The guilt of people lay not in their ignorance but in the perversion of their knowledge. Their fault was not intellectual but religious and moral. They were in need, not of information, but repentance. They did not acknowledge God as God. In their refusal to acknowledge God they fabricated gods of their own design and gave their hearts over to folly, fear and degradation. By their rejection of God's self-disclosure in the things God had made and in God's direction of the world, their minds were lost in darkness and their thinking ended in futility.

We have said that with regard to the knowledge of God's will and the human's responsibility, all people – Jew and Gentile – stand equidistant from God and are equally responsible to God. Is that really the case? The Israelite is in possession of the law of God given to Moses. How then in their ignorance of that law can divine justice be meted out equitably to those Gentiles who reject the knowledge and will of God? Even if it is "not the

hearers of the law who are justified before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified" (Rom 2:13), how can those, to whom the revelation of the law has not been proclaimed, be doers of the law or equally responsible before God? Paul answers, because even though they have not the law, "they do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves... they show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness" (Rom 2:14, 15).

The implication is that by God's creation, the Gentile, like the Jew, is a moral being endowed with a faculty by which he/she knows what God commands even if he/she should not know that God commands it or the nature of the God who commands it.¹⁹ The Gentile may not possess the outside standard of the law of Moses but has a law inscribed on the heart. By the observable fact that at times the Gentile does what is right, even that which is exemplary, and is shamed by conscience when doing wrong, the Gentile attests to the fact that God has made him/her the way he/she is. Both the knowledge and the responsibility of the Gentile derive from God, under whose judgment, like the Jew, the Gentile also stands.²⁰

In his missionary speeches at Lystra (Acts 14:8-18) and Athens (Acts 17:22-31), Paul, in a manner characteristically adapted to a Hellenistic pagan audience, once again deals with the Gentile question. Here, however, he speaks not in terms of the divine judgment and the accountability of all people, but rather in terms of the clue to the nature of God (Acts 14:17), which God himself has left among them in God's own kindnesses, and which they evidence in their worship of the true, unknown God (Acts 17:23).

As contrasted with Rom 1:21, where all were "without excuse," in Acts the ignorance of God by the Gentiles is excusable (Acts 14:16),²¹ although in the latter part of his speech at Athens, Paul reminds the Athenians that the "times of ignorance" are now ended with the proclamation of the gospel (Acts 17:30, 31).

The approach of the apostle, or the "Lukan" Paul,²² in the addresses in Acts differs markedly from the approach in Romans 1 and 2. In Romans the thrust was the dialectic of the law and gospel in which Jew and Gentile both were held accountable. In Acts this dialectic is absent. For the Hellenist of the post-apostolic age, law is treated in a positive rather than in a dialectical or problematic sense. The gospel is seen more in terms of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies; among the Gentiles, in a confirmation-fulfillment, an apologia, of the teaching of the Greek philosophers and poets stressing the unity of humankind under the "universal giver of life and breath and all else," and the nearness or immanence of God (Acts 17:25-28).²³

People were created “to seek God, and, it might be, touch and find him” (Acts 17:27). Much controversy has developed among New Testament scholars over the sources and intentions of the speech of Paul on Mars Hill. Some have contended that the doctrine was simply taken over from contemporary pagan philosophy and had very little connection with biblical or Jewish thought. Others argue that the speech is rooted in Hellenistic Jewish thought and is a piece of Christian propaganda directed toward the Gentiles. Another thesis affirms that the ideas are thoroughly traditional Old Testament and Jewish clothed merely in Stoic expression.

For example, the phrase “in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28) is not a Stoic expression of immanence and pantheism but a parallel of Pauline and Johannine thought of our “being in Christ.”²⁴ In point of fact, however, the language is largely that of contemporary philosophy and the message of God as creator of the world and “everything in it,” coupled with the fact that God “lacks nothing” and is independent of human beings could be echoed in Stoic and Epicurean philosophy.²⁵

In addressing the Athenians, Paul observed that in “everything that concerns religion” they were “uncommonly scrupulous” (Acts 17:22 NEB).²⁶ Was it a tongue in cheek, ironical comment or an honest acknowledgment of an authentic religious desire and awareness? He observed an altar bearing the inscription “To an Unknown God.”²⁷ “What therefore you worship as unknown,” said Paul, “I proclaim to you” (Acts 17:23). In effect, what Paul was saying was that he was not introducing something new or foreign to his hearers, but a God who paradoxically was both known, as the existence of the altar demonstrates, and unknown, as the inscription states. God had manifest himself and was near to them even though they did not know God. There is a likeness here to the response of Paul and Barnabas to the people at Lystra: “He (God) has not left you without some clue to his nature, in the kindness he shows: he sends you rain from heaven and crops in their season, and gives you food and good cheer in plenty” (Acts 14:17).

The objective of Paul’s address in both passages is, of course, the conversion of the Greeks to faith in the true God. Yet, despite the perversion of their temple cult and their cult of images, and the consequent need of repentance, they were not abandoned by God, and in reality, in their religious practice, in their seeking after God in hope of finding him (Acts 17:27), were in some sense concerned with the true and gracious God. By his essentially positive assessment of the pagans’ religious consciousness, Paul was able to establish the accountability of the Gentile world before God and the continuity of God’s self-witness throughout the whole series of human generations including his own.

IV

The universal and particular, as theological principles in tension, constantly come to expression in the Bible. The settings may differ: Israel and the nations, Christianity and Judaism, the church and Hellenistic religion and philosophy, even Jewish and Gentile Christianity. Wherever the tension appears, it is characterized by a concrete, specific, and exclusive claim of revelation, balanced, modified, or interpreted in terms of a more general claim or vice versa.

For example, God’s election of a particular people, Israel, to be the instrument of God’s redemptive work is rightly interpreted only in terms of the universal, that Israel be a light to the nations. Again, the light and wisdom of God mediated throughout all times and in all places by the divine word is truly understood only through the “inhistorization” (H. Richard Niebuhr) of that word in a particular time, place and person. And that historized word in turn becomes the true light and wisdom of the world.²⁸

Nowhere is the dialectic of the cosmic and particular more sharply focused than in the New Testament witness to the Christ. The Fourth Gospel more than the others accents the uniqueness, the “exclusiveness,” of God’s self-revelation in Christ Jesus, yet it does so in the theological setting of a confession of faith that speaks of the cosmic activity of the word.

One can understand the strong particularism of John in a situation of “multiple conflict where the catholic claim for Jesus as the Christ” was being seriously challenged from the side of Jewish traditionalism as well as heretical groups like the Ebionites and Docetists.²⁹ On the one hand, it may be true to say that the “regulative Christological concept” of John’s Gospel is not the Logos but Jesus Christ himself: that the Johannine use of Logos may have closer affinity with the dynamic Old Testament phrase *ʾĕvar Yahweh* (“The word of the LORD”) than with Hellenistic thought; and that the *logos* of the prologue must be interpreted in the light of the earthly life of Jesus the Christ.³⁰ Still it must be pointed out that the prologue-overture in John is concerned with all the activity of God’s word in creation, revelation and redemption. The universal and particular are kept in dialectical tension.

The exegesis of the prologue, especially the interpretation of the *logos*, in John’s Gospel is a much debated and complex section of New Testament literature. Scholarship is by no means in perfect agreement. Apart from such technical problems of authorship and the translation of particular words (e.g., *katelaben*, John 1:5),³¹ discussion has centered around the significance of the Jewish versus the Hellenistic Gentile (perhaps Gnostic) background and influence in the composition of the prologue.

More specifically the debate hinges on the background, meaning, and use of *logos* and the phrases that accompany it. Our interest lies in the total

dimensions of that masterful overture to the career of the incarnate word. If, as C. H. Dodd contends, the Fourth Gospel was “addressed to a wide public consisting of devout and thoughtful persons in the varied and cosmopolitan society of a great Hellenistic city such as Ephesus under the Roman Empire,”³² then the prologue may be understood as a fitting introduction to and a comprehensive summary of the historically concrete yet universal dimension of the divine Word.

The word that became fully and perfectly expressed in the life of Jesus was and is the “energy of Life” urging “all kinds of living things forward in their evolution.”³³ That word as light “seen in the universal mission of Christ, to draw all men to himself,”³⁴ and shining in its full splendor in Christ, was and is the enlightenment of the minds and consciences of all people coming into the world.

In other words, that word and wisdom of God that gives design and meaning to the universe and that has penetrated every level of the world, has been fully and definitively manifested in concrete space and time, in the word made flesh (John 1:14). The writer of the prologue says, in effect, let us assume that the cosmos exhibits a divine meaning that constitutes its reality. I will tell you what the meaning is: it was embodied in the life of Jesus that I will now describe....³⁵

In a sense much of the debate about the Jewish or Greek backgrounds of John’s prologue and their alleged significance for it may appear to be irrelevant. When the prologue is seen and taken in its total dimension, that is, in its universality and particularity, it is foreign neither to the higher reaches of Greek religious thought nor to the historical consciousness of the Jewish religious tradition.

By the same token it is somewhat academic to limit one’s comprehension of *logos* to an either/or of either Jewish or Greek interpretation when one sees it in the context of the whole prologue. Further, to measure the universal activity of God’s word as the light enlightening every person who comes into the world by the criterion of the “word made flesh” in Jesus Christ is not an act of exclusion; it is a concrete way of understanding and including every entry of God into human history, however dimly some may apprehend that reality.

The late Archbishop Nathan Söderblom, in an imaginative but controversial work asks (I think rightly): “Could a comparable faith in divine providence, a comparable religious seriousness and pious practical wisdom in Socrates, or Seneca, or Epictetus be a devilish deception or a self discovered wisdom, but a work of God in the Psalmist or in Paul or Tertullian?”³⁶ Later he adds: “If, however, one has met God in Christ, one can no longer isolate Christ. The man who says: ‘God is revealed in Christ,’ at the same time says:

‘God is revealed in nature.’ The man who says: ‘God is revealed in Christ,’ cannot escape saying: ‘God is revealed in history.’”³⁷ The point we are arguing here, and one that has far reaching significance for later development in our discussion, is not only that the “word made flesh” in Jesus is God’s open secret for our understanding and acceptance of God’s redeeming action in our behalf, but that it is the definitive clue as well for our comprehending the cosmic dimensions of that divine self-activity.

To make out of the “word made flesh” a theological terminal for an exclusivistic faith rather than the pinnacle from which one can look back and all around and ahead, is to isolate Christ and to abridge the dimensions of God’s self-disclosure in all human history. There are basic convictions inherent in the Johannine proclamation that “the word became flesh in Jesus Christ,” which cannot be abandoned without sacrificing the distinctively Christian witness.

To make that affirmation, however, is not to foreclose at the same time God’s personal encounter with people elsewhere. On the contrary, I hold that it is precisely the definitive personal self-disclosure of God in Jesus’ history that convinces us that the living God is continuously making his way into the human spirit through the concrete realities of historic experience. This is not to deny elements of confusion, ambiguity, and perversion in that divine-human encounter, occasioned as it always is by human willfulness and ignorance, as well within Christianity as outside. It is rather to hold that whenever God presses in upon humankind it is a personal engagement, the fullness of which is disclosed in the phenomenon of the incarnate Son of God.

Peter’s apparently unequivocal statement about Jesus to the Jewish “doctors of the law” (Acts 4:5) has often been cited to support a Christian exclusivism: “This Jesus is the stone rejected by the builders which has become the keystone – and you are the builders. There is no salvation in anyone else at all, for there is no other name under heaven granted to men, by which to receive salvation” (Acts 4:11, 12 NEB). Using a metaphor from the Psalter (Ps 118:22) Peter was apparently maintaining that salvation could be gained not through Judaism but only through Jesus.³⁸ In a sense it was quite a Jewish way, recalling Isaiah’s similar manner of speaking about Yahweh (Isa 45:21,22), of making unlimited claim for the significance of Christ.³⁹

I am concerned here with the understanding of the text itself particularly in its context. The concern of the Jewish legalists was the matter of proper authority. “By what power – or by what name have you done this?” The law which, when rightly understood, as Paul also argued, contained the revelation of the will and purpose of God somehow got twisted into an ex-

clusive system of salvation. And “untrained laymen” (Acts 4:13) like Peter and John could scarcely be said to be bona fide dispensers of salvation “*outside* this system,” by whatever name they spoke and acted.

In effect, Peter’s response was an unequivocal rejection of salvation through law, or any religious system as such. Salvation is to be found in Jesus, the rejected cornerstone, not in the religious system. In the language of Paul, Jesus is not only the fulfillment of the law as its goal but the end of the law as a system of salvation (Rom 10:4). To have confined salvation within the Jewish legal system would have been tantamount to making God the God of the Jews only (Rom 3:29). God is also the God of the Gentiles. Faith in Christ, therefore, was not an undermining of the law but “placing law itself on a firmer footing” (Rom 3:31) and by the same token universalizing salvation.

To quote a modern Jewish writer, “Israel can bring the world to God only through Christianity.”⁴⁰ In actuality what is really meant is, “only through Christ,” for, “only through Christianity,” may easily be interpreted (and often has been) as another exclusive system of salvation. Indeed, the phrase “only in Jesus Christ” can be interpreted in such a way that even Christ can be made into a new theological legalism by the church, with the result that the universality of God’s redemptive activity in Jesus Christ becomes another form of exclusivism. Such a possibility moves Schubert Ogden to write:

The claim “only in Jesus Christ” must be interpreted to mean not that God acts to redeem only in the history of Jesus and in no other history, but that the only God who redeems in any history – *although he in fact redeems every history* – is the God whose redemptive action is decisively represented in the word that Jesus speaks and is.⁴¹

To interpret Acts 4:11-12 in such a way as to bind the infinite God to the person of Jesus, is, as Pannenberg rightly observes, “to finitize the infinite God.”⁴² Jesus is the true revealer of the infinite God because in and through his own person, and through his sacrificial obedience to his mission, he opened up the way to the full and future reign of God. The name of Jesus saved the Jews from their own exclusivism, not in order to create another exclusivism of Christianity, but in order that, as Paul says, “the blessing of Abraham should in Jesus Christ be extended to the Gentiles” (Gal 3:14).

Let us return more specifically to the context of Peter’s speech before the Jewish supreme court (Acts 4:9-10). Peter’s declaration of salvation occurs in the context of the “healing” of the cripple. “If we are being asked,”

he said, “by what means this man has been cured (*sesōtai*)... it is by the name of Jesus of Nazareth... that this man stands here before you healthy (*hugiēs*).” The Greek word provides our English word “hygienic.” Salvation here has the force of wholeness, health, well-being.⁴³ A similar meaning is expressed in Jesus’ healing ministry to the woman with a hemorrhage (Matt 9:22), the blind man (Mark 10:52), the leper (Luke 17:19), and the immoral woman whose disease was that of sin (Luke 7:50). In all instances, the meaning is recovery of health, wholeness.

The leaders of the Jewish court trapped in the hierarchical theological structure of religion could not understand the healing salvation actually mediated through the name and person of Jesus. This was no formal theological invocation of a name but the concrete reality of divine healing communicated through this particular person and the fact of his own love for the suffering and sinful.

It was what that name stood for, the *kind* of person God became in Jesus, that personalized healing reality, which Peter witnessed to. To turn the “name of Jesus” into a “false exclusivism” is to confuse the true ultimacy that is in God and that finds its fullness of expression in the re-creative, life-restoring ministry of Jesus. To call upon the name of Jesus is not to set up a dogmatic *terminus* of Christo-monism, or more accurately Jesus-monism, but to behold uniquely in Jesus’ person and mission, the power and mystery of God, a mystery and a power, indeed, which may find expression and be perceived however fragmentarily in other religions.

Still another classical biblical text to buttress a Christian doctrine of exclusivism is Jesus’ response to Thomas’ query, “Lord we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?” “I am the way,” said Jesus, “and the truth and the life; no one come to the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). There is little doubt that this passage, coupled with others (e.g., 1:51; 3:13) in John’s Gospel, is intended to declare that the only true way to the Father is through Jesus Christ. The use of the definite article before each of the three substantives confirms that. The pity is that the passage has often become a dogmatic stereotype to support a principle of exclusivity. It has been rigidly intellectualized. What for John was an expression of the enjoyment of divine reality communicated to the soul, a personal communion with the living God through Christ, has been reduced to a cold, formal, exclusivistic – dogmatic utterance. And as such has led to distortion.

In a real sense, Philip’s request of Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied,” like the Pharisees’ question of Jesus, “Where is your Father?” (John 8:19) were appeals for an authenticated dogmatic proof of the likes of which a theologically wooden interpretation of John 14:6 might well provide.

Jesus' reaction was one of "pained surprise" at Philip and sheer frustration at the lack of understanding from the Pharisees. His declaration, "No man comes to the Father but by me", was not dogmatic dictum or a mere assertion of a claim, but the invitation to a spiritual pilgrimage. Life with Christ (the way), in trust and harmony of will, brings knowledge of reality (truth) and eternal life.

To handle this verse as an exclusionary dogmatic formula is to miss altogether its spiritual intimacy and profundity. To "know the truth" of Christ is more than to weigh his words or hearken to his claim; it is to be one with him, to be "of the truth," to belong to the truth, to have one's existence determined by that truth.⁴⁴ Only through such living communion with Christ does one come to the real experience of God as Father and a full understanding of the Father's presence among human beings.

To exaggerate the text into a discriminatory dogma is to efface and lose it. As Bultmann rightly observes, there is no short cut into that truth and that life which *is* Christ. It does not exist as a "doctrine" or in a "condensed form like a truth of science." A person "has to take the way to it for himself, for only on the way does this truth disclose itself."⁴⁵

In conclusion, the Bible offers no formal reflection on pagan religious systems nor a specific theological model for evaluating them. It does take seriously the reality and fate of humankind in their other-believing or unbelieving existence. It does provide, in the concrete experiences of God's creative and redemptive activity with humankind, criteria or postures for understanding positively humanity's religious history.

Among such criteria are:

1. the particularity and universality of a divine grace, which in a profound sense embraces all humankind, so that no one stands "outside" God.
2. the spiritual gifts of faith and love, rooted in divine grace, which often transcend boundaries of traditional orthodoxy.
3. the universal knowledge of the will of God and all people's accountability before the judgment of God.
4. the gospel as the fulfillment not only of Old Testament prophecy but in some sense also the insight of pagan philosophy and poetry, though both are subjected to the ultimate criterion of the gospel.
5. the universal dimensions of God's active word and wisdom in the historical experience of all humankind, but definitively disclosed in that word made flesh in the whole phenomenon of Jesus Christ.

Notes

- 1 Carl F. Hallencreutz, *New Approaches to Men of Other Faiths* (Research Pamphlet 18; Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1970). The statement appears in the introduction to the pamphlet written by Dr. S. J. Samartha, Associate Secretary, Dept. on Studies in Mission and Evangelism, World Council of Churches, Geneva.
- 2 Johannes Blauw, "Biblical View of Man in His Religion," in *The Theology of the Christian Mission* (ed. Gerald H. Anderson; Hightstown, N.J.: McGraw Hill, 1961) 40.
- 3 See Martin Noth, *The Old Testament World* (trans. Victor I. Gruhn; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966); William Foxwell Albright, *Yabweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968); G. Ernest Wright, *The Old Testament Against Its Environment* (Chicago: H. Regnery, 1950); Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (Anchor Bible; Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1966); C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Reynoldsburg, Ohio: Cambridge, 1965).
- 4 See Johannes Munck, *Acts of the Apostles* (Anchor Bible; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967) 171-172; R. P. C. Hanson, *The Acts in the Revised Standard Version: With Introduction and Commentary* (The New Clarendon Bible; Oxford: Clarendon, 1967) 177-178.
- 5 G. H. P. Thompson, *The Letters of Paul to the Ephesians, to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) 121.
- 6 Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (2 vols; trans. D. M. G. Stalker; New York: Harper & Row, 1965) 1:161-165.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 164.
- 8 Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Old Testament Library; trans. John H. Marks; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) 130.
- 9 Hans Küng, "The World Religions in God's Plan of Salvation," in *Christian Revelation and World Religions* (ed. Joseph Neuner; London: Burns & Oates, 1967) 41.
- 10 von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2:343-344.
- 11 Dennis J. McCarthy states: "Covenant must be understood as divine grace. The covenant of God is not earned but bestowed. The continuance of the covenant is not dependent upon human obedience notwithstanding its demand for human response. Grace precedes and is the condition for the laws of God rather than 'a consequence earned through the laws'" (*Old Testament Covenant* [Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1972] 3, 54).
- 12 For a discussion of whether the verse is meant to refer to the Gentiles or to Diaspora Jews, see Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: the Proclamation of Jesus* (trans. John Bowden; New York: Scribner, 1971) 246. See also Isa 45:6, 49:12; Mal 1:11 for the idea that many Gentiles will be accepted into the Kingdom.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 116.
- 14 See E. J. Tinsley, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965) 150; Jeremias, *Theology of the New Testament*, 247.
- 15 Jeremias, *Theology of the New Testament*, 212-213.
- 16 Franz J. Leenhardt, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Cleveland: World, 1961) 83.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 64.
- 18 W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1945) 39. The word *gnoston* may mean "what

- can be known” or “what *is* known.” Consequently, Paul is not necessarily saying that everything that “can be known of God has been disclosed to the Gentiles,” but rather that “what they *do* know they know clearly and surely.”
- 19 Leenhardt, *Epistle to the Romans*, 80-81.
 - 20 See Ernest Best, *Letter of Paul to the Romans* (Reynoldsburg, Ohio: Cambridge, 1967) 28-29.
 - 21 See R. P. C. Hanson, *The Acts in the Revised Standard Version*, 149: “But in Romans 3:25 he speaks of the ‘divine forbearance’ which had ‘passed over former sin.’ And we have already seen examples in Luke of ignorance regarded as both excusable and culpable (Acts 3:17; 13:27).”
 - 22 See Hans Conzelmann, “Address of Paul on the Areopagus,” in *Studies in Luke-Acts* (ed. Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Martyn; New York: Abington, 1966) 217-30. Conzelmann’s thesis is that the Areopagus speech was not really a sermon by Paul but a highly stylized literary creation of Luke indicative of how the Christian community of 100 C.E. confronted Greek philosophy with the Christian message.
 - 23 See Bornkamm, “The Missionary Stance of Paul in I Corinthians 9 and in Acts,” in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, 194-207.
 - 24 See footnote 4 for sources of the discussion.
 - 25 J. W. Packer, *Acts of the Apostles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966) 148.
 - 26 RSV: “very religious”; Conzelmann: “devout.”
 - 27 See Munck, *Acts of the Apostles*, 171: “The Altar ‘to an Unknown God’ has not been found in Athens, but altars to unknown gods have been unearthed in other cities. In polytheistic religions such altars may have been erected to allay the fear that some gods might be forgotten.” If so, one may see a parallel in the erection of Tombs to the Unknown Soldier in various parts of the world.
 - 28 See George A. Lindbeck, “Unbelievers and the ‘Sola Christi,’” *Dialog* 12 (Summer 1973) 183: “The more exclusive sounding New Testament passages (e.g. Luke 16:16) must be interpreted in the light of the more universalist ones (Col 1:20; Eph 1:9, 10; Phil 2:10, 11; 1 John 2:2; Acts 3:21) rather than vice versa as most post-biblical tradition has done.”
 - 29 George Johnston, *The Spirit—Paraclete in the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) 38-39.
 - 30 See T. E. Pollard, *Johannine Christology and the Early Church* (Reynoldsburg, Ohio: Cambridge, 1970) 38-39.
 - 31 See Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 8; H. Kraemer, *Religion and the Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956) 274; A. C. Bouquet, *The Christian Faith and Non-Christian Religions* (New York: Harper, 1958) 156.
 - 32 C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965) 9.
 - 33 William Temple, *Readings in St. John’s Gospel* (London: MacMillan, 1963) 9.
 - 34 Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 284.
 - 35 *Ibid.*, 285.
 - 36 Nathan Söderblom, *The Nature of Revelation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) 42.
 - 37 *Ibid.*, 122.
 - 38 W. A. Visser’t Hooft has taken the theme of this biblical passage as a title of a book on Christian universalism and syncretism (*No Other Name* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963]).
 - 39 R. P. C. Hanson further observes that there is some evidence in the early Jewish-Christian apocalyptic literature that “The Name” was used as a title for Jesus (*The Acts in the Revised Standard Version*, 78).
 - 40 See Will Herberg, “A Jew Looks at Jesus,” in *The Finality of Jesus* (ed. Dow Kirkpatrick; Nashville: Abington, 1966) 96.
 - 41 Schubert M. Ogden, *The Reality of God: and other essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) 173.
 - 42 See Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology* (2 vols; trans. George H. Kehm; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971, 1983) 1:114.
 - 43 For an enlightening explanation of this passage, see John Baillie, *The Sense of the Presence of God* (New York: Scribner, 1962) 195-196.
 - 44 See Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: a Commentary* (trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 606-607.
 - 45 *Ibid.*, 606.

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Martin Luther in the Third Reich: Recent Research on Luther as Iconic Force in Hitler's Germany

Guy C. Carter

*Das Wort sie sollen lassen stahn, und kein' Dank dazu haben.
Er ist bei uns wohl auf dem Plan, mit seinem Geist' und Gaben.
Nehmen sie den Leib, Gut, Ehr, Kind und Weib,
laß fahren dahin, sie haben's kein' Gewinn.
Das Reich muß uns doch bleiben.*
Martin Luther 1529

Though the contrary view has been in circulation since the publication of Ernst Klee's *Die SA Jesu Christi* ("The Storm Troops of Jesus Christ") in 1989 and Doris Bergen's *Twisted Cross* in 1996,¹ the standard narrative of the so-called 'German Church Struggle' (*Kirchenkampf*) under National Socialism (hereafter, *NS* = National Socialism, National Socialist, National Socialists) in most works on the subject written and published in English follows that of Lutheran church historian Eric Gritsch in his 2002 *A History of Lutheranism*:

When the president of Germany, Paul von Hindenburg... officially transferred his office to Adolf Hitler in 1933, German Lutherans were confronted with a government hostile to their Judeo-Christian tradition.... Interest in religion declined in the wake of the ongoing secularization of the new political situation. Adopting a racist stance grounded in the old myths of a Nordic superrace of Aryans, the new German government coordinated all sectors of public and private life to engage in a struggle against Communism and Judaism, its perceived

enemies. Communists were viewed as the Slavic menace that threatened racial purity and Western culture; Jews were blamed for Europe's economic woes and seen as greedy subhuman Semites."²

Gritsch's judgment stands in a direct line from Arthur C. Cochrane's *The Church's Confession under Hitler* to John Conway's 1968 *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches*.³ The first part of this paper will attempt to demonstrate how, contrary to Gritsch and the majority of historians of this period, *NS*, in its actual political form and in the self-understanding of the highest *NS* Party elites, was hardly hostile to Christian tradition and institutions, provided that that Christianity could be 'coordinated' (*gleichgeschaltet werden*) with the aspirations and aims of the Party and the Third Reich. In the second part, the *NS* obsession with one particular figure in the history of Christianity, Martin Luther, will be examined.

This paper will survey Klee's and Bergen's work together with three more recent studies of Christianity under *NS*. These are Richard Steigmann-Gall's *Holy Reich*, Susannah Heschel's *The Aryan Jesus* and Holy Cross Father Kevin Spicer's *Hitler's Priests*.⁴ These studies demonstrate two points concerning the *NS* reliance on both Christianity and Luther. First, National Socialism and movements aligned with it were anything but self-consciously anti-Christian or even predominantly paganist. *NS* and the highest *NS* leadership were self-consciously Christian, although prepared to sweep aside traditional churchly standards of orthodoxy and practice. Second, *NS* Party elites and their *German Christian* (*Deutsche Christen*) confederates in the Protestant territorial churches (and also, to a remarkable extent, *NS* clergy of the Roman Catholic Church in Germany and Austria) exhibited a genuine fascination with the life and teaching of Martin Luther, allowing themselves to be inspired and guided by the life and teaching of Luther. This *NS* Luther phenomenon was genuine and formative for the rise of *NS* Germany and the later union of Germany and Austria in the Greater German Reich. The *NS* Luther phenomenon was occasioned by more than the Luther Jubilee Year of 1933 and its serendipity with the *NS* rise to power. As an iconic figure without parallel in German church and political history, Martin Luther would be made to play a powerful role in validating the Third Reich's claim to interpret and to recapitulate and reincarnate the heroic German past.

I. Christianity in the Third Reich

Until the appearance of these works by Klee, Bergen, Steigmann-Gall, Heschel, and Spicer, virtually every rehearsal of the history of the Christian churches under *NS* was based, directly or indirectly, on the following ex-

cerpt from *Hitler Speaks*, a book purporting to be a reportage of private conversations between the author/editor and Adolf Hitler:

Neither of the confessions – Catholic or Protestant, they are both the same – has any future left. At least not for the Germans. [Italian] Fascism may perhaps make its peace with the Church in God's name. I will do it too. Why not? But that won't stop me stamping out Christianity in Germany, root and branch. One is either a Christian or a German. You can't be both.... The parsons will be made to dig their own graves. They will betray their God to us. They will betray anything for the sake of their miserable little jobs and incomes.⁵

On the basis of both internal and external evidence, *Hitler Speaks* has been conclusively proven to be a forgery, produced for the purposes of British war propaganda in the first year of World War II.⁶

This spurious citation insinuates an utter cynicism of the *NS* Leader (*Führer*) toward Christianity and the churches. It continues to circulate, virus-like, into new publications and to nest in old ones where it has not been excised through subsequent edition. Both church and non-church historians cling to it as it makes their work simple, casting the German churches and people in a sympathetic light from the outset, all victims along with the rest of Europe of the conscienceless and anti-Christian scheming of Adolf Hitler and his henchmen. It followed from this now discredited premise that all *NS* and most *German Christian* avowals of fidelity to the Christian faith and culture of over a thousand years were little more than feigned faith and opportunistic conniving. Anecdotal evidence of persons who officially left their respective churches because of *NS* commitments may reinforce this view, but such was not the experience of most Germans living from 1933 to 1945. The truth is more sinister, and perhaps more difficult to bear: neither Adolf Hitler nor the *NS* in the main were in the least insincere in their Christian faith, however heretical, heterodox, or simply idiosyncratic they were in its application, and however horrendously criminal the ultimate outcomes of this political theology undoubtedly were.

What were some of the characteristics of *NS* that caused its adherents to relate to Christianity rather than to neo-paganism or to some form of state atheism as in the Soviet Union? According to Karla Ploewe, *NS* developed and offered a particular view of modernity and of the future, one she terms “post-modern.” Marxism-Leninism, with its future-oriented doctrine of dialectical materialism based on immutable laws of history and economics, viewed the present as a revolutionary present, as the beginning of the destruction of the hegemonic past of aristocracy and capitalism, a present

building toward a future in which a completely new type of fully-evolved proletarian humanity and world order would emerge. *NS* took the inverse view based on what can only be described as truly a theology of the German ethnic community and of the totalitarian state that makes a total demand on the people. That community and demand are based on divine destiny. For *NS*, the present of the German national awakening marked the break with the destructive and degenerative process to which Communism was devoted. The new Germany marked the beginning not of a completely new age but rather an antiquarian epoch committed to recovery of the best of the past, a divine past, and a divine in-breaking into the present in a manner unimpeded by liberal democracy, by cosmopolitanism or by Jewry. It was the task of the German *Volk* to give itself to this process fully and to remove all obstacles to its realization.⁷

For a minority of *NS*, this pointed toward a vision of recovery of the German pre-Christian and even pre-Roman past. But when, for example, the Ludendorffs pushed their paganist vision to the extent of insisting on ridding the new Germany and the German future of Christianity and specifically of any mention of Jesus Christ as unalterably Jewish, their Party membership was revoked on orders from the very highest authority.⁸ *NS* paganists had to accommodate themselves grudgingly, but quietly, to a coexistence with Christianity in a peculiarly traditional form as fostered by the Party and its Leader, Adolf Hitler.⁹

Had Erich Ludendorff risen to the top of the *NS* hierarchy, then neo-paganism might have held sway in the Third Reich. Hitler's churchmanship may have been idiosyncratic, but his working Christology was in at least some respects orthodox. Examples of this include his reference, in a never completed *magnum opus*, the first section of which was devoted to the Bible, to Jesus as the “true God” whose struggle inspired his own, and his declaration at an *NS* Christmas party given in Munich in 1926, that the goal of *NS* was to “translate the ideals of Christ into deeds” and to “complete the work which Christ had begun but could not finish.”¹⁰ In his *Mein Kampf* (edited with the help of Catholic priest, Father Hubert Stempfle)¹¹ references to religion, church and Christianity are made with respect whereas references to pantheism, to panentheism, to paganism as a viable world-view, or for that matter to a deistic let alone agnostic view of God, are completely absent.¹²

The ‘Positive Christianity’ endorsed by the *NS* Party in Point 24 of its platform could best be described as ‘Neo-Mediæval,’ that is, as a repristination of the German imperial past. Whether they were devout Christians, such as Lutheran Walter Buch, the brown priest Joseph Lortz, the devoutly practicing Catholic layman Heinrich Himmler (until he became attracted to Islam), disaffectedly complex Catholics, such as Adolf Hitler, or nominal

post-Communist Catholics, such as Joseph Goebbels or Alfred Rosenberg, they all understood themselves to be Christian traditionalists, however impatient many *NS* and *German Christian* leaders were with ecclesiastical dogmatic and confessional inertia. These quixotic champions of a German past shamed by Versailles now worked to make possible a glorious breakthrough to the present and carry Germany to unparalleled greatness and imperial domination. They were united in their rage toward a minority they all agreed had been, and for the moment still was, the primary obstacle to achieving that goal – the Jews.

An array of Christian organizations in Germany competed with each other in supporting this return to the idealized past. The *Protestant League (Evangelischer Bund)*, whose national president until his defection to Great Britain was Hitler's chosen successor, Rudolf Hess, declared itself firmly behind the Party's and the Reich's tough new policy on segregation and expulsion of the Jews and on subjugation of the Slavic nations and peoples of the East.¹³ It was, after all, the new *NS* state that had called for a conclusion to the decades-long project of uniting the historically established Protestant 'Land' or Territorial Churches in a single Reich Church confederation (the *German Protestant Church [Deutsche Evangelische Kirche]*, forerunner of the post-war *Evangelical Church in Germany [Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland]*), and had summoned Protestants to a role in the national awakening. This attitude was by no means restricted to the various *German Christian* movements.¹⁴

The Roman Catholic Church in Germany, as well as in Austria, was at first uncooperative and resistant to its 'coordination' (*Gleichschaltung*) within the Nazi state. The relationship of the German Catholic Church to the State can best be expressed as one of mutual suspicion and envy. Many in the Roman Church looked admiringly on as Hitler and the Third Reich breathed new life into the nation while giving homage to Germany's ancient Catholic greatness in Charlemagne's First Reich. Hitler and other Nazi elites, most notably Himmler, admired the mystical antiquity, the discipline and the institutional cohesion of the Catholic Church. But the Catholic Church's existence and authority did not depend on the approval or encouragement of any secular state, and Catholicism was and is simultaneously church, world-view with its own moral and social teaching (displacing any ideology), and also state (in the form of the Vatican city-state), making no distinction between nations or races, in no need of ideological tutelage from the Fascist, the *NS*, or any new secular state in its infancy. The Catholic Church in Germany had survived Bismark's 'culture war' (*Kulturkampf*) intact except for the laws governing marriage. In Weimar Germany, thanks to the ruling (predominantly Catholic) Central Party and the Social Demo-

cratic Party, German Catholics were in a stronger position than ever. Until a formal agreement was forged, not between Greater Germany and the German-Austrian episcopate but between Germany and the Holy See, the *NS* State and the Vatican State, no official warming or offers of co-operation from the Catholic side were forthcoming.¹⁵

Many others among the German Catholic clergy, most notably Father Joseph Lortz, took a different view and heard in the mystical tones of the *NS* awakening the opportunity for a synthesis between throne and altar that had not existed since Late Antiquity and Charlemagne.¹⁶ Lortz, his close friend, Father Richard Kleine, and many others sought to open up dialog with the infant ideology, but the almost comical reaction of the *Reich Security Service (Sicherheitsdienst)* put an end to this initiative. Assuming that someone of Lortz' caliber and stature in the church would have joined the Party only to infiltrate it, the *Reich Security Service* reported to the Party leadership that the priest's dialogue initiative, as expressed in a book on which Lortz collaborated with Kleine and others, was most likely intended to confuse the *NS* rank and file.¹⁷ For the *German Christians*, the Party's distancing of itself from them and the Reich's appointment of a Commissar for Church affairs in reaction to the November 1933 'Sports Palace Scandal' involving *German Christian* rally speaker Reinhold Krause's call for elimination of the Old Testament and the Pauline corpus from the Bible indeed hurt their pride and diminished their role. There were, however, significant *German Christian* survivals as documented in Susannah Heschel's magisterial work on the institutional survivals of the *German Christian* movement's focus on Walter Grundmann's "Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life" (*Institut zum Studium und zur Beseitigung des jüdischen Einflusses auf das deutsche Kirchenleben*), which demonstrates the impact this ultimately had on both German Church life and academia throughout the war and after 1945.¹⁸ Even after their prestige and influence was limited by the Reich Protector, Reinhard Heydrich, and the Reich Commissariate for Religious Affairs, many *German Christian* church leaders who had received appointments in the chaotic days of the formation of the *German Protestant Church* remained in power and at their parochial posts throughout the duration of World War II until the capitulation in May of 1945, and in some cases beyond that point.¹⁹

Martin Luther and the Lutheran Reformation, as a shibboleth in the German past and as implicitly inseparable from the *NS* understanding of 'Positive Christianity' in Point 24 of its party program, was naturally a problem for Catholics in the Third Reich, as much for practicing laity and lower clergy as for prelates. This was not seen as a problem for all those Catholics who were either *NS* Party members or sympathizers, a prime ex-

ample being Reformation historian and Luther scholar, Father Joseph Lortz. In the second part, this question will also be investigated: how did not only the NS Party leadership as well as the various formations of Protestant, mostly Lutheran, *German Christians*, but also the small yet influential cadre of Catholic clerics belonging to the NS Party and working quietly under the doctrinal radar of Rome for the Party's goals appropriate the arch-heretic Luther?²⁰

II. Martin Luther as Popular Phenomenon and Iconic Force in the Third Reich

The life and teaching of Martin Luther were appropriated by NS in both its political and religious expression. This occurred in four main ways. (1) That which was understood to have been Luther's *Christological biblical hermeneutic*, especially the 'canon within the canon' (*Kanon-im-Kanon*), was embraced with a renewed interest and zeal. This theological renewal was characterized by an exaggerated and misunderstood distinction between the New Testament and the Septuagint/Hebrew Bible, between 'Law and Gospel' in Luther, and was made to serve an anti-Jewish distinction between Jesus of Nazareth and the Jewish people that went well beyond Luther and his historic frame of reference. (2) The *German Christian* application of some version of Luther's Augustinian Two Kingdoms Doctrine, was made to justify absolute loyalty to the NS totalitarian state. (3) Reference was made to Luther as an heroic figure of German nationalism to justify the German state and church going their own ways apart from the League of Nations and the Ecumenical Movement (or from the Church of Rome if need be, viz., against the Papacy, in the case of the 'brown priests'). (4) Publication and distribution of Luther's vicious polemical attacks on the Jews of the 16th century as a means of justifying NS state policy of marginalization, harassment, and destruction of 20th century Jewry and as a means of enlisting active Christian support and participation in that policy as a pan-European *Aryan* project.

1. Luther's Biblical Hermeneutic in the Service of Nazi Christology

Martin Luther's understanding of Christ as the essential content of the Bible, as the so-called "canon within the canon" of Scripture, expresses the unity of revelation and of the Old and New Testaments. This theme was mishandled by the *German Christians* to split the two Testaments from each other and to separate out the Jewish element from Scripture and Christ as well. According to Luther's profoundly Johannine theology, the Incarnate Christ is *the* Word of God speaking out of each page of Scripture and in the

Church, and this very hermeneutic can be seen to develop in Luther's *Old Testament* exposition from the beginning of his career as a professor of Bible at Wittenberg.²¹ Christ alone, reconciling God and humanity, heaven and earth, is living Word of God in an unequivocal sense. The Scriptural manifestation of the Divine Word is part of the process of the Incarnation and in no way separate from it. Any attempt to separate Word of God from Scripture is out of bounds for Luther, just as in Lutheran teaching Christ the Incarnate Word cannot be separated from the elements of the Holy Eucharist consecrated through the Word in Scripture. Any attempt to apply Scripture in a way that does not ultimately support and proclaim the reconciling Word of God needs to be corrected by a rule or *canon*, that being that it is Christ alone who is to be sought, found, heard and heeded in Scripture. The unity of Old Testament and New Testament, emphatically confessed by the church since the condemnation of Marcion and the Creed and canons of Nicæa, is absolute in Luther. The NS appropriation of Luther's canon within the canon, however, deliberately and grossly ignored this detail, on the basis of what passed for good scholarly authority.

Marcionism, which disposed of the Old Testament altogether, was elevated to the level of theological science in 1924 by Adolf von Harnack's publication of *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God*. In the *German Christians* Harnack's teaching would find apt pupils. The *German Christian* movement as a whole may be justly described as solidly and consistently Marcionite. *German Christian* leaders Joachim Hossenfelder, Ludwig Müller, and Friedrich Wienecke were all openly Marcionite in their approach to Scripture.²² *German Christian* religion teacher Reinhold Krause would go further than Marcion in his scandalous utterance at the November 13, 1933, Luther Day rally before the assembled *German Christians* of the Berlin NS Party *Gau* (district) in which he called for the elimination not only of the Old Testament but also of "Rabbi Paul" (and thus the entire Biblical basis for Lutheranism as well).²³ It was precisely this speech that caused dozens of conservative *German Christian* church and academic figures such as Paul Althaus and Friedrich Gogarten to resign their memberships and subscriptions in *German Christian* organizations immediately. The Krause speech stimulated the opposite reaction from the paganist wing of the *German Christian* movement.²⁴

2. Luther's 'Two Kingdoms Doctrine' in Nazi Mode

The second principal NS use of a prominent motif in Luther's theology and political thought involves the Augustinian 'doctrine of the two kingdoms,' 'two spheres' or 'two realms.' An unholy triangle joining Luther to some version of this doctrine and then to alleged German passivity in the face of to-

talitarian injustice has been widely popularized by the American journalist-historian, William Shirer, in his 1959 *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. The imprint of Luther's character and mentality on the Germans and their political thought condemned them, Shirer wrote, to "a mindless and provincial political absolutism which reduced the vast majority of the German people to poverty, to a horrible torpor and a demeaning subservience."²⁵ But, is the trust Germans placed in a traditionalist totalitarian state different than, for example, the misplaced Dutch trust in their own government during the initial phase of the German occupation, a trust and subservience that lulled the population of the occupied Netherlands into thinking they were still in control of their own citizens, including their own Jewish citizens? Luther's theology of the two kingdoms was hardly unique in a Christian Europe already marked by Augustinianism for 1,000 years before the Reformation. It was, however, mined by those NS Party members and sympathizers who sought to lend theological respectability to a totalitarian state that replaced the impotent Weimar Republic.

No doctrine of Luther's was more intensively studied and debated in the 1933 Luther Jubilee Year than the Two Kingdoms Doctrine. Both *German Christian* theologians and their confessionalist opponents used it to express their own political thought and theology of society. Conservative *German Christian* members (until the Krause scandal), Gogarten and Althaus, used the Two Kingdoms Doctrine against what they saw as the anemic, half-formed, essentially 'alien' and 'Catholic/Jewish' parliamentary democracy of the Weimar Republic ('Catholic' because of the *Central Party*, forerunner of today's *Christian Democratic Party* and *Christian Democratic Union*, and 'Jewish' because many leaders of the *Social Democratic Party* were Jewish, the two parties forming a ruling coalition in the Weimar Republic).²⁶

To this day in German Protestant church and theological circles, those who identify strongly with the *Confessing Church* will tend to chide Lutherans for their clinging to the Two Kingdoms Doctrine. I think that this is true for two reasons. First, the 1933 'Bethel Confession' (*Betheler Bekenntnis*) of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Hermann Sasse et al. had made skillful use of the Two Kingdoms Doctrine to call the NS state to moral and civil responsibility, but it was only one voice, and a still-born one at that.²⁷ Paul Althaus, however, had and, for that matter, still has a reading public of immense size within Germany and internationally. It was Althaus' conservative *German Christian* use of the Two Kingdoms Doctrine as an apologist for the Third Reich that left the most lasting impression, thus associating the doctrine in the minds of many with the *German Christian* movement. Also, it would be Karl Barth and his 'Theological Declaration,' and not Bonhoeffer-Sasse and the Bethel Confession, who would carry the day and unify the opposition to

the *German Christians* at the First Synod of the Confessing Church at Barmen-Gemarke in May 1934. As a Calvinist, Barth emphatically rejected both the Lutheran Law-Gospel hermeneutic and the Two Kingdoms Doctrine in any form. Thus, rejection of the Two Kingdoms Doctrine is associated with Barmen.

3. Luther as German National Hero

To them [the 'Marathon Runners of History'] belong not only the truly great statesmen, but all other great reformers as well. Beside Frederick the Great stands Martin Luther... as well as Richard Wagner.²⁸

Paganists of the intellectual *German Faith Movement*-stripe might carp about Luther's "half-Reformation,"²⁹ but the *Führer* thought Luther was made of sound German stuff, proclaiming Luther in Hitler's own 'Table Talk' (*Tischreden*) to be "the first great revolutionary."³⁰ Dubbed by others as "implicitly the first National Socialist,"³¹ Luther served the theological and ideological purposes of both the NS Party and the *German Christians* in his historic role as both reformer and father of the German nation.³² Conservative *German Christians* such as Althaus pointed to Luther and the Lutheran Reformation as the most characteristically German expression of folk spirituality and religion.³³ Emanuel Hirsch believed, in direct contradiction to Karl Barth and probably in concert with the vast majority of German Protestants, that God in fact had spoken and did speak to the German people through Luther in that Luther not only literally translated but also existentially transposed Christianity for Germans of his time.³⁴ The following passage from Klaus Scholder sums up this use of Luther by the *German Christians* in support of the 'German national rising' (*deutsche Nationalerhebung*):

The Luther text most frequently quoted at this time came from a 1521 letter, originally about the translation of Bible texts into German: *Germanis meis natus sum, quibus et serviam* [Luther to Nicholas Gerbel, 1 November 1521, *WA Briefe* 2, no. 435,397]. Now this remark appeared in the form: 'I was born for my beloved Germans; it is them I want to serve,' repeated *ad nauseam* as evidence of Luther's völkisch mission to the German nation. And from one end of the country to the other it was proclaimed as at the Jubilee celebrations in Göttingen: "Let us be instructed by the prophet of the Germans to heed the call given to us and respond to it in the decisive hour. For both belong inseparably together: Luther and Germany."³⁵

1933 was a year marked by a plethora of Protestant and *NS* coincidences. Or were they? The serendipity of the 450th Luther Jubilee, the uniting Synod of the *German Protestant Church* and the first year of the Third Reich was seen by many as providential and as a fulfillment of the Reformer's ideal.³⁶ The precise timing of the *NS* rise to power and the *German Christian* movement that shadowed it are important to bear in mind where contemporary German understandings and uses of Luther are concerned, because 1933, the 450th anniversary of Martin Luther's birth, represented in some sense the zenith in German Luther scholarship and interest on the part of such scholars as Erick Seeberg, Ernst Wolf and Karl Holl. Whether viewed as coincidental or as providential, this serendipity played an unmistakably strong role in the momentum that placed the work and popular memory of Martin Luther before the eyes of the German people at precisely the time Adolf Hitler's star was rising.

A coincidence, or providence, on a smaller scale preceded the big Reformation and Luther celebrations of October and November 1933 by just a month. That was the centennial of the opening of Pastor Heinrich Wichern's settlement house in Hamburg (*Das Rauhe Haus [the Rough House]*) in which the modern Advent wreath was invented and developed by trial and error and where also was born the whole 'Inner Mission' (*Innere Mission*), i.e., home mission movement of the 19th century, whose champion had been none other than devout Lutheran Otto von Bismarck, in simultaneity with other such movements of Christian outreach to the urban and industrial poor in Great Britain and elsewhere. In the case of the Inner Mission, this also meant the inception of communities of celibate male 'deacons' (*Diakonen*) parallel to the already burgeoning 'deaconess' movement in foundations such as Kaiserswerth, Neuendettelsau and, later, in the 1850s, the Bodelschwingh Institution's Bethel bei Bielefeld, where the Bethel Confession had been framed behind closed doors scarcely a month earlier. The celebration lasted a week and took on the form of a revival. *NS* Party Schools Director Hans Schemm was one of the principal speakers. All manner of other Party dignitaries and Hamburg Lutheran Church hierarchs and lower clergy were there. The commingling of *NS* Party, *German Christian*, and established church hierarchs, some of whom answered to both previous descriptions, prompted the only half-joking suggestion that the name *Das Rauhe Haus* be changed to *Das Braune Haus* (The Brown House).³⁷ Already the Inner Mission had contributed many of its Deacons and Deacons-in-information to the national effort as concentration camp guards. The Inner Mission actually ran its own concentration camp at Kuhlen in Emsland. It was paid by the Reich Interior Ministry for each prisoner it incarcerated.³⁸

The *Rauhe Haus/Braune Haus* celebration was a local affair. The

Luther Year was to be national, and on a massive scale. Minister of Religious Affairs (*Kultusminister*) Wilhelm Frick saw to pressing all the powers of the *Volk* into the effort, with the exception of Catholic school children who were not required to participate. The Papal Nuncio, Eugenio Pacelli (the future Pope Pius XII) demurred officially to non-*NS* Foreign Minister Neurath, asking if making Luther the subject of a national celebration was not rather prejudicial to the country's Catholics, nearly one half of the population in 1933. The Lutheran Neurath replied that he was quite sure the Catholic Church had been known to hold celebrations without consideration of Protestant sensibilities. The state, still represented by Weimar Republic President and retired Field Marshall Paul von Hindenburg who was prominently in attendance, bore most of the expense for the Luther Year directly. Arrangements in all *NS Gaue* (districts based on ancient German tribal boundaries) were lavish verging on the extravagant for a country just climbing up from its second economic depression in less than 20 years.³⁹ Hans Schemm was on hand again, after his warm-up engagement in Hamburg, fairly preaching his message for Luther's birthday on the theme, "Our religion is Christ, our politics is Fatherland."⁴⁰ No parallel between the Reformer and the *Führer* went unnoticed. Walter Buch, head of the *NS* Party court of adjudication and father-in-law of Martin Bormann, pointed out that the social teaching of both reformers and prophets were identical, viz., on the dignity of the great German *Volk*, on the sanctity of the family, and on the danger posed by the Jews.⁴¹ Looking back on the Luther Year from the distance of 1939, *German Christian* Martin Redecker wrote that *NS* is essentially an expression of Lutheranism in that it was through Luther that primal Germanic themes of freedom and will erupted.⁴² The somewhat occultist Siegfried Leffler averred that Adolf Hitler was in fact a reincarnation of Martin Luther.⁴³ The March 1939 Bad Godesberg Declaration of the Grundmann Institute repudiating internationalism in the church and Judaism also affirmed in *NS* a fulfillment of Martin Luther's reformation.⁴⁴

William Shirer points to the German Peasants' Revolt of 1525, accurately stating that Luther was, through his writings rousing the Germans to throw off the yoke of their oppressors, more than indirectly responsible for it. Having indicted Luther for political irresponsibility and a failure of civil courage in the face of the enraged aristocracy, Shirer then draws a striking parallel as an example of a flaw in Luther as a leader: Luther did not always take responsibility for the power of his own words. Shirer states accurately that Luther was indeed directly responsible through his writings for rousing the peasants to revolt and throw off the shackles of aristocratic tyranny in 1525, though Luther later blamed the local priest and free-

dom-fighter, Thomas Münzer, whom Luther himself had recommended for his parish call. There is, as Shirer points out, a sheer *viciousness* with which Luther calls for the suppression of the rebellion and an equal viciousness with which he calls for the conversion, expulsion or even destruction of the Jews.⁴⁵

What else did *NS* find to admire in Martin Luther? There was the courageous and careful thinking Luther of *On the Freedom of a Christian*, but also the reckless Luther of *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. There was also the bitter, cynical and vindictive Luther of the *Smalcald Articles* who was willing to divide the Catholic Church in the West and its society from top to bottom, to reject wise counsel and the opportunity for genuine reforming reconciliation with Rome when this was offered by the new, Flemish Pope Adrian, who was himself willing finally to bring down the whole house of Christendom in a flaming apotheosis in the very face of the Ottoman threat approaching closer to the heart of Europe by the day. It seems plausible that Adolf Hitler and his Party comrades must have seen in just that reckless attitude of Luther the *arch-reformer* or *arch-heretic* a soul-mate from across the chasm of history. Only the lapsed Catholic Goebbels would bemoan the divisive impact of the Reformer.⁴⁶

4. Martin Luther vs. 'the Jews'

State Interior and Education Minister of Braunschweig, and close friend of Joseph Goebbels, Dietrich Klagges, affirmed Christ to be "not just a model anti-Semite, Jesus was the Son of God."⁴⁷ The violent dichotomy and antipathy between Jesus of Nazareth and 'the Jews,' especially the Jews of the Johannine Gospel narrative, was elevated to the level of dogma in the *German Christian* and 'brown' Catholic world of thought and discourse. If Martin Luther was seen to be the prophet of an anti-Semitic Christ, then it was the anti-Semitic Luther in which the Nazi faithful were most interested. For those seeking Luther the anti-Semite above all else, the anti-Semitic Luther was easy to find. As Daniel Goldhagen observes, Luther stands in a long Mediæval Christian tradition of 'eliminationist' antipathy toward the Jews as that detachable and completely dispensable non-Christian 'fourth estate' in the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, having no guaranteed rights and perpetually subject to crushing tax levy or banishment at a moment's notice.⁴⁸ The Luther the *NS* needed would be Luther the anti-Semite, and the Christ they needed could not be a Jew.

The *NS* and *German Christian* 'de-Judification' of Jesus the Christ touched the neuralgic point that sparked the German Church Struggle in its Protestant aspect. Aided by Von Harnack's published Marcionism, the project of making of Jesus, son of Mary of Nazareth, into *not* a Jew but rather an *Aryan* was un-

wittingly abetted by the learned and humane Lutheran theologian and Marburg historian of religions, Rudolf Otto, one who had eschewed both *Confessing Church* and *German Christian* involvement. With the publication of his *Kingdom of God and Son of Man* (1933), attempting to trace the idea of 'kingdom' and 'kingdom of God,' so central to Jesus' preaching, from its Israelite and other ancient Near Eastern, including Persian (Aryan), origins, Otto makes reference in passing to the very mixed Jewish/Samaritan/Syro-Phœnician/Græco-Roman ethnic and cultural makeup of Jesus' homeland, 'Galilee of the Gentiles,' as compared with the more strictly Hebrew/Jewish character of Roman Judæa. Here Otto coins the unfortunate phrase 'Jesus the Galilean.' What Otto intends is to suggest a picture of Jesus' everyday life and thought world that was ethnically, culturally, and perhaps religiously diverse, and to point out that the idea of 'kingdom of God' or 'kingdom of heaven' is as much Chaldæan or Persian in origin as it is Jewish. What *German Christian* and paganist students of the New Testament such as Grundmann seized upon was the notion – *not* propounded by Rudolf Otto – that Jesus was definitely of non-Jewish descent and potentially neither Jewish nor Semitic at all, but rather *Aryan*, the theme of a Grundmann book from 1940, *Jesus der Galiläer und das Judentum* (Jesus the Galilean and Jewry).⁴⁹

What did Luther understand by the word 'Jew'? This question is raised and answered by Olaf Roynesdal in his *Luther and the Jews*, particularly in the author's central chapter 5, "An Interpretation of Luther's Attitude Toward the Jews."⁵⁰ Roynesdal rejects the 'Young Luther-Old Luther' dichotomy that plays off the supposedly philo-judaic 'Young Luther' of the 1523 treatise, *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew* (*Das Jesus Christus ein geborener Jude sei*), with the Jew-hating 'Old Luther' of the bitter 1543 writings. On the one hand, Luther was already 'old' by late mediæval standards when he wrote the 1523 treatise. On the other hand, though Luther's 1523 optimism about converting the Jews to Christianity changed to pessimism by 1543, Roynesdal doubts that Luther was ever truly optimistic about converting the Jews, showing how Luther's view of the Jews as heretical enemies of God was constant throughout his career. There was never any philo-judaic Luther. Looking back to the Fathers of the Early Church, and particularly to Saint John Chrysostom, on whose anti-Jewish sermons Luther patterned his own anti-Jewish tracts, Luther thought he was being completely consistent with orthodox Christian tradition in seeing and identifying the Jews as a triple threat, viz.: They were complicit in the activity of the devil in the world, in open rebellion against God (even to the ultimate degree of Deicide through their complicity in the Crucifixion). They hypocritically claimed divine favor as the 'Chosen People' of God, having lost that favor through their rejection of Christ. Finally, the Jews were seen by Luther as

stubborn obstacles to the Reformation and its eschatological goal of preparing the world for the second coming of Christ and the Last Judgment, thus placing themselves in Luther's eyes on a level with the papists, Sabbatarians, and sacramentalist fanatics.

The one variable factor Roynesdal points to is that, in the 1540s as Luther approaches his own eschaton through old age and illness, of all the groups arrayed in opposition to the Reformation, the Jews were the most vulnerable, the only group Luther could hope to control because of their helplessness as non-baptized persons under the Theodosian code of Roman law still in force in the German Empire.⁵¹ Roynesdal urges a balanced view of Luther, however. In terms of the immense mass of his writings, Luther's 'Anti-Jewish Writings' (*Judenschriften*) form an infinitesimal fraction of the whole and are sadly conventional for their day in terms of their content. No one, Roynesdal points out, remembers the anti-Jewish writings of Dr. Johannes Eck, the Ingolstadt theologian appointed to refute Luther's heresy in public disputation, yet Eck's total written output of anti-Jewish bile far surpassed that of Luther.⁵² And, as harsh as the banishment language of Luther's 1543 *Judenschriften* was, in reiteration of received wisdom going back to the fifth-century Greek Church Father and Doctor of the Catholic Church, Saint John Chrysostom, Luther never advocated physical abuse or destruction of property of specific individual Jews.⁵³ Furthermore, Luther's invective was ignored as a matter of civil and military policy in Electoral Saxony. *German Christian* interpreters failed, or refused, to take these facts into account. Expressive of the *NS* mentality fixed on pressing solutions to problems identified by the *NS* Party to their catastrophic extremes, Lutheran *SA* man Walter Buch regarded the anti-Jewish pamphlets of the old Luther to be the culmination and completion of the Reformer's work and his lasting legacy for Germany, seed for the harvest soon to come.⁵⁴

In November of 1938, Reich Minister of Church Affairs Hanns Kerrl chastised the *German Christians* for their poor showing and lack of enthusiasm on Kristallnacht by referring to Luther's *Concerning the Jews and Their Lies* (*Von den Juden und ihren Lügen*, 1543), and warned them that weak behavior like this was making the church run the risk of being abandoned by the state altogether.⁵⁵ Like-minded Thuringian *German Christian* Bishop Martin Sasse had the Luther treatise printed and distributed throughout his territorial church with a preface written by himself and dated the day after Kristallnacht, Luther's birthday, the 10th of November 1938: "On 10 November 1938, the synagogues in Germany are burning," commending the works of Luther as those of "the greatest anti-Semite of his time" who had warned the German people "against the Jews."⁵⁶ The same Bishop Sasse was a co-founder of the Grundmann Institute at Eisenach, for which he presided

over a festive grand opening in the Wartburg Castle on May 6, 1939, and liked to refer to it as his very own "Jew-Institute" (*Judeninstitut*).⁵⁷

Small wonder that *German Christian* leader and *NS* bureaucrat in the Thuringian education ministry, Siegfried Leffler, could speak as early as February 1936, nearly two years before the *Reich-Kristallnacht* and the other pogroms of November 1938, and nearly four years before the Conference at Wannsee finalizing plans for the 'final solution to the Jewish question in Europe' (*Endlösung zur Judenfrage in Europa*), of the obligation to "kill" and "shoot" Jews, even if one knows in one's heart that "the Jew, too, is a child of God." Though two *Confessing Church* historians were present at that Dresden meeting of the Grundmann Institute to cover the sessions for their *Confessing Church* publications, neither one records that any question or discussion followed Leffler's literally psychopathic statement. As Susannah Heschel observes in dismay, "Long before the mass murder of Jews became Nazi policy... there was no response to his comments from those attending, neither immediately nor later in the session; the discussion simply continued as if murdering Jews in the name of Christ was a customary topic."⁵⁸

NS leaders, all major factions of the *German Christian* movement, and elements in both major Christian confessions in Germany from 1933 to 1945 looked to Martin Luther as a pioneer in German nationhood, in ethnic identity, and in the ethnic cleansing that they saw as necessary to national survival, as a reformer of German Christianity, and as founder of the German national and ethnic community (*Volksgemeinschaft*). That level of respect, combined with the inertia of a long history of Christian antipathy toward Jews and persecution of Jewish communities throughout Europe, led to a selective reading of Luther and to wild and totally anachronistic mental linkages between the Reformer and the public persona of the *Führer*. No mental stretch was required to bridge the historic divide between Luther's unbridled rage against Jews and the *NS* anti-Semitic platform and policy of the Third Reich. Both Luther and the Nazis took deliberate aim at the Jews as still the most vulnerable element in European society. The obsession with Luther on the part of this political and social movement, quite the most destructive in modern times, was neither feigned nor opportunistic. It was completely congruent and sincere.

Notes

- 1 Ernst Klee, "Die SA Jesu Christi." *Die Kirche im Banne Hitlers* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1989); Doris Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1996).
- 2 Eric W. Gritsch, *A History of Lutheranism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002) 223.
- 3 Arthur C. Cochrane, *The Church's Confession under Hitler* (ed. Dikran Y. Hadidian; Pittsburgh Reprint Series 4; reprint from 1962 ed. [Westminster]; Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1976) esp. 19ff on "National Socialism – a Sinister Background;" John Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches: 1933-1945* (New York: Basic, 1968).
- 4 Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Kevin P. Spicer, *Hitler's Priests: Catholic Clergy and National Socialism* (De Kalb, IL/ Washington, DC: Northern Illinois University/the U. S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2008).
- 5 Hermann Rauschnig, *Hitler Speaks* (London: Butterworth, 1939); cited in Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 28.
- 6 Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 28, nn.73 and 74, cites Eckhard Jesse, Wolfgang Hänel, Fritz Tobias, Henry Ashby Turner and Ian Kershaw as scholars who reject Rauschnig as a reliable source. The publication date of the 'original' German Zürich edition, 1940, the year after the appearance in England of the English 'translation' in 1939 would seem to give this war secret away, a fact which amazingly escaped the notice of a community of scholars normally so keen on textual criticism. The British War Office produced other documentary books in support of the war effort, some in both British and American editions, another example of which is *The Black Book of Poland* (copyright by the Polish Ministry of Information of the Polish Government in Exile; American ed.; New York: Putnam, 1942), the earliest published documentation of German crimes against humanity. Ernst Christian Helmreich also cautions against accepting Rauschnig's memoirs as accurate, but because the views he reports Hitler stating seem to fit with a period later than that of the *Machtergreifung* and earlier (*The German Churches under Hitler: Background, Struggle, and Epilogue* [Detroit: Wayne State University, 1979, 1980] 486, n. 13).
- 7 Karla Ploewe, *New Religions and the Nazis* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 84.
- 8 E.g., the founders of the arch-paganist *Tannenberger Bund*, Lutheran pastor's daughter Mathilde Ludendorff and her husband, retired Major General Erich Ludendorff, scientist of religion Jakob Wilhelm Hauer, and prominent NS faithful such as Robert Ley and Alfred Bäumler. Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 106, 110, 112.
- 9 Under Reinhard Heydrich, state restrictions on public assembly by the paganist *German Faith Movement (Deutsche Glaubensbewegung)* of Walter Grundmann et al. were never applied to the *German Christians*. The Reich exercised a clear fundamental option for Christianity in NS form over neo-paganism, however Germanic it understood itself to be (Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 151-152).
- 10 Ibid., 26.
- 11 Spicer, *Hitler's Priests*, 51.
- 12 Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 26-27.
- 13 Ibid., 139-140.
- 14 Some theological students and even pastors of the *Confessing Church (Bekennende Kirche)* not only joined the NS Party but also joined Julius Streicher's 'Storm Troops' (*Sturmabteilung = SA*). Ibid., 148.
- 15 Prior to the July 1933 Concordat between the Third Reich and the Holy See, most priests, such as one Monsignor Mayer, Vicar General of the Diocese of Mainz, thought that they were on perfectly firm ground in categorically condemning from the pulpit the NS Party and any Catholic who dared to join the Party, though a year later, after the Concordat between the Reich and the Holy See, he would take a different attitude entirely. See Michael Lukens, "Joseph Lortz and a Catholic Accommodation with National Socialism," in *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust* (ed. Robert P. Erickson and Susannah Heschel; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999) 149-150.
- 16 Ibid., 165.
- 17 After the war, Father Lortz testified to the American denazification board that he had indeed been a member of the NS Party since before its rise to power, but that his party membership was terminated following the *Reich Security Service* report. Despite that fact, Lortz continued to address his friend, Father Kleine, as 'Kammerad' or 'Parteigenosse' and to end his letters with 'Heil Hitler!' until the capitulation in 1945 (Spicer, *Hitler's Priests*, 163ff).
- 18 Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 67ff. There were several study groups within the Institute. One of these, specifically for Catholics, was headed up by Karl Dungs (Spicer, *Hitler's Priests*, 193).
- 19 A personal friend of the author's and Confessing Church pastor, a member of the Lutheran classis of the United Church of the Rhineland, the late Dr. Werner Goßlau, served from 1934 until his retirement in the densely populated Ruhr parish of Oberhausen. His two colleagues in that parish were DC clergy who referred to him as the 'Jew Brother' (*Judenbruder*), a sarcastic reference to his practice of still reading propers from the OT, and listed their services as 'Germanic Faith Celebrations' (*Germanische Glaubensfeier*) alongside Dr. Goßlau's 'Divine Service' (*Gottedienst*). On the Catholic side, Father Spicer's name glossary, providing curricula vitae for every entry, shows at a glance how many 'brown' Catholic clergy who failed the 'denazification' process in the American zone of occupation were simply moved to another post within the same diocese or emigrated overseas to countries such as Chile and Argentina as 'missionary' personnel (see esp. Spicer, *Hitler's Priests*, Appendix 2, 239ff).
- 20 Lortz' friend, Father Kleine, a parish priest and high school religion teacher, is a prime example. Ibid., 184-94. Few were willing to go as far as Father Philipp Haeuser, who affirmed Luther as "a reaction of a good force against the unhealthy humor in the Church." Ibid., 125.
- 21 Examples are found throughout the very early Psalms lectures and particularly in Luther's 1525 Deuteronomy lectures (LW 9).
- 22 Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion, das Evangelium vom fremden Gott: eine Monographie zur Geschichte der Grundlegung der Katholischen Kirche* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1924); *Marcion: the Gospel of the Alien God* (trans. John E. Steely and Lyle D. Bierma; Durham, NC: Labyrinth, 1990). Paganist *German Christians*, Constantin Großmann and Walter Grundmann, also misidentified the canon within the canon as the text of the New Testament, misusing Luther's hermeneutical principle to jettison the Old Testament in an effort to expurgate the "Jewish element" from the Bible and to separate Jesus Son of Mary from the Jewish people (James A. Zabel, *Nazism and the Pastors* [AAR Dissertation Series 14; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1976] 229-230; Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 69-70).
- 23 Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich. Vol. 1: 1918-1934. Preliminary His-*

- tory and the Time of Illusions (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 552.
- 24 E.g., Wilhelm Schwaner's *Germanenbibel*, an anthology of Nordic-Germanic myths and hero-sagas superimposed on an Old Testament outline, clearly pointing in a direction openly embraced by the Neo-Nordic 'Tannenberg League' (*Tannenberger Bund*) and the only slightly less radical 'German Faith Movement' (*Deutsche Glaubensbewegung*), namely, in the direction of not only Marcionism but of religious syncretism, as espoused by Ernst Graf von Reventlow: "We, the German Faith Movement, have no point of connection with Luther for we have no sense of relationship to the Bible as a godly holy book, nor to Christ as a Messiah-Savior" (Ploewe, *New Religions*, 73, citing Reventlow, "Luther und deutscher Glaube," *Deutscher Glaube* 1 [January 1934] 15-16).
- 25 William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1960) 91. Shirer seems to be completely unaware of how extensively in currency the Two Kingdoms Doctrine was among Late Medieval Western theologians and how highly nuanced the application of the concept could be in political thought, also in Luther. See Hans-Joachim Gänßler, *Evangelium und weltliches Schwert: Hintergrund, Entstehungsgeschichte und Anlaß von Luthers Scheidung zweier Reiche oder Regimenter* (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte; Mainz, Abteilung für Abendländische Religionsgeschichte 109; Wiesbaden: Franz Steuer, 1983).
- 26 For them, a Protestant Church within a powerful, authoritarian and even totalitarian German state, was the embodiment of the Two Kingdoms Doctrine. See Hans-Joachim Sonne, *Die Politische Theologie der Deutschen Christen: Einheit und Vielfalt deutschchristlichen Denkens dargestellt anhand des Bundes für deutsche Kirche, der Thüringer Kirchenbewegung "Deutscher Christen," und der Christlich-deutschen Bewegung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982) 110-12; Zabel, *Nazism and the Pastors*, 80-96. For Althaus, though the Weimar government was a legitimate government, it was essentially provisional in nature, having been imposed on Germany from victorious foreign enemies and treacherous domestic ones. The Germans' allegiance to Weimar could therefore only be likewise provisional. What was needed, in order to have a State in the full sense of Romans 13 or Luther's Two Kingdoms Doctrine, was a robust state of German origin deserving German and Christian obedience (Robert P. Ericksen, *Theologians and Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, Emanuel Hirsch* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985] 84; cites Althaus, *Obrigkeit und Führertum* [Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1936] 52). Whereas the customary Lutheran application of the Two Kingdoms Doctrine was to foster a sense of spiritual detachment from the powers of this world, Althaus, like those confessionalists who would oppose the *German Christians*, insisted that the doctrine provided a platform for political engagement between Church and State in the face of a completely new situation (Ericksen, *Theologians*, 104-106; cites Althaus, *Die Deutsche Stunde der Kirche* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1934] 55-60).
- 27 Primary text of unrevised August 1933 edition with commentary published in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Gesammelte Schriften* (ed. Eberhard Bethge; Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1965) 2:77-119; *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke. Vol 12: Berlin 1932-1933* (ed. Carsten Nicolaisen and Ernst-Albert Scharffenorth; Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1997) 362-407 [includes texts of Bonhoeffer-Sasse draft and August 1933 edition]; Dorothea Friedrich, *Das Betheler Bekenntnis* (wissenschaftlicher Prüfung für das Lehramt an Gymnasien; Zulassungsarbeit im Fache Evangelischer Theologie [unpublished master's thesis for admission to teaching Protestant theology in university preparatory secondary schools]; University of Tübingen, summer session, 1973 [includes excerpts of August edition from *Gesammelte Schriften* 2]; Jelle van der Kooi, *Das Betheler Bekenntnis* (ed. and foreword Jelle van der Kooi; Bethel, Beiträge aus der Arbeit der v. Bodelschwingh-schen Anstalten in Bielefeld-Bethel 25; (Bielefeld: Bodelschwingh Institutions Bethel, 1983) [includes final January 1934 edition published under name of Martin Niemöller]; Guy Christopher Carter, *Confession at Bethel, August 1933 – Enduring Witness: The Formation, Revision and Significance of the First Full Theological Confession of the Evangelical Church Struggle in Nazi Germany* (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University Graduate School; Milwaukee: Marquette Univ. in assoc. with University Microfilms International, 1987) [includes full English translation of all four rescensions of Bethel Confession, viz., Draft, August 1933 Confession, November 1933 Redaction, and January 1934 printed edition arranged in synopsis form as well as various archivalia pertinent to the primary text]; Christine-Ruth Müller, *Bekenntnis und Bekennen: Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Bethel (1933): Ein lutherischer Versuch* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1989) [includes excerpts and commentary only]; Bernd Ranke, *Die Genesis des Betheler Bekenntnisses von August bis Dezember 1933: Historische und inhaltliche Analyse unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Abschnitte "Die Ordnungen" und "Die Kirche und die Juden"* (unpublished M.Div. thesis for the first theological examination, Bethel bei Bielefeld: Kirchliche Hochschule Bethel, May 1991 [commentary only with focus on the *BB* subsections "The Orders" and "The Church and the Jews" including photocopies of lists of participants and invited critics].
- 28 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (ed. and trans. Ralph Mannheim; from the 1925 and 1927 eds. of Fritz Eher Nachfolger, Gmbh (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943) 213.
- 29 Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 149.
- 30 Ibid., 256.
- 31 Ibid., 266.
- 32 Hartmut Lehmann, "Luther als Nationalheld im 19. Jahrhundert," *Luther* 55/2 (1984) 53ff.
- 33 Zabel, *Nazism and the Pastors*, 51-75.
- 34 Ericksen, *Theologians*, 178; cites Emanuel Hirsch, *Deutsches Volkstum und evangelischer Glaube* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1934), a sentiment with which Althaus was entirely in agreement. Ericksen, *Theologians*, 91-92; cites Althaus, *Christus und die deutsche Seele* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1934) 5.
- 35 Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich. Vol. 1: 1918-1934*, 545-546; cites Hermann Dörries, *Luther und Deutschland Sammlung gemeinverständlicher Vorträge*, No. 169 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1934) 19.
- 36 Scholder, 1: 552; vol. 2: *The Year of Disillusionment 1934: Barmen and Rome*, 227.
- 37 Klee, *Die SA Jesu Christi*, 52ff.
- 38 Ibid., 61ff.
- 39 Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 134-38.
- 40 Ibid., 24.
- 41 Idem.
- 42 Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 173-174.
- 43 Ibid., 283.
- 44 Ibid., 81.
- 45 Shirer, *Rise and Fall*, 236.
- 46 Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 20ff.

- 47 Ibid., 22.
- 48 Ibid., 53.
- 49 Rudolf Otto, *Reich Gottes und Menschensohn: ein religionsgeschichtliche Versuch* (3rd unrev. ed.; Munich: Beck, 1954 [(1933)] 3-4; Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 61, cites Otto, 14-15. Walter Grundmann, *Jesus der Galiläer und das Judentum* (Leipzig: Georg Wigand, 1940).
- 50 Olaf Roynesdal, *Luther and the Jews* (Ph.D. diss. Marquette University Graduate School; Milwaukee: Marquette University in assoc. with University Microfilms International, 1986) 270ff.
- 51 Ibid., 287.
- 52 Ibid., 285-286.
- 53 Ibid., 320.
- 54 Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 33.
- 55 Berger, *Twisted Cross*, 159.
- 56 Wolfgang Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent: The Confessing Church and the Persecution of the Jews* (trans. Victoria J. Barnett; Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2000) 147-148; also Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Knopf, 1996) 111.
- 57 Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 71ff.
- 58 Ibid., 10.

Guy C. Carter, a Catholic historical theologian, was formerly an ELCA pastor in the Northern Great Lakes, New Jersey and Lower Susquehanna Synods as well as in the Evangelical Lutheran Territorial Church of Hannover, and was for ten years a member of the theology department of Saint Peter's College-the Jesuit College of New Jersey. Carter is presently serving as theological consultant to the Religion and Society Center of Harrisburg.

BOOK REVIEW

After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty and Thirty Somethings are Shaping the Future of American Religion

Robert Wuthnow, Princeton University Press, 2007

Reviewed by Maria Erling

After the Baby Boomers, Robert Wuthnow's book about religious affiliation among young adults in America, religion provides all interpreters of American religion and culture – pastors, youth leaders, and parish planners in particular – with a valuable resource. Comparing data on young adults and religious practice in the 1970s with contemporary surveys of young adults today, this very prominent sociologist of religion gives significant insight to churches: lifestyle changes during young adulthood – delays in starting careers, marriage, and family – have so dramatically changed the orientation of those in their 20s and 30s that older patterns of denominational planning and parish programming and even staffing are structurally out of touch with the needs and concerns of a whole generation. Providing data that includes responses from young adults in all the religious bodies in the United States, Wuthnow convincingly shows that young adults today differ from the generation that matured in the 1970's. Because of longer life-spans, for instance, the midpoint of life is now 49 rather than the early 40's. There is more time in young adulthood to do things that used to be 'compressed within a shorter time span' [p 10] with important consequences for religious life. These changes have been noticed by churches, certainly, in the declining numbers of young families in their pews, but Wuthnow provides a wider framework with which to assess the new religious landscape that has emerged.

Perhaps the most significant insight to this reviewer that emerges from the comparison of data between the two generations is that the period of young adulthood as experienced today is a full decade longer than in the 1970's. Survey data revealed that the longer period between the end of schooling and the establishment of a career is time spent largely outside the influence of traditional congregational programming.

Noting that while young adults may have delayed entry into traditional adult responsibilities, but are nevertheless taking on the task, virtually without assistance, of deciding on work and vocation, Wuthnow then asks, "how are young adults negotiating the difficult transitions from youth to career fulfillment?" One place they are not going is into worshiping communities. The programs that might attract them just aren't there. Geared towards youth still at home, and to families starting out with young children, congregations do not recognize the important resource they could be for young adults who have different questions and needs. The role a congregation could play as a connector, a place for networks of support and socializing, is an obvious task that our churches already perform, but perhaps not with the self-conscious purpose of helping young adults become integrated into a supportive fellowship.

Pastors and congregations in the last three decades have attempted various strategies to respond to changing demographics in their communities, and Wuthnow's book provides convincing data and solid interpretation of these important findings. What will make a congregation attractive to youth and young adults, however, is not the predictable answers that many might expect. New worship styles, service projects, or mega vs small church approaches, have often been proposed as solutions, but the survey data does not support any particular style of ministry or worship. Wuthnow concludes, after finding young adults in every type of congregation, that 'although it is hard to demonstrate with survey data, what makes a congregation, large or small, attractive to young adults is probably a sense of community.' [p. 223] He has found that those in their 40's show the most interest – about 25% – in contemporary worship, while 20 and 30 something have half the enthusiasm. [p. 224]

Our seminary has recently inaugurated a degree concentration in youth and young adult ministry, and this book will be an important resource we can use to help prepare leaders. I energetically recommend this book also to pastors, youth leaders, and hospitable planners in our congregations.

POETRY + THEOLOGY

When God is Present but not Apparent

Katy Giebenhain

“Calling begins with identity, not task,”¹ The Rev. Dr. M. Craig Barnes asserts in *The Pastor as Minor Poet: Texts and Subtexts in the Ministerial Life*. “Anyone can describe doing. Our society is not short on people who are experts on how to get more done, more efficiently and more successfully. But it takes a poet to describe being. That is why people have pastors.”² The notion of a call being identity-anchored is not new, but it’s a useful reminder, and one Barnes approaches with experience and candor.

A parish pastor and a professor at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Barnes has learned to consistently search for the spoken and written subtexts of what is going on around him. While reading *The Pastor as Minor Poet*, I couldn’t help but think of the opening paragraph of Dr. Christianson’s article on Gettysburg Seminary’s own Herman Stuempfle, Jr. in the last issue of *Seminary Ridge Review*. “Among all these careers – pastor, professor, [seminary] president, poet – there was really only one, preacher; and as preacher, a poet of the Lord.”³

Even pastors who are not actually writing poetry or hymns, as Stuempfle did, can be considered poets because of the nature of their calling. It has to do with the noticing of truth behind reality. “The value of reality is only found by peeling back its appearance to discover the underlying truth. This is why poets care about the text, what is said or done, but only in order to reveal subtext, which reveals what it means.”⁴ Barnes adopts T. S. Eliot’s statements about every culture needing both major and minor poets. “Biblical authors are considered by pastors to be *their* major poets.”⁵

“In contrast to the biblical and theological poets, the pastoral poet has the unique calling of making sense of their words in light of the dust and grit of daily life in a parish.”⁶ Barnes sees the task of uncovering subtexts, of

meaning and relevance of situations as perpetually important. “One of the reasons that people need pastors is precisely because God is always present but usually not apparent. It takes a poet to find that presence beneath the layers of strategy for coping with the feeling of its absence.”⁷

It is in the spirit of this search for subtext and ideas about poetry and the life of church leaders that we have added a new rubric to *Seminary Ridge Review*. The rubric will offer hymn texts, interviews, brief book and journal recommendations and other reflections on theology and poetry. In this issue we are pleased to include poems by Kathleen O’Keefe Reed, Kent Gramm and Gary Ciocco.

Bucolics

Some poetry books, particularly anthologies, are useful to mine for including lines or stanzas in sermons. This is not one of these books. It is, instead, a book to read for the sake of reading, and I recommend it to Gettysburg Seminary’s minor poets and minor-poets-in-the-making.

A collection of pastoral poems, (the epigraph from George Herbert is appropriately about shepherds), *Bucolics* is written in the voice of a laborer and a keen watcher of his surroundings. The voice asks, challenges, shakes his head at, praises, and acknowledges the presence of God as he goes about his work. When reading a number of poems from *Bucolics* in a row (they flow together, so it is easy to read several rather than just one), I’m reminded of that point in a Taizé service where the whole becomes more than the sum of its parts. The short, repeated songs, the relaxed yet focused atmosphere, and the seemingly accidental access to the subtext of wherever I was before the Taizé service started, are a bit like the experience of settling in with this book.

Here God (Boss) is addressed in vernacular, unpunctuated verse. The voice rings true. Always. Thoughts are spoken privately and comfortably with God. “you keep your secrets Boss / you flash a yellow eye then crow / away you’re like a rooster Boss / sometimes you’re like a fox.” This is a book of bootstraps, clouds, candle wicks, shadows, fields, old dogs, turning dirt, butterflies and bees. Like a good sermon that sneaks up on you, it is both simple and sophisticated. The table of contents lists the first lines of each poem and nearly becomes a final poem in and of itself (only after you’ve read the whole book, and only because all the poems are in the same voice).

This series of modern psalms has a way of bringing readers “back to earth” in more ways than one. There is an ongoing attempt by the narrator to clarify the identity of God and his own identity. Sometimes he is insistent about it, other times mellow and perfectly satisfied to let mysteries be mys-

teries. “I / don’t know you never leave / it very long I guess / you’ve got your reasons well / I guess that’s why you’re Boss.”

Notes

- 1 Barnes, Craig M. *The Pastor as Minor Poet: Texts and Subtexts in the Ministerial Life*, (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, MA: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), p. 102.
- 2 Barnes, p. 103.
- 3 Christianson, Gerald, “Herman G. Stuempfle, Jr.: Poet of the Lord,” *Seminary Ridge Review* 11 no. 1-2, (Autumn 2008-Spring 2009): p. 31.
- 4 Barnes, p. 19.
- 5 Barnes, p. 24.
- 6 Barnes, p. 22.
- 7 Barnes, p. 22.

M. Craig Barnes is senior pastor at Shadyside Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh, and the Robert Meneilly Professor of Leadership and Ministry at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

Maurice Manning teaches at Indiana University and Warren Wilson College. *Bucolics* is published by Harcourt, Inc., Orlando: 2007. A native of Kentucky, he won the Yale Younger Poets Award for *Lawrence Booth’s Book of Visions*. Manning is also the author of *A Companion for Owls* and the forthcoming *The Common Man*.

Creatio Ex Nihilo

Kathleen O'Keefe Reed

Putting her hands on hips
 That would not have been known to exist
 Except in such moments
 She expands an equally ephemeral breast
 With the breathing of a satisfied sigh
 That wants to be eternal,
 She looks down upon her latest creation
 And says to herself,
 Hattie, you sure did blend your colors nicely this time!
 She is the ragrug woman
 Gatherer of good for nothing
 Weaver of worth
 Expert in creatio ex nihilo
 Her joy any ball of cloth not fit for dust
 Whatever is worn out she receives
 Just dump it right here on the kitchen table
 Where her hands hover over the chaos
 Where fingers dance with scissors, thread and needle
 Making strands of life emerge.

From rags she weaves
 Works of art you can walk on
 Solid spirals with centers
 You can stand in and look into
 Finding the pieces:

The snowsuit you wore the day you steered your sled
 into a tree – where did the blood go?

The uniform your father wore home
 from the war – where did the blood go?

The scarf you had on the day your lover
 locked you out – where did the blood go?

For the first time
 It all makes sense.

Kathleen Reed is Director of Advancement at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg after 25 years serving pastorates in New England. "Creatio Ex Nihilo" first appeared in Lutheran Partners, July/August 1990. © Kathleen O'Keefe Reed.

Aurora

Kent Gramm

The heavens are an ocean; mind is land.
 The aura of aurora borealis
 is reflected by aurora australis:
 Aurora. Ions we can understand.
 But looking up, we see the firmament
 all waves, and there she is, her filmy gown
 glowing – the daughter of Hyperion
 in love with us, her swimming eyes demented.
 The hunter, orderly and male – Orion –
 most recognizable of all the Forms –
 she carried off, and with her draping warmth
 unmade him gaze in gaze. But ions
 we can measure as we measure feet in time
 unsurfacing into eternal rhyme.

Prayer

Orion is a hunter with a bow,
and not a theologian who knows
but cannot shoot the old celestial game.
The coughing earth lies buried in its snows
and every so-and-so has got a name.
I wish that something new would come to light –
some savior with the stars at his right hand,
some hunter with the answers in his sights,
some love that I could hope to understand
and not, again, some speculative man
who talks a good religion but who goes
the way of every one at last and dies
with stars reflecting in his glassy eyes,
a victim of that unforgiving bow.

Kent Gramm has taught at colleges and universities in the U.S. and Germany. He directs the Seminary Ridge Symposium. He is the editor of, most recently, Battle: The Nature and Consequences of Civil War Combat. "Aurora" and "Prayer" © Kent Gramm 2009.

These Hills Have Mercy

Gary Ciocco

Flat places tire me.
These hills have long names and old faces –
Italians, Poles, Slovaks, German-Irish combos.
There is a working dignity to the horizon.
These hills undulate and drop sharply.
They sing of a past, recent and ancient.
They sing of a nature
which holds forth patient
but not still.

Saint Mary's Road carries its namesake cemetery,
carving a permanent place
where my mother is buried five years now.
They lower you into the ground
with rhythmic incantations,
flowers thrown as organic icons.

In the corner house
where nothing else happens
Mrs. Petro prays the rosary
as if she were mastering a violin.
She sings as she fingers
she fingers as she sings
her prayers appear flung
to the end of Saturn's rings.

In these times, men in black
must carry a knapsack.
They get flogged by the left and
flogged by the right,
but still do yeoman's work
of being both Christ's conduit
and your neighborly soda jerk.

Gary Ciocco is a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Philosophy Department at Gettysburg College. His B.A. is from Haverford College and his Ph.D., is from The Catholic University of America. "These Hills Have Mercy" © Gary Ciocco 2009.

GETTYSBURG SEMINARY FINE ARTS

Water in Wine out: Filling our Jars

John Spangler

*And Jesus said to him, "Fill the jars with water."
And they filled them to the brim."—John 2:7*

The truth is that it (truth) is not always about beauty any more than artistic expression is always beautiful. And conversely, that which is beautiful may or may not convey truth.

In a brief decade of experience with Gettysburg Seminary's Fine Arts Council exhibits, some of the more powerful exhibitions were far from "beautiful" in the most commonly understood sense. Some exhibits of the most stunningly beautiful work do not always receive the response that they deserve. Art that some termed "off-putting" and "repugnant" broke through the barriers erected by a noisy culture and overly cluttered schedules to elicit meaningful reflection. We know that visual arts contain within their shape and frame the power to challenge our field of vision by introducing new perspectives.

In this sense, the icons that grace the cover and nearby pages of this *Seminary Ridge Review* are emblematic of the purpose this journal. The lectures, papers, sermons, poetry and reviews contained in this modest publication are designed to share as widely as possible a sample of the stimulating challenges of life on the Ridge, and imaginative fine art belongs in the mix.

J.D. Pyshnik "wrote" the cover icon as a part of a collection of twenty, designed to fill a full scale iconostasis, a large screen that separates the worshipping assembly from the altar area in his Carpatho-Russian Orthodox tradition. (Icons are properly understood to be "written" rather than merely "painted.") The 20 icons range across the testaments, over the Jordan River and through the sacraments, and linger among the apostles, saints and angels (Michael, Nicholas, Thomas and Gabriel).

Most of the artists whose work we have displayed at the Seminary got their imaginative start in the setting of worship. Pyshnik said that he worshipped in a large congregation with a big icon screen. Long before he knew that one rank of icons represented the major biblical figures or another represented the apostles, or that others covered the major feast days of the church year. He said that he spent time “studying these images and wondering who those people were and what they were doing. My imagination was captured. No, rather it was invited in and stayed.”

Decades later, and “out of the blue” as Pyshnik put it, “I got the idea that it would be sweet to have an icon screen that could more readily be linked to the stories that I remembered from the Bible back in my childhood days.” Thus, the icon writer gave us the eye “of his youth” and turned biblical stories, apostles and wedding feasts on end. The views flow from above, below and sometimes from the side as he plays with the inherited faith, that is, with a joyful, youthful, and even rebellious eye. And even while his childlike persona held faithfully to the story line, there is the trickery of water going in and the implication that wine flowed out, with the filled glasses next to it. Everything God is willing to do to save the feast is right there, mysteriously and suggestively framed on canvas, even as it lives in the second chapter of the Gospel According to John. Water funneled into a bottle is still water, isn’t it? Next to that bottle there are three glasses, suspended as if defying gravity, attached to a differently oriented table. Water in, wine out – all for the sake of the feast. The water flows with gravity while the wine glasses operate in a shifted universe. This shifting enhances the sign and symbol of the implied narrative.

After viewing a recent varied set of exhibits and collections, it appears that the artists we have seen here alter perspective most often as a way to convey and challenge their faith and ours. Through these 20 icons, the “writer” invited us in to his adopted point of view, invited us to join his own quest.

Symbolic language “is the mother tongue of faith” wrote Gustaf Aulén, putting our eyes on alert for the ways in which words offer more below and beyond the surface. Theological schools are used to exploring the symbolic side of words in texts. But it is the artist who can provide another dimension in the imaginative processes involved in interpretation. This can be especially helpful to students of theology and to members in congregations who have not had the background understanding of the way symbolic language, verbal and visual, can help reveal truths.

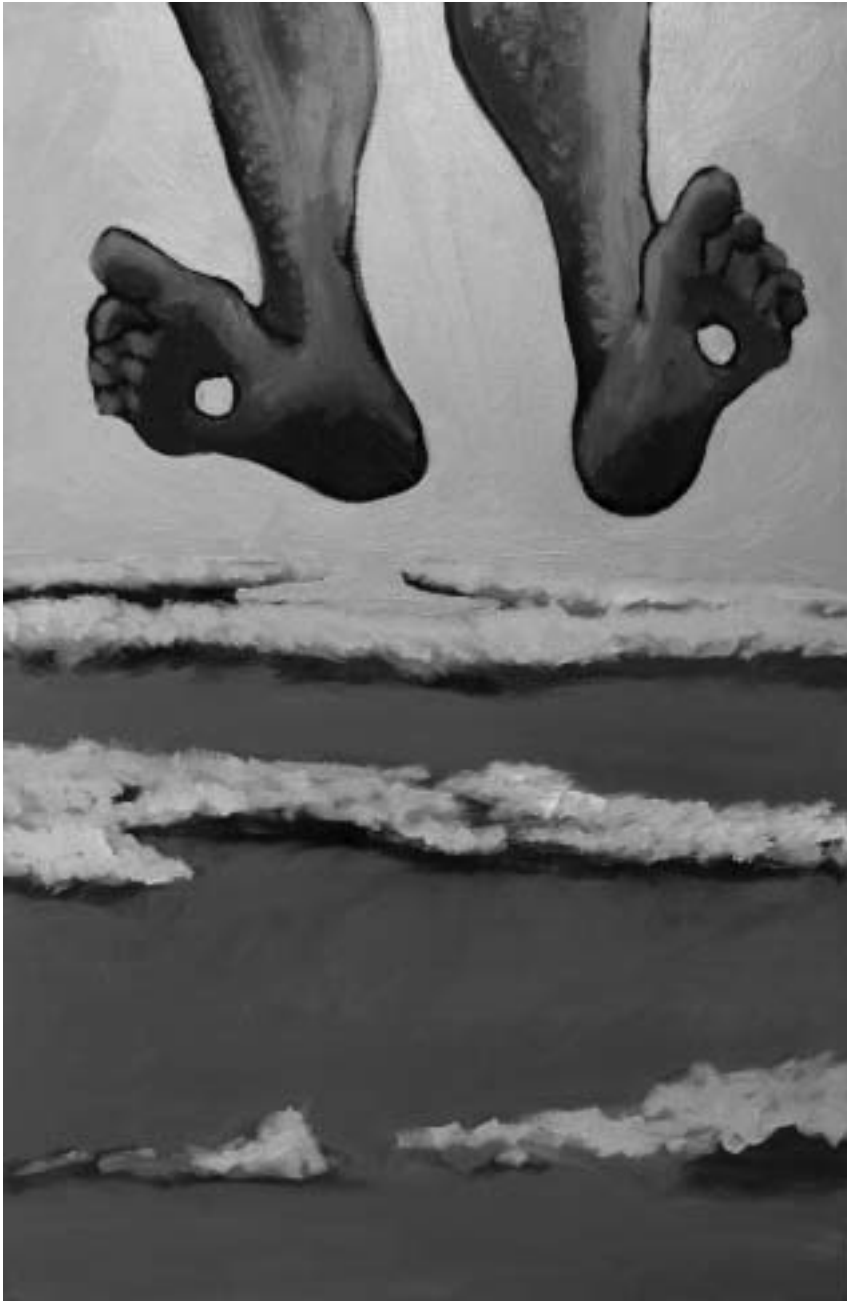
The Christian faith’s dependence upon spoken and written words does not exclude the power of the visual arts to assist the quest. As with J.D. Pyshnik, visual art is another way that we may be invited in to the Christian faith’s mysteries, so much so that we will want to stay.



Above: Matthew 14:10.
Right: Genesis 11:19.

All icons © J.D. Pyshnik.

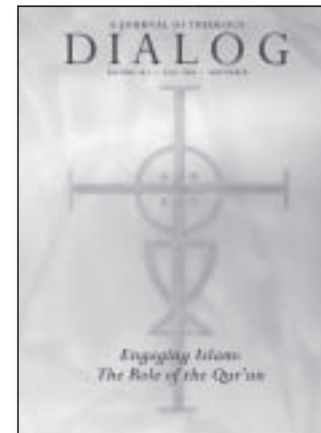




Above: Acts 1:9.



Above: John 14:27.



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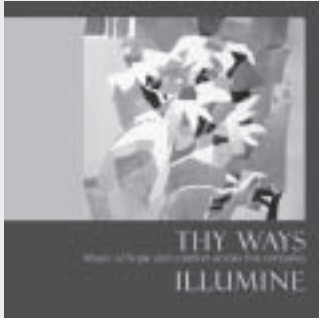
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