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Calvin, Theology, and History

Barbara Pitkin

At the end of his study of apocalypticism in the late German reformation, Robin Bruce Barnes ventures the insightful claim that Martin Luther would have been disappointed to know that people were celebrating the 500th anniversary of his birth in 1983.¹ It is not clear that one could say with equal conviction what John Calvin's reaction would be toward the Calvin quincentenary. That he would have had at the least mixed feelings toward the many commemorations' focus on him is fairly certain; this was, after all, a man who specified that he be buried in an unmarked grave. Whether or not he would be surprised, however, to know that the world was still around in 2009 is another question, a partial answer to which lies in his understanding of theology and history, which is the subject of the present investigation.

I. The Reformation, the Bible, and History

Popular portrayals of the Protestant reformation often depict the central issue in religious debates between evangelical reformers and the defenders of the traditional, Roman Catholic faith as a battle between the authority of scripture and that of ecclesiastical tradition. Any student at a Lutheran seminary soon comes to realize the deficiencies of this explanation, whether in a class on the 16th-century Reformations or in one on the Old or New Testament. Yet he or she will likely also discover that the stereotype that Protestants, in contrast to Roman Catholics, base all of their beliefs *solely* on the Bible is one that not only persists but also continues to shape Protestant self-understandings even in the 21st century.

As Heiko Oberman showed many years ago, a more helpful and accurate way of understanding the classic differences between Protestant and Catholic approaches to biblical authority can be found in a distinction be-

tween two kinds of “tradition.”² Evangelical reformers like Luther and Calvin joined in a late medieval debate over the material sufficiency of scripture: whether scripture as interpreted in light of the tradition of the church’s orthodox teaching was the sole source of divine revelation, or whether rather in addition to written scriptures so interpreted there was another, extra-biblical authoritative oral tradition. In siding with the former position, they operated within the arena of what Oberman called “Tradition I,” asserting the authority of scripture interpreted through the church’s exegetical tradition over all human and ecclesiastical traditions. This explains their strong desire to demonstrate the consistency of their readings of scripture with those of ancient Christian authorities – first and foremost, of course, with Augustine, but others as well. Calvin, in fact, argued that God had provided the exegetical writings of the Fathers as aids to interpretation; pious interpreters cannot ignore them without expressing profound ingratitude.³ The Reformation thus was not simply a debate about the authority of scripture but involved a *clash between two rival understandings of tradition*.

This 16th-century crisis in the understanding of the church’s tradition forced a re-examination and redefinition of the past that took many forms.⁴ It certainly involved critical scrutiny earlier Christian doctrinal traditions, seeking to show their consistency with present teaching or, alternatively, to demonstrate one’s opponents’ alleged decline from orthodoxy. However, the task aimed at something far more complex than simple restoration of the ancient church via reaffirmation of neglected principles and standards. The crisis also ushered in a complete reevaluation of the biblical past and secular history, which yielded not only guidelines for establishing the church in the present crisis but also new perspectives on the meaning of history and, along with this, newly-crafted religious self-understandings. Novel readings of the past were intertwined with the constructive need to define and locate the evangelical movement in the scheme of God’s world-historical plan.⁵

This was not an easy undertaking, for questions surrounding the meaning of history and the best way to view events gone by were particularly fluid in the 16th century. At the same time, they were increasingly urgent – not *least* because of the rival readings of the past fueled by the raging religious controversies, but not *only* because of them.⁶ Heightened scrutiny of sources borne of the humanistic enterprise, debates over university curricula, a hermeneutical crisis over the interpretation of the Bible, and an information explosion resulting from the expansion of printing: all these features of 16th-century life also fed the demand for more discriminating reflection on history. Meeting this challenge in the religious arena were a number of important Lutheran pioneers: Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560), who headed up the transformation of *Carion’s Chronicle*, a world history from Adam to

the 16th century, into the first work of Protestant historiography;⁷ Johann Sleidan (1506-1556), the author of the first Protestant history of the 16th-century evangelical movement⁸; and Matthais Flacius Illyricus (1520-1575), who organized the composition of *The Magdeburg Centuries*, which was the first comprehensive church history since that of Eusebius in the 4th century.⁹

Unlike these Lutheran writers, John Calvin did not produce or directly contribute to a work of Protestant historiography. However, he knew their work and corresponded, at least indirectly, with each of them about matters of religious concern, including the role of history. Like them, he was deeply interested in contemporary questions surrounding the meaning of history and the best way to view events gone by. This interest manifests itself broadly in his work in a variety of ways. Calvin’s particular orientation toward the past was also shaped profoundly by important developments in the historical study of Roman law in France.¹⁰ His training as a humanist lawyer influenced, among other things, his unique historicizing approach to scripture, his view of church history, and his theology in general – in particular his doctrine of God.

Calvin and the Lutheran pioneers mentioned above shared many commonalities in their approaches to history – a deep appreciation of the past, a conviction that laying claim to history would aid in the vindication of evangelical reform, and a fundamental insistence on the authority of scripture as interpreted in the church’s orthodox tradition. However, Calvin also developed several distinctive positions on the relationship between history and theology that contrasted sharply with those of many Lutheran reformers. In particular, in his historicizing approach to biblical interpretation, in his view of the historical location of the 16th-century evangelical movement, and in his vision of God and history Calvin advanced ideas that deviated from the emerging Lutheran approaches. Moreover, some of his Lutheran contemporaries found certain of his ideas controversial. The particular emphases that emerged from his re-examination of the past thus contributed to the shaping of different confessional identities. Even if it is “most certainly true” that not all Reformed thinkers agreed with him on these points, and not all Lutherans concurred with his critics, Calvin’s ideas about theology and history present a fruitful starting point for reflection in the 2009 Luther Colloquy on different “Reformation Teams.”

II. Calvin and the Historical Sense of Scripture

Calvin laid out his fundamental principle for interpreting scripture in the letter of dedication he wrote for his very first biblical commentary – a commentary on Romans that appeared in 1540. There Calvin professed his aim as an interpreter to determine and make intelligible the “mind of the au-

thor,” by which he meant the human author writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.¹¹ Interest in authorial intention had deep roots in the Christian exegetical tradition, but reflecting more recent humanistic perspectives, Calvin prioritized this sense above all others, and thus in his commentaries he gave special attention to the historical situation and stylistic peculiarities of the various biblical writers. For example, in this commentary Calvin argued that Paul (in Rom 3:28) and James (in Jas 2:14-26) use the word “justify” in different ways out of concession to their respective opponents.¹² Calvin’s appeal to historical context to resolve their apparently conflicting statements concerning the relationship of faith and works contrasts with Luther’s early judgment that James “is flatly against St. Paul and all the rest of scripture in ascribing justification to works.”¹³

Like Luther, however, Calvin also stressed the christological focus of scriptural interpretation. In a preface to a French New Testament that constitutes one of his first published evangelical writings, he observed: “This is what we should in short seek in the whole of Scripture: truly to know Jesus Christ and the infinite riches that are comprised in him and are offered to us by him from God the Father.”¹⁴ However, Calvin’s means for arriving at this common goal were somewhat different. For Luther the dialectical distinction between law and gospel provided the fundamental method for finding Christ; this distinction was also foundational for Melancthon’s rhetorical interpretation of scripture. Melancthon, as noted earlier, had a profound historical sensibility and certainly made wide-ranging use of historical tools in his interpretation of the Bible. In the end, however, the *scopus* of any book and scripture itself had to be made known via a rhetorical analysis that focused on such things as the genre of speech used, the overall theme, and the structure of the work.¹⁵ Calvin also attended to rhetorical elements, but, in contrast, he sought Christ, particularly in the Old Testament, via a more historical avenue. This alternative approach is especially clear, for example, in his commentary on the Psalms (1557). Calvin situates the Psalms, including those traditionally understood as messianic prophecies, in their first and primary sense in the context of Israel’s history, relating this history to the 16th century in a way that sought to preserve the integrity of the biblical past to a much greater degree than other interpreters who shared his appreciation of the literal sense, such as the Antiochene exegetes of the early church, Nicholas of Lyra, Martin Bucer, and John Oecolampadius.¹⁶ Melancthon, for example, also viewed the Psalms as “narrating history,” but envisioned them as pieces of rhetoric intended to “engage the spiritual affections toward right action.”¹⁷

Thus Calvin follows a traditional trend in biblical interpretation that was gaining momentum in the 16th century, but he integrates historical context into meaning in such a way as to yield exegetical conclusions that go

beyond these earlier models. Another example of this with respect to the Lutheran tradition can be seen in his interpretation of the Gospel of John (1553). Calvin shared Luther’s reasons for the superiority of the Fourth Gospel over the Synoptics: that John delineated more clearly “how faith in Christ overcomes sin, death, and hell, and gives life, righteousness, and salvation.”¹⁸ The consequences of Luther’s judgment found fuller expression in Melancthon’s commentary on John, which was the very first Protestant commentary on this biblical book. Melancthon followed Luther’s insight and inaugurated a trend that ran counter to the traditional consensus that John’s central purpose was to proclaim Christ’s divinity. Although he treated and agreed with orthodox trinitarian and christological doctrines in his commentary, these discussions were not as prominent as in earlier interpreters. Melancthon shifted the focus from Christ’s person to his work, from christology to soteriology.¹⁹ Calvin not only followed this new orientation, but unlike others, such as Bucer, who simply ignored earlier interpreters’ use of certain passages to promote or explain Christ’s divine nature, Calvin explicitly criticized them.²⁰ The basis for his complaint is usually that the ancient writers were too caught up in the struggle of their own age to refute Arianism to notice that Christ was speaking not of his eternal essence or his divinity but rather of his office as incarnate mediator. In other words, the ancient writers allowed the exigencies of their own historical context to obscure Christ’s and the evangelist’s original meaning.

Calvin’s insistence on a more historically informed interpretation of the traditional messianic and christological proof texts in the Psalms and the Gospel of John, as well as in other biblical passages, was attacked in treatises written by the Lutheran theologian Giles Hunnius (1550-1603) at the end of the 16th century.²¹ Hunnius conceded that Calvin’s trinitarian and christological doctrines were orthodox, but he criticized him for undercutting the orthodox position by rejecting the exegesis that had long supported it; moreover, he charged him with a “Judaizing exegesis” – “an approach to the Bible that divorced it from its Christian context” – and opening the door for antitrinitarians and modern Arians.²² The Reformed theologian David Pareus (1548-1622) responded, defending Calvin’s orthodoxy and putting his rejection of earlier exegesis in a broader context.²³ Pareus pointed out, and it is worth underscoring his point, that Calvin did not always reject earlier writers or the trinitarian implications of the Fourth Gospel, and in fact at other points in his commentary not only cited ancient authorities with approval but also used passages in John to reject Arian teaching and the more recent trinitarian heterodoxy of Michael Servetus.²⁴ Calvin was no modern historical critic! Nevertheless, his deeper appreciation for matters of historical context and original meaning come to the fore in this confession-

ally driven exchange. In the “Calvinian” tradition, attention to the mind of the author, the context of the writing, as well as to one’s own historical situation, are critical aids to accurate and edifying interpretation of scripture.

Edification of the faithful and the nurturing of faith were not sacrificed in Calvin’s pursuit of a historically sensitive reading of the Bible. These constituted rather the larger goal of the enterprise “truly to know Jesus Christ and the infinite riches that are comprised in him and offered to us by him from God the Father.” But his approach raises questions about how he understands past events and situations to be relevant for later generations. In the first place, of course, there are many teachings in scripture that Calvin understands to be transhistorical and universally applicable; an example of this would be Jesus’ teaching about his office in the Gospel of John. Such teachings are directly relevant in all ages. In other instances, however, Calvin often invokes a principle he calls “the similitude of times” for bridging the gap between the past and present. For example, in his interpretation of the prophecies in Dan 8:23-25 and Dan 11:36-45, Calvin rejects the traditional apocalyptic reading recently popularized by Luther and reads the passages instead in terms of the past history and not a future Antichrist.²⁵ He views the prophecies as fulfilled by the end of the 1st century CE and not warnings of events to come or timetables for calculating the end. Their primary function, in his view, was to console the ancient faithful before the first coming of Christ. Having established this, however, he willingly embraces adapting the situation of the church of old to the present day because the circumstances are similar. Commenting on the verse, “When they fall victim, they shall receive a little help, and many shall join them insincerely” (Dan 11:34), Calvin reflects on how contemporary events echo the time of the Maccabean revolt, which he understands as the referent of the prophecy:

Out of the great multitude of those who [today] wish to be esteemed as Christians, we observe how very few retain the pure and uncorrupted worship of God.... And even in that small company which has withdrawn itself from the papal idolatries, the greater part is full of perfidy and deceit. They pretend to remarkable zeal, but if you thoroughly examine them, you will find them full of deception. For if God should probe his church to the quick, as he did some years ago in Germany, and as he may do shortly in our own case, in all these serious conflicts, and amidst these persecutions, many will boast in the bravery of their championship, and yet their zeal will quickly ooze away. When the Lord, therefore, exercises us by methods similar to those by which he proved the ancient church, this instruction ought always to occur to our remembrance, lest our minds grow dull and languid.²⁶

Even under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Daniel did not foresee the events of the 16th-century Interim or the impending religious conflicts in France; he spoke to Israelites living before the time of Christ and consoled them in their historical circumstances. The task of the interpreter in such instances is to grasp the situation of the biblical author and draw analogies to the present day that are applications of the writer’s meaning but not inherent in it. Such applications or “analogies” are possible, Calvin thinks, because in the course of history there are situations and circumstances that are similar despite the passage of time. Calvin’s key for finding present-day relevance contains within it assumptions about the historical location of the 16th-century evangelical movement, which is the topic of the next section.

III. Calvin and the Historical Location of the Sixteenth-Century Evangelical Movement

Before exploring the ways in which Calvin responds to the demand to define the place of the evangelical movement in God’s world-historical plan, it is important to examine his views on the key role played by scripture in understanding all of history. Commenting on Paul’s use of the example of Abraham in Romans 4, Calvin refers to an oft-cited dictum from the Roman orator Cicero concerning the character and value of the past: “The pagan writers have truly said that history is the teacher of life.” He adds, however, that “no one makes sound progress in [history] as it is handed down to us by them: scripture alone claims for itself this kind of teaching office.”²⁷ For Calvin, scripture prescribes the general rules for deriving meaning from the past by testing all other history; distinguishes which actions should be followed from those to be avoided; and, uniquely, shows God’s providential care of the righteous and judgment of the wicked. Thus while past events related by historians *do* provide the material and models for instruction, historical events as narrated cannot convey in and of themselves the broader lessons to which they bear witness. This holds true not only for writings of secular historians, but also for ecclesiastical historians and the sacred histories related in the Bible itself. Calvin’s claim that the past must be measured by scriptural hermeneutical principles in order for meaning to emerge reflects in part his famous image of scripture functioning as spectacles for fallen humans, bringing into focus the divine purpose behind the world and human history that fallen human reason is too confused to grasp on its own.²⁸ Only the church founded on scripture, he believes, can rightly assess the past.

Thus the first task for Calvin is to demonstrate the continuity between the “true” church and the evangelical movement. Following the Augsburg Confession, he identifies the two marks of the true church as proper preach-

ing of the Word and administration of the sacraments.²⁹ This notion of being founded on the Word becomes then the essential criterion by which he seeks to connect the evangelical movement to the historic Christian church. He argues that the evangelical movement represents this true church, while the Roman church, despite its appeal to apostolic succession, has no legitimate claim to be the church. In the *Institutes*, for example, he identifies the Roman church of his day as having degenerated from its proper foundation and accuses it of establishing its authority on flimsy historical evidence drawn from ancient chronicles and misreadings of the church fathers.³⁰ Calvin refutes these claims by poking holes in his opponents' portrayal of the past. He offers an alternative reading that includes reference to Paul (Romans 9-11 and Galatians 4) to illustrate how sometimes those who have once been part of the church can err and be rejected.

In casting the Roman church of his day in the role of the false church, Calvin applies his principle of the similitude of times and finds a historical precedent, comparing the current Roman church to Israelite religion at the time of Jeroboam. He locates the evangelical movement, in contrast, in continuity with the true church, which, like the false church, extends throughout the ages.³¹ Calvin believes that there is only one covenant, and this means that the origins of the true church extend back to the beginning of human history.³² In the *Institutes*, he argues that all of the patriarchs, from Adam and Eve on, were adopted into the hope of immortality in a covenant founded on God's mercy; "they had and knew Christ as Mediator, through whom they were joined to God and were to share in his promises."³³ He thus views God's covenant of grace – spanning all ages – as the unifying factor in human history, and locates the evangelical movement within the succession of communities to whom it has been collectively entrusted: the true church.

Calvin's efforts to integrate the evangelical movement and its churches into the one, true, but invisible church demonstrate the importance of the past for legitimating evangelical reform. However, it is not enough to argue for its place as the most recent instance of an ongoing struggle Calvin perceives between the true church and the false church. For although Calvin finds that the past supplies a fund of examples to demonstrate that this struggle is perpetual, he also wants to differentiate different stages in the course of this history. In other words, history for Calvin is not circular or a cycle of repetition, but rather progresses through different ages: the situation of the church in Calvin's day is similar to but not identical with Israelite religion at the time of Jeroboam or, alternatively, the Maccabean Revolt. Hence a further element in determining the place of the evangelical movement involves specifying different stages in the history of God's covenant and discerning their distinctive features.

For Calvin history is fundamentally divided into the period before the manifestation of Christ on earth and the period that follows. As we have just seen, he emphasizes that one covenant bridges these two eras, but the substance of this covenant is subject, says Calvin, to different "orders of dispensation." In other words, the same teaching of grace is conveyed to the Israelites in ways appropriate to their status living before the appearance of the Redeemer, and to Christians living after Christ's life, death, and resurrection in ways accommodated to their situation. Like Augustine, he sometimes uses the image of human maturation to contrast the church in the age of a child and later as more fully grown.³⁴ The ancient church in the previous age received the promises of Christ and eternal life in a rudimentary form, veiled under earthly benefits or hidden in images and figures, and was more subject to the harsh condemnation and bondage of the law even as it reaped the benefits of the gospel. It was also, importantly, restricted to the people of Israel and to those gentiles who converted. Under the new dispensation, in contrast, Calvin finds a greater clarity in revelation, as the gospel is proclaimed more clearly and without figure and to all indiscriminately.³⁵

Calvin thus views human history as divided into two periods, with Christ at the center. Within each epoch, he is also sensitive to particular historical developments and circumstances. In the time before Christ, for example, the situation changes as God makes a covenant with Abraham and adopts a particular people as his own, extending his promise to them alone. There are also different ways in which humans come to participate in the divine word, as God revealed God's self first in oracles and visions which were handed down orally and later caused these to be put down in writing.³⁶ The period of the Babylonian exile brings new challenges for the people of God beyond those of the time of the monarchy. Yet in all these situations, the church used the different means provided by God for directing itself to Christ and his benefits conveyed in the promise: for example, the law, the ceremonies, the words of the prophets. In the time after Christ, Calvin notes differences between the time of Christ, the apostolic age, the period of the Fathers – a period of approximately 500 years that he views as a kind of golden age – and the time of greater conflict with error and deviance from true doctrine that extends down to his own day. Yet he views all of these, along with his own century, as part of the final age extending from Christ's first advent to his second coming: the time of the open proclamation of the gospel. Calvin is cautious about imposing any more detailed schema of organization or historical periodization.

Two elements distinguish Calvin's views on the place of the evangelical movement as the most recent embodiment of the true church in this final age of history from the visions being espoused by his contemporaries, par-

ticularly by his Lutheran co-religionists. First is this extreme caution toward exact schematization and periodization.³⁷ This reluctance can be seen, for example, in his opinion on the plan of the *Magdeburg Centuries*, where he questions what appears to him to be the arbitrary division of material into books by centuries – he thinks this is not only impractical but also that it may lead to needless repetition of material that will tax the reader.³⁸ Second is the way he views the apocalyptic dimensions of the historical situation in his day. Although he understands the period of 16th-century reform as a time of intensified crisis in the last age of history, he does not promote expectation of an immediate end. Both of these tendencies are evident in his handling of two biblical passages often used in his day to calculate the time to the eschaton: these are his Lectures on Daniel, already mentioned at the end of section I above, and his commentary on Second Thessalonians.³⁹

In contrast to the dominant Protestant interpretive trends in the 16th century, Calvin limits (with one exception) the scope of Daniel's prophecies to events up through the 1st century of the common era. As described earlier, in Calvin's view, the predictions concerning the four empires in Daniel 2 and 7 and the prophecies of the "king of bold countenance" (Dan 8:23-25) and the king "who shall act as he pleases" (Dan 11:26-45) were intended, in the first place, for the consolation of the ancient faithful waiting for the manifestation of Christ. However, the dominant interpretive trend, exemplified in *Carion's Chronicle*, Sleidan's *Four World Monarchies* (1556), in Luther's biblical prefaces and other writings on Daniel, and in the commentaries on Daniel by Melancthon (1543) and Heinrich Bullinger (1565), understood the four monarchies to comprise a universal world history that was extended down to the 16th century.⁴⁰ This tradition identified the papacy or the Ottoman Turks as the Antichrist purportedly prophesied in Daniel 8 and 11, and in so doing viewed Daniel as an eschatological handbook for the end times.

The idea of four world monarchies was a traditional one that the Lutheran interpreters tweaked to fit the circumstances introduced by the Reformation; another, more recently adopted predictive tool was a tripartite schema of history adopted by Melancthon from the Talmud. This so-called "Elias" scheme divided history into three periods of two thousand years: the age before the Law, the age of the Law, and the age of the Messiah.⁴¹ Some argued that the last era would be foreshortened for the sake of the elect because of the extent of corruption, which would hasten God's judgment. In 16th-century Germany, peaking about 1600, there was a virtual cottage industry of speculative writing about what was immediately on the historical horizon, reckonings of the date for the end of the world based on the Bible, the stars, numerology, apocalyptic calculations by medieval writers such as

Nicolas of Cusa, and sometimes, in the words of historian Robin Barnes, drawn from "thin air."⁴² These visions positioned the evangelical movement in the final stages of a cosmic conflict that would usher in the end of history.

Calvin thought that he was living in the eschatological age amid an intense battle between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the Antichrist, between true church and false church, between truth and error. But he did not think it possible or desirable to attempt calculations about when and how this final age, already over 1,500 years underway, might come to an end. He takes his cue not from Daniel but from Paul – specifically, the second chapter of Second Thessalonians.⁴³ In his commentary on this passage, Calvin takes his typical historicizing approach and focuses first on the context for Paul's statements about the coming day of the Lord. He explains that some in the Thessalonian community had marked out a fixed day for Christ's return. He then argues that Paul indicates that this will not take place until a series of events first unfolds, including scattering, tribulation, and eventually, widespread apostasy and the reign of the Antichrist within the visible church. Paul thus aims both to squelch the immediate expectation of those Thessalonians who had been misled and also comfort all the pious after them who will witness these calamities. Calvin's readers, with their twenty-twenty hindsight, can see how this prediction of Paul has been confirmed in the history of the church. But that does not mean that they have any better estimate of *when* the end will come.⁴⁴ There are indications that much of what Paul predicts has already come to pass, including the fact that the reign of the Antichrist has penetrated to the temple of God (2 Thess 2:4) in the institution of the Roman papacy and that Christ, by his word, has begun to put down his reign (2 Thess 2:8). These insights themselves were broadly shared by other Protestants, as was the sense that the evangelical movement is part of this increasingly urgent struggle between the word of God and the powers of evil. Yet Calvin finds that the utility of Paul's teaching lies not in furnishing a timetable for the end. Rather, it serves to assure the elect that God is in control of history, and to console them until the Word triumphs. The church founded on the Word not only has the ability to grasp the meaning of history but also to persevere amid the chaos that characterizes history.

This last point, the confusion of history, is worth underscoring. For Calvin God's active providence superintends all events, but that does not mean that their meaning is transparent. Rather, history appears confused on a number of levels – most notably, in the fact that the wicked triumph and the righteous are persecuted and the Antichrist appears to overpower the word of God. Although in Calvin's view the revelation of the covenant is clearer under the second dispensation than it was in the time before the

manifestation of Christ, the gospel is clouded and obscured by the efforts of Satan to overthrow it. The meaning of human events, even the event of the Reformation itself, becomes intelligible and then only in part through faith in divine providence. Thus Calvin is less concerned to speculate about the future than he is to console and comfort his readers and auditors by building up their faith that appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, all of history is in God's hands. His insistence on pressing this point, and its special application in the doctrine of predestination, was another area that some of his Lutheran colleagues found controversial – but this is a topic for another day.

Conclusion

Calvin's historicizing approach to scripture and his designation of the historical location of the evangelical movement cannot be reduced simply to the polemical need to justify religious schism. Surely in the clash between rival understandings of tradition the polemical impulse played an important role. But as my comparisons between Calvin and Lutheran reformers has shown, even within the evangelical movement the understanding of how best to approach the past, to reap its lessons, and to tie current events into those gone by were not at all uniform. One important lens for illuminating these differences is the different political and intellectual contexts that generated them: Germany on the one hand and France and Switzerland on the other. While apocalypticism was rampant in Lutheran Germany, in Switzerland and France where Reformed Christianity took hold, the general mentality was more in synch with Calvin's view that the Reformation was a significant phase in history but perhaps not its immediate final chapter. Calvin, as far as we know, never preached, lectured or commented on the book of Revelation. However, Irena Backus has shown that those Reformed contemporaries who did do not seem to have seen "the Apocalypse fundamentally as a book written for their era. Only the papal Antichrist struck an immediate chord...the text was plastic enough to permit the grafting on of various reformed doctrines and messages of consolation addressed to the true faithful." To Lutheran commentators, in contrast, "the Apocalypse was, in different ways and for different reasons, a book about the Last Judgment and the role of the Reformation in it."⁴⁵

Beyond these contextual differences, another lens for viewing Calvin's particular approach to history is his work as a pastor. His interpretation of scripture as well as his defense of the evangelical movement and his understanding of its historical location arise immediately out of a pastoral concern to console and comfort believers – religious refugees (who were legion in the

16th century) as well as native-born citizens in Geneva and evangelical religious minorities throughout Europe. Calvin exhorted them to trust in the gospel and grasp God's ongoing providence in the apparent confusion of *their own particular historical circumstances*. He urged them to respect the past on its own terms and invited those whom he addressed to seek there analogies to their own situation and, finally, confirmation that God was in control of all history. For Calvin, it was essential to understand one's own place in history and to respect the circumstances of those who had gone before. The church is founded on a Word that transcends history, but a Word that is also embedded in and, ultimately, incarnate in human history, accommodating itself to the situation of believers in all times and places.

Notes

- 1 Robin Bruce Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis: Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988) 261.
- 2 Heiko A. Oberman, "Quo vadis, Petre? Tradition from Irenaeus to Humani Generis," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 16 (1963) 225-55; and *The Dawn of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986) 269-96.
- 3 For a discussion of these comments in Calvin's *Preface to the Homilies of Chrysostom* (1537), see John L. Thompson, "Calvin as a Biblical Interpreter," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* (ed. Donald K. McKim; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 63-64.
- 4 John M. Headley, "The Reformation as Crisis in the Understanding of Tradition," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte / Archive for Reformation History* 78 (1987) 5-23.
- 5 Bruce Gordon, "The Changing Face of Protestant History and Identity in the Sixteenth Century," in *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe: The Later Reformation* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1996) 1-22.
- 6 In this regard, Irena Backus, *Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the Era of the Reformation (1378-1615)* (Leiden: Brill, 2003) has challenged and revised the thesis of Pontien Polman that 16th-century religious historians were motivated primarily by polemic and confessional interests and not in an interest in history for its own sake (*L'élément historique dans la controverse religieuse du XVI^e siècle* [Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1932]). On the way that approaches to history were being transformed in this period in general, see Anthony Grafton, *What Was History? The Art of History in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
- 7 See Harry Brettschneider, *Melanchthon als Historiker: Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis der deutschen Historiographie im Zeitalter des Humanismus* (Karl Wilhelmi: Insterburg, 1880); Emil Menke-Glückert, *Die Geschichtsschreibung der Reformation und Gegenreformation: Bodin und die Begründung der Geschichtsmethodologie durch Bartholomäus Keckermann* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1912) 36-64; Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis*, 106-108.

- 8 *De statu religionis et reipublicae, Carolo Quinto, Caesare, Commentarii* (Strasbourg: Wendelin Rihel, 1555); see Alexandra Kess, *Johann Sleidan and the Protestant Vision of History* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008); Donald R. Kelley, "Johann Sleidan and the Origins of History as a Profession," *Journal of Modern History* 52/4 (1980) 573-98.
- 9 See Heinz Scheible, *Die Entstehung der Magdeburger Zenturien: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der historiographischen Methode* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1966).
- 10 On the development of historical scholarship in early modern French jurisprudence, see Donald R. Kelley, *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship: Language, Law, and History in the French Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970).
- 11 *Iohannis Calvini commentarius in epistolam Pauli ad Romanos* (ed. T. H. L. Parker; Studies in the History of Christian Thought 22; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981) 1. On Calvin as an interpreter of the Bible, see Thompson, "Calvin as a Biblical Interpreter" and Barbara Pitkin, "John Calvin and the Interpretation of the Bible," in *A History of Biblical Interpretation. Volume 2. The Medieval Through the Reformation Periods* (ed. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 341-71.
- 12 *Iohannis Calvini commentarius in epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, 77.
- 13 "Preface to the Epistles of St. James and Jude," *Luther's Works*, American Edition (hereafter abbreviated LW), 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg and Fortress, 1955-86) 35:396; cf. LW 34:175-76, where Luther seeks to resolve the issue grammatically.
- 14 John Calvin, "Preface to Olivétan's New Testament," in *Calvin: Commentaries* (ed. J. Haroutounian; Library of Christian Classics 23; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958) 70.
- 15 See Timothy J. Wengert, "Philip Melancthon's 1522 *Annotationes on Romans* and the Lutheran Origins of Rhetorical Criticism," in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: Essays Presented to David C. Steinmetz in Honor of His Sixtieth Birthday* (ed. R. A. Muller and J. L. Thompson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 118-40; "Biblical Interpretation in the Works of Philip Melancthon," in *A History of Biblical Interpretation* (see note 11 above) 319-40.
- 16 See G. Sujin Pak, *The Judaizing Calvin: Sixteenth-Century Debates over the Messianic Psalms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Barbara Pitkin, "Imitation of David: David as a Paradigm for Faith in Calvin's Exegesis of the Psalms," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 24 (1993) 843-63.
- 17 John R. Schneider, "The Hermeneutics of Commentary: Origins of Melancthon's Integration of Dialectic into Rhetoric," in *Philip Melancthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary* (ed. Timothy J. Wengert and M. Patrick Graham; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) 45 n. 120.
- 18 Luther, "Preface to New Testament (1522)," LW 35:362; cf. Calvin's observation that what distinguishes John's Gospel from the other three is its more complete portrayal of the "doctrine by which the office of Christ, together with the power of his death and resurrection, is unfolded" (*In evangelium secundum Johannem commentarius*, vol. 47 of *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia* [hereafter abbreviated CO] [ed. W. Baum, E. Cunitz, and E. Reuss; *Corpus Reformatorum* 75; Brunswick: C. A. Schwetschke and Son (M. Bruhn), 1892] vii).
- 19 Timothy J. Wengert, *Philip Melancthon's Annotationes in Johannem in Relation to its Predecessors and Contemporaries* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1987) 93, 113. See also Barbara Pitkin, "Calvin as a Commentator on John," in *Calvin and the Bible* (ed. Donald K. McKim; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 179-80.
- 20 See, for example, Calvin's comments on John 17:21: "Again, it ought to be understood, that, in every instance in which Christ declares, in this chapter, that he is *one with the Father*, he does not speak simply of his Divine essence, but that he is called *one* as regards his mediatorial office, and in so far as he is our Head. Many of the fathers, no doubt, interpreted these words as meaning, absolutely, that Christ is *one* with the Father, because he is the eternal God. But their dispute with the Arians led them to seize on detached passages, and to torture them out of their natural meaning, in order to employ them against their antagonists" (CO 47:387).
- 21 Giles Hunnius, *Articulus de Trinitate* (Frankfurt: Johannes Spies, 1589) and *Calvinus Iudaizans* (Wittenberg: Vidua Matthaei Welaci, 1593).
- 22 David C. Steinmetz, "The Judaizing Calvin," in *Die Patristik in der Bibelexegese des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Wolfenbütteler Forschungen 85; Wiesbaden: Harrossowitz, 1999) 136. See also Pak, *The Judaizing Calvin*.
- 23 David Paraeus, *Libri Duo: I. Calvinus Orthodoxus de Sacrosancta Trinitate: et de aeterna Christi Divinitate. II. Solida Expositio XXXIIX. Difficiliorum Scripturae Locorum et Oraculorum...* (Neustadt: Matthaeus Harnisch, 1595).
- 24 See Steinmetz, "The Judaizing Calvin," 143-44.
- 25 Barbara Pitkin, "Prophecy and History in Calvin's Lectures on Daniel (1561)," in *Die Geschichte der Daniel-Auslegung in Judentum, Christentum und Islam. Studien zur Kommentierung des Danielbuches in Literatur und Kunst* (ed. Katharina Bracht and David S. du Toit; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007) 323-47.
- 26 *Praelectionum in Daniele prophetam* (CO 41: 262).
- 27 "Historiam esse vitae magistratam, vere dixerunt Ethnici, sed qualiter ab ipsis traditur, nemo in ea tuto proficiat: sola Scriptura sibi iure vindicat eiusmodi magisterium." (*Ioannis Calvini commentarius in epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, 99; in English in John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians* [trans. R. Mackenzie; vol. 8 of *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*; ed. D. W. Torrance and T. F. Torrance; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960] 100-1 [translation slightly altered]). Circeo's famous definition is found in *De oratore* 2.36: "Historia vero testis temporum, lux veritas, vita memoriae, magistra vitae, nuntia vetustatis, qua vice alia nisi oratoris immortalitati commendatur?" Calvin also cites this dictum in his *Commentary on Seneca's de Clementia* (ed. Ford Lewis Battles and André Malan Hugo; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969) 50-51. Donald Kelley suggests that Calvin's statement reflects a more negative view about history's role than that of Luther and calls for a fuller examination of Calvin's historical thought – presumably to test this notion (*Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship*, 157-58, esp. n. 14).
- 28 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559) (2 vols; ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Library of Christian Classics 20-21; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960; reissued Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), book 1, chapter 6, paragraph 1.
- 29 *Institutes*, 4.1.9: "From this the face of the church comes forth and becomes visible to our eyes. Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists."
- 30 "But what are their reasons to prove that they have the true church? From ancient chronicles they allege what once took place in Italy, France, and Spain. They claim to take their origin from those holy men who with sound doctrine founded and raised up churches, and by their blood established the very doctrine and upbuilding of the church. Moreover, they say that the church was so consecrated both by spiritual gifts

- and by the blood of martyrs among them, and preserved by an unending succession of bishops, in order that it should not perish. They recall how much Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Augustine, and others made of this succession." (*Institutes*, 4.2.2).
- 31 On the fundamental character of the distinction between true and false church for Calvin's view of church history, see Danielle Fischer, "L'histoire de L'Eglise dans le pensée de Calvin," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte / Archive for Reformation History* 77 (1986) 79-125.
- 32 Now we can clearly see from what has already been said that all men adopted by God into the company of his people since the beginning of the world were covenanted to him by the same law and by the bond of the same doctrine as obtains among us." (*Institutes*, 2.10.1).
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Augustine, *City of God* (ed. David Knowles; trans. Henry Bettenson; New York: Penguin, 1972), Book 16.43.
- 35 These similarities and differences are outlined in *Institutes*, 2.10.
- 36 *Institutes*, 1.6.1-2.
- 37 See Heinrich Berger, *Calvins Geschichtsauffassung* (Zurich: Zwingli Verlag, 1955) 93-110, 168-70.
- 38 CO 20:449; German translation in *Johannes Calvin Lebenswerk in seinen Briefen* (3 vols; ed. Rudolph Schwarz; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1961-1962) 3:878-79.
- 39 The following discussion draws on my "Prophecy and History in Calvin's Lectures on Daniel."
- 40 *De quatuor summis imperiis libri tres* (Strasbourg, 1556); also known in English translation as *A Key to History*. On Luther, see Stefan Strohm, "Luthers Vorrede zum Propheten Daniel in seiner Deutschen Bibel," in *Die Geschichte der Daniel-Auslegung* (ed. Bracht and Du Toit) 219-243; on Melancthon, see Heinz Scheible, "Melancthons Verständnis des Danielbuches," in *Die Geschichte der Daniel-Auslegung* (ed. Bracht and Du Toit) 293-321; on Bullinger, see Emdio Campi, "Über das Ende des Weltzeitalters – Aspekte der Rezeption des Danielbuches bei Heinrich Bullinger," in *Europa, Tausendjähriges Reich und Neue Welt: Zwei Jahrtausende Geschichte und Utopie in der Rezeption des Danielbuches* (ed. Mariano Delgado, Klaus Koch, Edgar Marsch; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2003) 225-38.
- 41 Calvin says in passing that the world is scarcely 5,000 years old (*Institutes*, 3.21.4).
- 42 See Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis*, 100-40.
- 43 *Commentarius in epistolam ad Thessalonicenses II*, CO 52:194-208.
- 44 See, for example, Calvin's comments on 2 Thess 2:2: "In the meantime, the Lord would have us be constantly waiting for him in such a way as not to limit him to a certain time" (CO 52:195-196).
- 45 Irena Backus, *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse: Geneva, Zurich, and Wittenberg* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 137.

Address on the Conferral of the Herman G. Stuempfle Chair of Proclamation of the Word, October 13, 2009

Susan K. Hedahl

Good morning. What a day for us all. Thank you for being here today: the family of Herm Stuempfle, my family, friends, members of the Board, president, dean, faculty, staff, and students. Today is a unique experience in our seminary history as we celebrate the establishment and conferral of the Herman G. Stuempfle Chair of Proclamation of the Word.

It is appropriate to ask by way of introduction: What is a chair? Upon retirement faculty members here at the seminary are awarded a sturdy wooden chair, supposedly to sit in and enjoy that interesting period of life called retirement. But there are many types of chairs and this kind of chair of which we speak today has nothing to do with retirement! Instead it symbolizes the future, advancement, community, and theological work in the service of the public proclamation and teaching of the Gospel.

What is this chair for us? For me, a high honor as the first occupant. For all of us this chair has been established in the name of someone who has significantly influenced many lives here, including my own. It came into being because it was built by an entire community; those present today and those dispersed throughout the world in ministry. Multiple donors and friends supported this chair and continue to do so.

This chair also represents the fact that we understand the Word of God, expressed in many ways, to be the most collaborative activity in which can engage; it makes the Church the church. No teacher stands before a homiletics classroom or pastor in a pulpit without the corresponding contributions of the listeners, tradition, scriptures, experience, and the multiple voices of interpretation that characterize the field of homiletics.

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Part I

Many of you here knew Herm Stuempfle in a variety of roles: pastor, administrator, writer, teacher, worker in the community of Gettysburg. Some of you were his students, his co-workers, parishioners and fellow board members. When I arrived here in 1992, I came to know Herm as a thoughtful and kind friend. My first memory of him goes back to a presentation I was planning for our monthly faculty forum on the subject of Samuel Simon Schmucker's sermons. I was aware that Herm had done his Master's degree on Schmucker's sermons, so I asked him if he would be interested in co-presenting with me. He laughed and said: "Sue, going back to one's old theological works is like having to eat cold oatmeal!" And yet, he still agreed to do that presentation with me: one experienced homiletician and author paired up with a new faculty member recently out of grad school.

Undoubtedly the title of this chair – The Herman G Stuempfle Chair of Proclamation of the Word – is most appropriately named. Herm, as a faithful Christian and true Lutheran, immersed himself in words of all sorts: words of sermons, classroom instruction, publication, pastoral care, community commitments, and of more recent date, eloquent words of hymn texts he crafted. Indeed, the words Herm created, spoke, and printed are still repeated in our classrooms, read at student desks and sung in worship services here and throughout the Church. I have quoted him, as have others, in published works.

This past summer I read a delightful novel by Brian Lynch entitled *The Winner of Sorrow* about the life of the 18th century British poet, William Cowper.¹ Lynch has a keen heart combined with a good sense of Irish humor. I thought immediately of Herm's book *Preaching Law and Gospel*² when I read the opening words of this novel, since the words Lynch uses describe the faith predicament which Herm's book addresses: "It was the first day of a new century and in East Dereham the Christians were going to church. Among them, but not of them, was a man, William Cowper, who believed in Christ and his infinite mercy, although he was also convinced that God hated him personally and was intent on sending him to hell, soon, for all eternity. That the belief and the conviction contradicted each other he understood clearly."³

As a Lutheran homiletician, I use Herm's book, *Preaching Law and Gospel*, first published in 1978 and in print continuously since then. It is a landmark work in the field of homiletics, and Lynch's literary words so well describe this work's attention to the theological realities of that loving tension between law and gospel which we experience as believers and express as preachers.

Lest one under-estimate the importance of this particular work, consigning it only to the interests of Lutheran theologians and preachers, in 2004, Paul Scott Wilson, a well-known Canadian homiletical theologian of our academy, published a work entitled *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*.⁴ The work presents an over view of key books in the history of American preaching. He devotes many words to Herm's work and I quote here some of them:

Stuempfle consistently used the phrase 'law and gospel.' In so doing, he is more than pointing to the human impossibility of ever totally or appropriately separating law and gospel. A prescription "from law to gospel" is a distortion. His major accomplishment was providing freedom to preachers with his *horizontal* notions of law and gospel. Preachers uneasy about employing law from week to week lest they be mistaken for a critical parent had another way of fulfilling the responsibility to preach judgment. They could describe a situation of fallenness or brokenness in a world and society. Stuempfle found this a more congenial way of preaching in the post-Vietnam War era, though certainly law remained important. Moreover, he provides the preachers with an understanding of gospel that emphasizes God's actions to overturn the powers of this world. In a simple, brilliant, ninety-degree turn from vertical to horizontal, Stuempfle shifted the focus of preaching from primarily individual to social, as well."⁵

Thus Paul Scott Wilson, 26 years after Herm's work was first published.

Most importantly this social note which Herm struck in words, he enacted in daily life. He sought to establish a county home for the elderly; worked with the homeless shelter, served as a member of the Prison Society to help those struggling to re-enter a normal life; established a library at the County Jail; worked for years on the Martin Luther King, Jr. Committee towards this town's yearly celebrations. He and Gretchen worked with youth at "Kid's Time" at Christ Lutheran Church, and who could not admire the firm rhetoric when he wrote letters to the Gettysburg Times, protesting the possible presence of a casino in Gettysburg. He received several of our Gettysburg community's highest awards for service.

Herm not only crafted words of wisdom and power but he respected them in others as well, including those of one wise woman. When the YWCA was seeking a place to build, Gretchen said to Herm, there is some unused property at the boundaries of our school. Let's invite the YWCA to use it. Herm agreed and that mutual decision changed the nature of our campus.

Part II

One of the key phrases in our seminary's mission statement – “at the crossroads of history and hope” – is a reminder of Herm's half-jesting words to me about eating only academic cold oatmeal. Occupying this chair brings with it the imperative to engage thoughtfully the intense demands of contemporary public proclamation, which in its best sense is never neutral.

While doing graduate studies, I was supply preaching during the summer months. One particular congregation met in a school auditorium. As I was reading one of the lessons, a text on the radical judgments of God, an enormous thunderstorm broke around us. The first crack of thunder was picked up on the school's PA system at precisely the moment I concluded the reading. Everyone jumped – high. After the service, the last person out, a gentleman in his early 80s, said to me: “Very impressive. What else can you do in that pulpit?”

A good question. But over the years, I have learned the real question is: What is the pulpit asking of us? For to sit in this chair, brings with it both an imperative to remember history and a demand to maintain an informed, scholarly eye on the homiletical horizon. It means seeking engagement in the contemporary challenges which face preaching the gospel today. I would like to address four of these critical elements on the homiletical landscape today, which I deem crucial to our preaching and reflection.

1. The first homiletical vector is what I describe as: Commitment to the study and articulation of biblical texts in the service of public proclamation of the Gospel.

Isn't this another word from history? Yes. But it also holds challenges for the contemporary preacher. We may encounter this business of texts from several perspectives. One is the proclamatory fatigue felt by those who feel overwhelmed with the texts which repeat themselves in our lectionaries year after year. “Now what do I preach on?!” My students, just new to the task of proclamation, wrestle with these same texts. How to speak them again – for the first time? Yet, counter balancing that, we are vividly aware today that debates among us now capture the attention of our faith communities, demanding new hearings of our biblical texts. Whatever our views, decisions about ministry, life, and faithfulness have at their core the public proclamation of biblical texts.

Fred Craddock, pioneer of the narrative form of preaching, noted once an experience he had when a musician friend visited. They went to a concert featuring a famous interpreter of Beethoven. Craddock asked his musician friend, “How do you know when someone is actually playing

Beethoven? What if they aren't playing Beethoven after all?” The friend, who had attended the concert (following the musical score on his lap!), said: “You always have the music.” In light of Craddock's recollection, I think of my own field of preaching. Regardless of whatever we bring to the act of preaching, what we must never forget is: “We always have the biblical texts.”

Craddock went on note a second reality, linked intrinsically to the first. Along with these texts comes the requirement of hermeneutics, of interpretation. He expressed exasperated disgust with those who take the Bible into the pulpit and say, “I preach the Bible just like it is, nothing added, nothing taken away.” This, said Craddock, is a cop-out. It is a proclamation uninformed by the work of the Spirit.

Today proclamation must be willing to engage texts in such ways that we both value them historically and are yet simultaneously unafraid to engage them through the process of in-depth hermeneutical reflection, trusting that such work honors the gospel's power to shape community, actions, and minds. We are in a time of great dialogue, dissent, and consensus-seeking in our faith communities. It seems essential that we ask how we can participate in our dialogues and disputes, relinquishing neither the texts nor our hermeneutical ventures.

2. A second homiletical vector these days is connected with: How to proclaim biblical texts with the use of technology?

We are engaged in many discussions about this here at Gettysburg Seminary. Our faculty models a wide range of technological usage. Our award winning colleague in this arena, Mark Vitalis Hoffman, consistently reminds us: “But what about this new development?” “And this?” “And this?”

Romans Chapter 10 describes the traditional role of the preacher. Verse 14 asks: “And how are they to hear without some to proclaim him?” Traditionally Protestants have characterized the reception of the gospel primarily through auditory means. We now consider that call to faith with what it means to combine words and images in service of the gospel.

The challenges of technology are those we encounter in our classrooms here daily. I do not sense these challenges and good possibilities lessening in degree but rather increasing. Accordingly, the theologies that accompany them are also published and competing for attention, too. We are naïve indeed if we consider technology as something which comes in neutral fashion; quite the contrary, its uses demand theological articulation about intentionality, motive and means.

My classrooms reflect this spectrum; whether it means all computers turned off and attention focused on the witness of the person preaching – or

listening to students who use the monitor, the screen, and the biblical texts to preach – in all cases we seek the proclamation of the gospel. It would seem this question of technology is really not about technology so much as how we might construct a theology of technology that serves rather than dominates the act of preaching.

3. A third homiletical vector today concerns the connection between doctrine and preaching.

Another change in the homiletical tide recently has drawn my attention in a renewed way to the content of proclamation. In the last decade, the field of homiletics has turned away from such pre-occupations as narrative theology, sermon as story, inductive preaching, or contextualized preaching. Concerns are fixed increasingly on doctrine with a view to preaching more intentionally the person and acts of Jesus Christ. While one may proclaim the biblical texts in all their richness and ambiguity, how in second level theological reflection are we interpreting these texts doctrinally? This is a crucial question.

Today one can hear many sermons where the figure of the Christ is minimized, sermons in which the restless power of the biblical texts is warped into a set of feel-good lessons or minimized with moralisms, or packaged as prosperity theology. There are sermons which can eulogize well, but never mention the hope of the resurrection in Jesus Christ. The possibilities of eclipsing Christ in preaching are enormous.

By way of example, doctrine is a concern of Sally A. Brown's recent work *Cross Talk: Preaching Redemption Here and Now*.⁶ She wastes no time in naming the purpose of her work immediately: "The subject of this book is one that theologians are discussing more and more, while the preachers seem to speak of it less and less: the death of Jesus."⁷ In this magnificent work on atonement theory, Brown expresses this hope about the ways we can speak of Jesus Christ and the Cross: "What our congregations long for, I am convinced – is a rhetoric of redemption that emphasizes exploration over explanation, maintains openness of meaning in preference to semantic closure, and aims at metaphorical modesty rather than theoretical comprehensiveness."⁸

Likewise Thomas G. Long's most recent work, *Preaching from Memory to Hope*, vigorously engages doctrine as well, his sparring partners being members of the Jesus Seminar.⁹ Long believes that preaching in the name of Jesus Christ has been significantly compromised in the theology produced by the Jesus Seminar. Today, Long claims, we are dealing with a neo-Gnosticism as a result and its subtle but devastating effects on preaching. Long names four of these challenges.

First he looks at the assumption that "Humanity is saved by gnosis, or knowledge." Long quotes Philip Lee, who describes this kind of preaching by saying: "the Gnostic impulse replaces mea culpa (I have sinned) with mea ignorantia (I don't know)."¹⁰ Against any preaching which does not contain both elements, Long asserts: "We need not only knowledge but also repentance and redemption."¹¹

Long's second critique of neo-Gnostic preaching which eclipses Christ is: "A focus on the spiritual inner self, the 'divine spark'."¹² Long's contention with this is simply that it reduces the preaching of the gospel to primarily individual and personal terms. Never mind that this gospel was meant for the shaking of the entire cosmos. According to this view of the personal, says Long, "The main action of redemption takes place, then, on a very small stage, the spiritual inner self."¹³ This ought to remind us that the you of the Gospels is usually plural, meaning all of us; or as my Texas-based colleague would say, y'all.

A third characteristic of contemporary neo-Gnostic preaching according to Long is that it minimizes the reality of Jesus Christ by what he calls "an antipathy toward incarnation and embodiment."¹⁴ Long takes aim at the Gnostic effort to make God separate and apart from anything that is human and physical, rendering God out there rather than involved in the messiness of our lives. Signs of this Long says are treating church communities and religious institutions as accidental structures, means to an end, instead of taking seriously the contexts in which we find ourselves, as contexts given by God. This attitude also refuses to dialogue about differences as well and claims, "We all have differently shaped egg cartons, but essentially we are all holding the same spiritual eggs."¹⁵ Long counters this by observing, "Behind this easy ecumenism though, is the Gnostic impulse that bodies are mere containers for the real stuff, namely the spirit. The Christian doctrine of incarnation, however, challenges simplistic divisions between bodies and spirits."¹⁶

Long's fourth and final warning is that Gnostic preaching today presents "an emphasis on present spiritual reality rather than the eschatological hope, on the God of timeless truth, rather than the God who will bring history to consummation."¹⁷ This view of God is both anti-Semitic and anti-historical and ignores the biblical and apocalyptic impulses which assert that God is more than just what happens to me – today.

I commend this work of Long's to you for a fuller version of his arguments with the Jesus Seminar participants as they reflects some of the issues I encounter in the classroom and hear from a number of pulpits today.

4. The fourth and final homiletical element that has such a major impact on proclamation today is what I view as the task of global proclamation.

This seminary is in its 184th year, and its global connections, for me, are most beautifully expressed in the two stone memorials, each in the rooms on either side of the chapel. You will see in one room a stone memorial commemorating the links of this seminary and its graduates with Africa, beginning in the year 1902. On the other side you will see a stone commemorating our links with India, beginning in 1863. Both of these links are embodied today in the presence of our Tanzanian student, Kumbuka Mwasanguti, and our New Testament colleague, the Reverend Dr. Surekha Neleva.

It is not simply, to use older terminology, that we are “doing mission.” It is that the world’s challenges, pains, and joys offer themselves as subjects for our preaching in ways that are unavoidable if we are to preach the Gospel genuinely. If you talk to our students who have returned from first-time trips overseas about their experiences, you will catch this combination of excitement and challenge. I have heard classroom sermons transformed by these experiences.

Numerically speaking, Christianity is a minority religion. When we speak the gospel, we speak as a minority voice and frequently in the context of those who would defiantly deny and ridicule our faith. Thus it seems in contemporary proclamation, given the global pressures we confront, that we must sincerely ask: Does the preacher stake everything on the truth of this gospel and understand that in a world-encompassing sense?

Surely it must be asked and answered if we are to preach the gospel truthfully. As my Oromo students from the areas of Ethiopia have reminded us in our preaching classes, just as 2,000 years ago – even so now: there are Christians still being literally murdered for their affirmation of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The stakes are high.

With the rich history of this new chair in mind, as well as the currents homiletical tasks to which we are called, I conclude with some observations based on a unique preaching story from Acts 20. In the area of Troas, Paul preached the gospel to a group until midnight. Verse 9 states, “A young man named Eutychus, who was sitting in the windowsill, began to sink off into a deep sleep while Paul talked still longer. Overcome by sleep he fell to the ground three floors below and was picked up for dead.” The text goes on to tell us how Paul restored the young man to life and then concludes, “Paul continued to converse with them until dawn, then he left.”

I like this story for many reasons. It is an emblematic story about preaching; it is about preachers and listeners; about the possible consequences of dozing off during a sermon; it is about a preacher who just doesn’t quit; and finally, it is about us in the personage of that young man who was restored to life by the preaching of the gospel. The young man’s name,

Eutychus, means “good fortune.” And indeed, it is our good fortune that we are restored to life daily and eternally by this gospel.

Today we are blessed indeed to celebrate the Herman G. Stuempfle Chair of Proclamation of the Word, which this community has lovingly built to honor him and the life-giving gospel of Jesus Christ. And we are all unusually and truly blessed by being entrusted with the mandate to proclaim that gospel. Thank you.

Notes

- 1 Brian Lynch, *The Winner of Sorrow* (London: Dalkey, 2005).
- 2 Herman G. Stuempfle, Jr., *Preaching Law and Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).
- 3 Lynch, *The Winner of Sorrow*, 1.
- 4 Paul Scott Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2004).
- 5 Ibid., 84.
- 6 Sally A. Brown, *Cross Talk: Preaching Redemption Here and Now* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008).
- 7 Ibid., 1.
- 8 Ibid., 48.
- 9 Thomas G. Long, *Preaching From Memory to Hope* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009).
- 10 Ibid., 92.
- 11 Ibid., 91.
- 12 Ibid., 94.
- 13 Ibid., 95.
- 14 Ibid., 95.
- 15 Ibid., 101.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Ibid., 103.

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Comparative Study of Luther's and Bonhoeffer's Trinitarian Theology and Ethics

Timo Tavast

This article, originally presented in the form of a guest lecture at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, discusses two different theological themes that can be found in Martin Luther's and Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology. The first one concerns their trinitarian theology, and the second is ethics as interpreted by these famous theologians. Although Luther and Bonhoeffer come from totally different theological periods, it is possible and also profitable to make comparisons between their thoughts. These comparisons highlight certain elements of their theology which have been sometimes underestimated in modern Luther and Bonhoeffer studies. The new perspectives of trinitarian theology and ethics presented in this article contribute to the rediscovery of these forgotten elements.

The first half of this article addresses Luther's and Bonhoeffer's trinitarian theology and particularly their understandings of the trinitarian doctrine's relationship to the doctrine of justification and christocentric faith. The second half explores the principles of Luther's and Bonhoeffer's ethics. I will investigate different models of Lutheran ethics, relate them to Luther's original thoughts, and raise the question of what kind of ethical model Bonhoeffer may represent if compared to Luther's ethics and later Lutheran models.

1. The Doctrine of the Trinity as a Precondition for the Doctrine of Justification

As starting points for the first half of this article, I present two combined theses. The first one is a general thesis on Christian faith presented here

from outside of Luther's and Bonhoeffer's theology: talking about saving faith or even Christ outside the context of trinitarian tradition is not Christian at all but belongs to some other religion. Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses are good examples of this kind of non-Christian religion. The trinitarian basis of the *World Council of Churches* tells also about the fact that trinitarianism is ecumenically confessed as one fundamental criterion of Christian faith.¹ When we ask if there is a trinitarian basis in Luther's or Bonhoeffer's theology, we are evaluating if these masters and spiritual fathers are true representatives of Christian faith.

The second thesis is presented from inside of Luther's and Bonhoeffer's theology: careful study of the writings of these theologians show that the doctrine of the Trinity is a necessary precondition and wider context of their doctrine of justification – even in those texts where the trinitarian basis is not explicitly mentioned. Without their trinitarian doctrine, we misinterpret their doctrine of justification and their most crucial ideas of faith, Christ, and Christian life. In other words, without paying attention to the trinitarian basis of faith represented by Luther and Bonhoeffer, we interpret their more explicitly emphasized doctrines and theological ideas incorrectly outside of the fundamental context to which they belong in their respective theological systems.²

1.1. The Role of the Doctrine of the Trinity in Luther's Theology

One central theme of recent Luther studies has been the investigation of the role (function) of the doctrine of the Trinity in Luther's theology.³ New findings can be summarized in a way which may sound surprising and radical but which is, nevertheless, well-grounded; although somebody might say so, it is not true that the doctrine of justification is the most fundamental principle of Luther and Lutheran faith. Of course, the doctrine of justification was very important for Luther. We cannot understand him and the main points of contention of the Reformation without understanding his doctrine of justification. Besides, it is true that Luther did not write as much about the doctrine of the Trinity as about justification by faith. However, the reason for that was not the irrelevance of the doctrine of the Trinity, but the simple fact that there was no debate on this doctrine with Catholics or with other Reformers. Luther did not have to argue for the doctrine of the Trinity since there was consensus on the doctrine. The situation regarding the subject of justification was totally different, as we know very well.

If we pay attention to the real content of Luther's doctrine of justification, we understand very quickly that there is no justification without the triune God who justifies us. The fundamental matter for Luther's under-

standing is not the process of justification or its results in us but the Holy Trinity itself, that is, the Father who has sent the Son Jesus to the world for our salvation and delivered the Holy Spirit so that we could participate in faith in this Son and his righteousness. The principle for Luther's doctrine of justification is the right biblical understanding of the loving triune God who is the Love itself among the Father, the Son, and the Spirit and who therefore loves us, too.

In general, if we read Luther and his original texts broadly enough, we can understand that, seen from a systematic perspective, all the other doctrines in Luther's theology, even the doctrine of justification, have a fundamental precondition which precedes these doctrines logically. That precondition is the classical Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Stated differently, the precondition for all the other doctrines is the doctrine of the Trinity together with the classical christological dogma, both determined by the ecumenical councils of the church in the 4th and 5th centuries. I would like to claim that at this fundamental trinitarian and christological level, Luther was a good Catholic until the end of his life. He knew the creeds of the undivided church profoundly as well as Augustine's and even some Eastern church fathers' trinitarian ideas. Besides, he respected medieval trinitarian tradition, particularly Franciscan tradition, a great deal and followed it in many ways in his doctrine of the Trinity.⁴ One reason for mentioning these facts is the following: there is enormous unused ecumenical potential in Luther's trinitarian doctrine. It would be much easier to build the bridge between Lutherans and Catholics, as well as between Lutherans and Orthodox, if we let Luther teach us our common trinitarian and christological roots which we have with classical Western and Eastern Christianity.

The remarks above emphasize the decisive role of the trinitarian doctrine for Luther and his theology. I conclude this section in the following way: for Luther, the doctrine of the Trinity is *gospel* by nature. This means that in Luther's theology the trinitarian doctrine is not considered to be an old doctrinal relic or a piece of speculative intellectual philosophy with bad Hellenistic metaphysics. Leading Neo-Protestant theologians in the late 19th and early 20th century claimed something like that and greatly underestimated the role of the doctrine of the Trinity in Luther's theology. We should rediscover the original Luther and his fundamental trinitarian ideas – and not only Luther's ideas but the holy ecumenical Christian faith and its trinitarian basis which is part and parcel of the gospel and our salvation. From Luther's theology, we cannot choose the gospel and the doctrine of justification only and leave out trinitarian doctrine, since these doctrines are inseparable. For Luther, losing the doctrine of the Trinity means losing the gospel and the foundation of justification.

The relationship between the trinitarian doctrine and the doctrine of justification in Luther's theology can also be summarized as follows. The doctrine of justification by faith is the center of Luther's theology, *but* it is essential to understand *how* it is the center. Justification is *not* an *exclusive* center; in other words, it is not a center which excludes other doctrines, considering them somehow less important or unnecessary. Instead, it is an *inclusive* center. So the doctrine of justification – in its broadest sense – includes its preconditions. The doctrine of the Trinity and the christological dogma are those most fundamental preconditions without which there would be no gospel and no justification. I have aimed to clarify this inclusive and hierarchical model of doctrines when dealing with Luther's doctrines of the Trinity and justification. Actually, we could even broaden our understanding of Luther's theology and relate some other doctrines to the center of Luther's faith. We could describe Luther's inclusive understanding of the doctrine of justification by including, for example, his doctrines of the Word, sacraments, church, and ministry in his model of justification. They are also constitutive parts of the saving gospel and the doctrinal whole of which the center is the doctrine of justification. Their role is not similar to the trinitarian and christological doctrines which form the ultimate foundation of justification, but these doctrines are also preconditions of justification since they describe the indispensable mediators of the gospel and justifying faith. In addition, we could also relate other doctrines to Luther's doctrine of justification. Some of them, for example, his view of sanctification and loving deeds, would describe the immediate consequences of justification. So not only preconditions but also consequences of justification are, in a way, included in this center of Luther's faith. *Summa summarum*: in Luther's theology, justification by faith alone is never alone!

1.2. *The Role of the Doctrine of the Trinity in Bonhoeffer's Theology*

When one begins to study Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology and to read his most well-known writings, many critical questions may arise in a systematic theologian's mind. For example: where is the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, in Bonhoeffer's theological texts? Is his theology christocentric only or does he somehow refer to the whole triune God when he speaks about Christ?

Many Bonhoeffer scholars have claimed that he is primarily a Barthian christocentric theologian whose theological approach is not fully trinitarian.⁵ Later in this section, I will call this kind of interpretation into question. However, I have to admit – at least if we only read texts like *Discipleship*⁶ and

*Life Together*⁷ – that there is a certain validity in these critical voices who claim that Bonhoeffer is mostly a christocentric theologian. Consequently, we have to take their accusations against Bonhoeffer seriously and ask critically if there is a trinitarian basis in Bonhoeffer's theology or not.

Bonhoeffer neither wrote any textbook of Systematic Theology nor investigated the doctrine of the Trinity as a part of a detailed theological system. However, we can reconstruct some key elements of his doctrinal understanding of the Trinity and locate this trinitarian doctrine in Bonhoeffer's theology. My purpose is to investigate what the role of the doctrine of the Trinity is in the wider context of his theology. In other words, I am asking why the trinitarian doctrine of God is important for Bonhoeffer and what it is needed for in his theology. I will start by investigating Bonhoeffer's catechisms from the trinitarian perspective. Second, I will take a step toward Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*⁸ but not yet from an ethical point of view. This unfinished work contains many notable ideas which show us the crucial elements of his theology, that is, the christocentric doctrine of justification and its preconditions and consequences. Seen from the viewpoint of *Ethics*, we will address the question of whether the doctrine of the Trinity is one of those preconditions.

1.2.1. *The Trinity in Bonhoeffer's Catechisms*

Bonhoeffer wrote two different catechisms in his lifetime. The first one was written with Franz Hildebrandt in 1931, when Bonhoeffer was leading a challenging confirmation school group in a suburb of Berlin.⁹ The second one dates to 1936 and is a product of his Finkenwalde period.¹⁰

Both catechisms were written for confirmation school students and teachers as modern instruction for the Christian Lutheran faith of our times. For us, they are highly interesting and informative examples of Bonhoeffer's catechetical teaching. I would like to argue that in these texts, he did not mechanically follow, for example, Luther's catechisms but instead expressed the most fundamental content of Christian faith in a fresh and personal way. These texts show us what was so fundamental to the faith of the church according to Bonhoeffer that he wanted to teach it to the confirmation school youths, too. Normally, when writing his academic and ecclesiastical texts, Bonhoeffer did not have to present all of these fundamental beliefs explicitly since he was able to suppose that the audience had already learned these basics elsewhere. Consequently, the trinitarian basis of many of his ideas was left without mention and taken for granted. Now, when writing for young Christians who were learning the basics for the first time in their life, Bonhoeffer had to explicate the church's trinitarian, christologi-

cal, and pneumatological doctrines – and, what is noteworthy, he did so in a way which was also personally true to himself. I would like to claim that we can read his catechisms as theological “tests”: if we can find a deep trinitarian understanding of God in these texts whose purpose is to explicate the foundation of the faith, then we can suppose that there is a profound trinitarian foundation elsewhere in his writings, too, although it is not necessarily mentioned explicitly. On the other hand, if there is no clear trinitarianism in Bonhoeffer's catechisms, or if it is there but only as a theoretical piece of tradition and without any real use, then we do not have any justified reason to deduce that there is a hidden trinitarian basis in his theology in general. In the history of Christianity, trinitarian doctrine has always occupied one of the most central places in catechetical teaching. Therefore it is well-founded to suppose that we will find it there in Bonhoeffer's case, too – if anywhere.

Trinitarianism in Bonhoeffer's catechetical teaching can be already found in his 1931 catechism which has been translated into English and therefore also easier to use here. The results of my analysis of this catechism, as well as more general findings from the 1936 catechism, can be presented as follows:

1. The starting point of the 1931 catechism

The opening questions of the 1931 catechism are “*What is the Gospel?*” and “*Who accepts the Gospel?*” So the message of salvation and the doctrine of justification by faith are Bonhoeffer's focus and starting point. The interesting matter here is the following: the doctrine of the Trinity is *not* separate from this focus, but instead this doctrine – in its economic form – is a fundamental part of the focus.

What is the Gospel? The message of the salvation of [1.] God, which has appeared in [2.] Jesus Christ and has been handed down to us through his [3.] Spirit.¹¹

Who accepts the Gospel? Anyone who rejoices in the grace of [1.] God, acknowledges the name of [2.] Christ, and prays for [3.] the Holy Spirit.¹²

According to Bonhoeffer, there is neither salvation nor justification by faith without the triune God, who is truly present and active in salvation history. The triune God is the core and fundamental basis of salvation and of all the deeds of God which take place for our benefit. Seen from the perspective of his catechisms, I would argue that Bonhoeffer's view of salvation and justifying faith is practically the same as the view represented by Luther, who in-

cluded the trinitarian doctrine in the doctrine of justification. Bonhoeffer even refers to Luther and accepts Luther's profound ontological interpretation of the triune God's saving acts: "The faith of the Gospel acknowledges that *God has given himself completely to us with all that he is and has*, in these words: 'I believe in [1.] God, that he is my Creator, in [2.] Jesus Christ, that he is my Lord, in [3.] the Holy Spirit, that he is my Sanctifier.'"13

2. The trinitarian structure of the 1931 catechism

At least in his catechetical teaching, Bonhoeffer uses the trinitarian doctrine as the fundamental framework of his theology. The doctrine of the Trinity is not some separate locus at the beginning of a theological system but the most constitutive and always present factor of his theological thoughts. This can be seen, particularly, in the sections on the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sanctifier which follow the trinitarian structure and start with the following introduction: "It is to the glory of [1.] God that he comes down to us in [2.] Christ to raise us up to him in [3.] the Spirit. He is God the Three in One."¹⁴

3. One God as primarily trinitarian

Western Augustinian tradition has emphasized the unity and one substance of God so strongly that the trinitarian perspective has sometimes been only a secondary perspective on God. In his 1931 catechism, Bonhoeffer does not represent this problematic approach to the doctrine of God. Already before talking about "the one, true God,"¹⁵ he has clearly explicated who this God is to whom he is referring: the one, true God is the trinitarian God who is present and active in salvation history, particularly in Jesus.¹⁶ Besides, immediately after Bonhoeffer's reference to the one, true God, he starts to reflect again upon the triune God and the Trinity's deeds as the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sanctifier. All of this means that Bonhoeffer is even more thoroughly trinitarian in his theology than the classic Western tradition has been. In addition, his approach to the Christian faith and to the trinitarian view of God is salvation-historical by nature. In other words, he is not so interested in abstract ideas of one "substance" and three eternal "persons" of God who exist somewhere beyond the biblical salvation history. Instead, Bonhoeffer is deeply rooted in biblical trinitarian thoughts which describe the Trinity from the perspective of God's trinitarian deeds in our world.

4. Trinitarian christocentrism

Whatever christocentrism there is in Bonhoeffer's 1931 catechism,¹⁷ it belongs to the wider trinitarian context. This finding is fundamental to understanding Bonhoeffer's theology correctly.

5. Comparison to the 1936 catechism

Compared to his older catechism, Bonhoeffer's 1936 catechism is even more clearly a trinitarian text. Its starting point and structure are constituted by profound trinitarian theology. The doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of Bonhoeffer's view of God in this document, and it is obvious that also his christocentric ideas belong to the trinitarian context.¹⁸

On the grounds of Bonhoeffer's catechisms, it is possible to formulate the following hypothesis which will be tested in the next section using his *Ethics*: the doctrine of the Trinity is included in Bonhoeffer's theology as a constitutive part of it although it is mentioned explicitly in only a few texts. The catechisms reveal the hidden trinitarian foundation and context of Bonhoeffer's christocentric approach to the doctrine of justification by faith, which is the focus and starting point of his theology.

1.2.2. *The Trinity in Bonhoeffer's Ethics*

When reading the "Editor's Introduction" to Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*, we can see immediately that the editor points out the christological center of this book – and, what raises questions, without mentioning Bonhoeffer's trinitarian ideas at all.¹⁹ On the one hand, this is understandable since the most widely explicated theological foundation of Bonhoeffer's ethical thinking is his Christology – especially the ideas of God's becoming human in Jesus Christ and the new humanity in him. On the other hand, I would like to explore whether the position in the Editor's Introduction is a bit one-sided. I wonder if the actual text of *Ethics* refers not only to Bonhoeffer's christocentric theology and to his doctrine of justification but also to the doctrine of the triune God as the most profound foundation of Christian ethics. The question shows that here I am also testing my hypothesis presented at the end of the previous section.

In the opening section of the chapter titled, "Ultimate and Penultimate Things," Bonhoeffer shows very clearly that the doctrine of justification is the focus and starting point of Christian life and faith. However, the interesting question is what the relationship is between this christocentric doctrine of justification and the doctrine of the Trinity in this crucial text and presumably in Bonhoeffer's theology in general, as well:

The origin and essence of all Christian life are consummated in the one event that the Reformation has called the justification of the sinner by grace alone. It is not what a person is per se, but what a person is in this event, that gives us insight into the Christian life. [...] What happens here? Something ultimate that cannot be grasped by anything we are, or do, or suffer. The dark tunnel of human life [...] is power-

fully torn open; the word of God bursts in. In this saving light, people recognize God and their neighbors for the first time. [...] They become free for God and for one another. They realize that there is a God who loves and accepts them, that alongside them stand others whom God loves equally, and that there is a future with the triune God and God's church-community. [...] The past and future of the whole of life flow together in God's presence. The whole of the past is embraced by the word 'forgiveness'; the whole of the future is preserved in the faithfulness of God. [...] This life knows itself stretched and sustained from one eternal foundation to another, from its election before the time of the world toward eternal salvation to come. This life knows itself as a member of a church and of a creation that sings the praises of the triune God. All this happens when Christ comes to each person. In Christ all this is truth and reality.²⁰

The quoted text shows that Bonhoeffer's view of the whole Trinity – i.e., not only his view of Christ – is the *foundation and goal* of his doctrine of justification. Christ has his crucial role in justification,²¹ but this christocentric focus is taken out of its context if we do not notice Bonhoeffer's references to the whole triune God. Not Christ alone but Christ as a part of the Trinity is the subject of our justification. So the view of the whole Trinity is implicitly included in Bonhoeffer's doctrine of justification as its *foundation*. On the other hand, the text says explicitly that justification through the present Christ, by grace and by faith, leads us to the reality of the whole Trinity. We have "a future with the triune God" and we know ourselves as members "of a creation that sings the praises of the triune God." Therefore I argue that for Bonhoeffer, the view of the Trinity and of our life in the triune God is also the *goal* of the doctrine of the Trinity. This is, actually, a part of classic trinitarian theology, represented by Luther, as well. Bonhoeffer does not investigate or express all these trinitarian ideas as broadly and frequently as, for example, Luther did, but they still belong to Bonhoeffer's theology as essential parts of it. As we have seen in this crucial text, Bonhoeffer's christocentric doctrine of justification is the locus where the trinitarian basis and goal are "lived out" and carried forward – although implicitly in most other texts.

The conclusion of my analysis of this section of *Ethics* is the following: on the grounds of the opening section of "Ultimate and Penultimate Things," the hypothesis presented earlier in this article seems to be correct. In other words, the doctrine of the Trinity is included in Bonhoeffer's theology and particularly in his christocentric doctrine of justification as a constitutive part of it, although the trinitarian doctrine is mentioned explicitly in few texts only.

There is also another section in *Ethics* which is worth investigation when we try to find an answer to the question of whether the doctrine of the Trinity is included in Bonhoeffer's theology as a constitutive part of it or not. This section is at the beginning of the chapter titled, "Christ, Reality, and Good[:] Christ, Church, and World."²² There Bonhoeffer talks about the "ultimate reality" which is the fundamental basis of Christian ethics according to him. Among other things he claims as follows: "If it turns out, however, that these realities, myself and the world, are themselves embedded in a wholly other ultimate reality, namely, the reality of God the Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer, then the ethical problem takes on a whole new aspect."²³

The decisive question is the following: who is the ultimate reality Bonhoeffer is referring to as foundational to the Christian ethics? In other words, who is "God the Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer" for Bonhoeffer? Is this God Christ alone *or* the Father and the Son together ("binitarian" God without the Spirit) *or* the whole Trinity? My claim is that Bonhoeffer is talking about the whole Trinity and that his ethical theology is not only christocentric by nature but also trinitarian – especially when seen from the viewpoint of the most profound basis of his theology. The trinitarian interpretation of the quoted text is based on the text's footnote which shows Bonhoeffer's connection to Karl Barth.²⁴ "God the Redeemer" and, in general, the view of redemption are interpreted eschatologically in Barth's theology. So the litany of "Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer" covers not only the salvation historical work of the Father and the Son but also the work of the Holy Spirit as well as the eschatological fulfillment.²⁵ Therefore I am also willing to argue that Bonhoeffer has not forgotten the Holy Spirit when we speak about God and the ultimate reality.

To conclude my analysis of the chapter "Christ, Reality, and Good[:] Christ, Church, and World," I can state that also this part of *Ethics* supports my hypothesis. Particularly the opening section of this chapter shows that not only Bonhoeffer's Christology but also his whole view of the Trinity is included in Bonhoeffer's ethical theology as a constitutive part of it.

2. Principles of Christian Ethics

Christian denominations differ from each other not only in their doctrinal interpretations but also in their understanding of ethics. Seen from a historical perspective as well as from a contemporary ecumenical point of view, there is no such collection of ethical principles or practical ethical conclusions which we could regard as the final and completed interpretation of Christian ethics – the only real one. Ethical pluralism, also among Chris-

tians, is a fact – regardless of whether we like it or not. However, the church struggle in Germany in the 1930's and 1940's and the horrors of Holocaust, caused by Nazi-“Christians”, have shown us that there have to be some boundaries around Christian ethics. We cannot accept the idea that “anything goes” in ethical matters or that all those moral principles people want to follow belong to Christian ethics. The church has to be aware of its permanent ethical principles, and, on the other hand, it has to investigate again and again in new historical and cultural contexts what the practical applications of these principles are in our concrete life.

In this part of the article, my goal is to investigate different ethical models which have been represented among Lutheran traditions. One of them is Luther's model. As I will show, his ethical ideas have been misunderstood and reinterpreted so many times during last 500 years that it is truly difficult to find the original Luther without critical Luther studies. After Luther's ethics, I will investigate the basis of Bonhoeffer's ethical thoughts very briefly. Although the historical context in which these thoughts were generated was totally different from Luther's, some meaningful comparisons can be drawn between these two theologians' ethics. This kind of investigation contributes to the formation of an accurate understanding of Luther's and Bonhoeffer's ethical ideas as well as to the formation of our own ethics – regardless of the fact that we do not necessarily accept all of their ethical views as such.

2.1. Three Models of Lutheran Ethics and Luther's Relationship to Them

In this section, I will present three different ethical models represented by Lutherans in the 20th century and even today. Critical Luther scholars have argued that all of these models are not authentic Lutheran ones in the sense that Luther himself did not accept all of them. The most recent Finnish Luther research has shown that Luther represented the third model, which was recently rediscovered.²⁶ However, many modern Lutherans still support the first or the second model, imagining that they follow Luther.

The most typical feature of the first ethical model is its one-sided emphasis on so-called *natural law*. In principle, the idea of natural law is deeply Christian since its earliest roots are in Romans 2:14-15: “When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness[...].”

These famous ideas of Paul were further developed in the early church

and in the medieval era. As a result, Western theologians widely accepted the following general understanding of natural law: it is written in our conscience by the Creator so that people, even after the fall, are quite capable of knowing God's will. In other words, all human beings are universally able to know quite well what is right and what is wrong although they cannot fulfill that good anymore. According to Paul and Western Catholic mainline tradition, one does not have to be a Christian or know the written biblical law in order to be a moral person and capable of doing moral evaluations. For moral knowledge, it is enough that one is created by God and that God has *instilled a conscience in us*. Law is in essence already written in our nature.

Here the interesting matter is that Luther also supported these traditional Christian ideas of conscience and natural law – although he did not accept the Catholic Augustinian idea of *ordo charitas* (the order of love) which was connected with the concept of natural law and contained the claim that human strivings are still, even after the fall, directed towards God, the highest good. In any case, the main point is that Luther's ethics is still essentially based on the idea of natural law.

At the same time, it is decisive to understand the following issue: in his ethics of natural law, Luther did *not* draw those conclusions which were typical of the modern ethical model I am trying to clarify just now as the first model. Some of the representatives of this first model were leading German Lutherans who supported the Nazi government in the 1930's and 1940's by claiming that God had created unchangeable orders like family, nation, and race. These theologians thought that in those orders, people would follow natural law quite independently without ethical instruction of the church. Actually, they claimed that the church had no Christian ethics of its own but it should follow those moral principles which were given to all people through natural law and which were then applied by the national government set by the Creator. The results of this kind of identification of Christian ethics with public opinion, politically “correct” views, and unchangeable orders of creation were fatal. The so-called German Christians were totally unable to criticize the rulers and their immoral deeds. We know very well that Bonhoeffer was one of those theologians who criticized the ethics of the Nazi-sympathetic Protestants very strongly. Luther would have done the same although he might have used quite different arguments from Bonhoeffer, as we will see later.

Scandinavian Lutheran ethics did not follow the German Lutheran tradition which had Nazi sympathies. However, in the mid- and late 20th century and in some cases even today, many Swedish and Finnish Lutheran theologians have represented the first ethical model I have described. According to these theologians, the content of natural law is quite simply the

abstract obligation of love. It is universally given and recognized by all people. The detailed contents of this love, that is, all the practical applications of natural law, are dependent on historical situation. Moral choices and decisions are made through intellect and in public ethical and social forums. The Christian church is only one participant in these discussions and not a moral authority anymore. The fundamental idea of this ethical model is that individual Christians or the Christian church do not have any source of ethical knowledge of their own. The content of the law is already known by every human being through natural law, so the church, the Bible, or Christian ethical tradition is no longer needed. The special revelation through Christ, the gospel proclaimed by the church, and the Christian faith may provide new motivation and strength to fulfill the will of God, but they do not bring anything new to our understanding of the content of God's will. Many Scandinavian Lutherans used to think in that way even after the catastrophe of the German state church and World War II. Luther was claimed to be supporter of this model, too. In fact, he was not, as recent Finnish Luther research has shown. Besides, the lessons of Germany's church struggle and the Holocaust have shown – at least to me – that this first ethical model is dangerous in many ways. The content of natural law is understood too ambiguously and described as an abstract principle of love only. As a result, prevailing public opinion or governing powers are able to include in “Christian” ethics anything they want. In fact, in this model, public opinion has the final moral authority over the church. This makes it impossible to criticize the prevailing morality. The law and the gospel have also been totally separated in this model: the first one is society's matter; the latter one, the gospel proclamation without any new understanding of the law, is the church's business. I can remember very clearly how the earlier bishop of my diocese, Paavo Kortekangas, instructed me and other interns even as late as 1993 according to this tradition. His idea was that the Bible is given to us only as a testimony of the gospel and as guide to salvation; the law should not be sought there but in our conscience and in natural law, whose applications are always formulated according to our social context and general human intellect. The views of the next generation of Finnish Lutheran bishops and Luther scholars have been much more nuanced and faithful to the original Lutheran tradition.

The second ethical model represents opposite solutions from the first model. On the one hand, the historical roots of the second model exist outside Lutheranism in classical Reformed tradition. On the other hand, this model, which is sometimes called “biblical ethics” or “ethics of faith”, comes from Karl Barth's dialectical theology and from many leading theologians of the German church struggle. From the latter perspective, the model can be

seen as a critical reaction against the first ethical model represented by Nazi Lutherans. Many contemporary Finnish groups belonging to evangelicalism or to certain Lutheran revival movements still support those ethical principles represented originally by the Reformed tradition or dialectical theologians.

While the first model claimed that Christian ethics can be reduced to prevailing moral consensus and universal natural law, the second model emphasizes the ethical rules of the Bible. These detailed rules, taken particularly from the New Testament, are needed since, according to this model, the fall of human beings corrupted not only our abilities to fulfill the law but also our knowledge of the true content of the law. So neither individual Christian life nor social ethics can be constructed on the basis of general knowledge of natural law. Only from the Bible, the gospel, and Christ can we learn the true law, which the church should then proclaim as a moral authority among Christians as well as in society. Understanding the actual content of God's will requires faith in Christ and careful reading of the Bible. In this model, the ethics of the church and Christian faith differs radically from the morality which is represented by the secular world or non-Christian traditions. In many cases, but not necessarily among the theologians of the German church struggle, the practical applications of Christian ethics are taken from the Bible without any attempt to contextualize the biblical catechesis into the modern cultural context. The problem of this ethical approach is that profound moral consideration and true searching for a neighbor's good in his or her concrete situation are not required any longer – at least not in the most problematic cases which represent this model. Instead, it may be thought that it is enough for Christian morals that the Bible's rules are to be *followed literally* as they stand in biblical texts. In addition to these problems, ethical discussions between Christians and non-Christians, and also between the church and secular society, become impossible if we suppose that Christian ethics is totally “from a different planet” and speaks a language that is only understandable to believers. The critics of the second model have argued that we need some common basis of ethics in this world and we have to be able to use general intellectual arguments, too, when the church proclaims its prophetic ethical message and formulates contextualized applications of biblical moral principles.

The interesting matter is to compare also the second ethical model with Luther's original ideas as well with Bonhoeffer's, who was one of the critics of the first model in the 1930's and 1940's. Above all I want to investigate Luther's ethical thoughts. To begin, I must point out that Luther represented neither the first model nor the second one. Luther scholars have shown very clearly that the detailed practical norms of the Bible are not the

fundamental basis of Luther's ethics – not even the New Testament's rules of Christian life which aimed to apply and contextualize fundamental Christian moral norms into the life of early Christians. For Luther, natural law was in many ways the key to ethics, and he criticized those Anabaptists and "spiritualists" very strongly who wanted to carry into effect the biblical law literally as it stands. At the same time, Luther did not abandon the moral instructions of the Bible like those Lutherans later did who followed the first ethical model and emphasized only natural law. The conclusion drawn by critical Luther scholars is the following: Luther represented the third model which aims to combine natural law and the specific biblical principles of Christian ethics in a new way which avoids the problems of both the first model and the second one. For modern, post-Holocaust Lutheran tradition, it is crucial to understand what Luther's model actually is.²⁷

When Luther speaks about natural law, he does not mean, without reservation, the moral consciousness which we, fallen human beings, still have. For Luther, human nature and natural law written in it by the Creator are truly the ground of human beings' moral knowledge and action, *but* the nature he refers to is the *original, unbroken, and perfect* human nature created by God. Therefore, in Luther's model, the criterion of God's will is neither prevailing moral consensus nor the factual state of morality among fallen people. Therefore we cannot deduce the final good by human intellectual consideration only or by analyzing ethical norms of social reality surrounding us. We live in the fallen world and not in paradise anymore. The only true and reliable natural law is the original image of God created in us. The corrupted version of it can lead us to go astray. According to Luther, all fallen human beings are, first, incapable of fulfilling the demands of natural law in its deepest theological sense, that is, before God; the only thing we can fulfill is external civil demands of the law. Second, the latest Luther studies have shown that according to him, the fall has also damaged and corrupted our moral knowledge – *not* totally, but in any case somehow. Therefore it is difficult for us to hear the voice of original natural law. We do have a conscience, and the law is written in our human nature so that we are still responsible for our life – even without knowing the written biblical law. So we also have the obligation to use our conscience and intellect and all other gifts the Creator has given to us for ethical consideration in new situations for our neighbor's good. Moral discussion with the secular world and non-Christians is meaningful, possible, and needed if we see the matter from Luther's viewpoint. However, he points out that our natural abilities to attain the knowledge of the final good is limited and therefore we also have to be critical about public moral opinion and our own natural morality.

The next point is crucial if we want to understand Luther's nuanced ethics profoundly. Luther claims that the true content of the original natural law is the same as the highest biblical norm of Christian ethics, that is, the Golden Rule, which can also be formulated as the commandment of love for God and for neighbor. In other words, Luther does not separate natural law from the biblical ethics of the Golden Rule. This solution makes it possible for Luther to define very clearly what the true content of natural law is – the content which is forgotten in many cases in this fallen world. According to Luther's ethics, "anything does *not* go," unlike it did in the first ethical model. As individual Christians and as the Christian church, we can always go back to Jesus' words which concluded the meaning of his Sermon on the Mount and all "the law and the prophets" in the following way: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt 7:12). Or Luke's version: "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:31). When Luther wants to clarify the meaning of the Golden Rule, the universally valid principle of ethics and everlasting expression of God's will, he refers to the twofold commandment of love in Luke 10:27. In addition, he emphasizes that the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, is the best explanation of the Golden Rule and natural law. All the other biblical norms, even the New Testament's practical teaching of Christian life, are located at a lower level in the hierarchy of moral norms so that they are not timeless and universally valid. In other words, there exist higher biblical norms which *are* universally and eternally valid, like the Golden Rule and its normative interpretations – the twofold commandment of love and the Ten Commandments – but, at the same time, there are also lower biblical norms which are bound by time and place and *are not* always valid. A neighbor's good, at its most concrete level, is a changing reality. Therefore, according to Luther, to be able to know and fulfill the true love which really meets the neighbor's needs, we have to apply the commandment of unselfish love and its normative interpretation, the Ten Commandments, in our neighbor's life context. Those practical solutions which were valid in biblical times are not necessarily valid any longer as such. To find the solutions which truly fulfill our neighbor's needs, we have to use all the created gifts and tools we have, that is, natural law and everything else that we share as human beings with other people. At the same time, Luther points out that we have to *meditate*,²⁸ again and again, upon those biblical commandments which express the original content of natural law. Much more strongly than modern Lutherans earlier supposed, the latest Luther studies have shown the importance of this meditation upon the Golden Rule and the Ten Commandments for Luther's ethics. This con-

tinual process of meditating and learning, which takes place not only in individual Christian reading of the Bible but also in the communion of the church and in its proclamation and sacraments, is necessary for us to be able to reach true knowledge of natural law and to start to be “formatted” in the form of Christ who has already fulfilled God’s will. If we want to follow Luther’s ethical model, we cannot underestimate the role of natural law, but at the same time, we have to investigate again and again the Bible’s highest ethical principals in the church so that we are able to correct the moral understanding represented naturally by us and by all human beings.

The last step in Luther’s ethics actually goes beyond the limits of ethics. The question is how we are able to *fulfill* the will of God. Knowing God’s will is of course necessary, and we have already spoken about that, but the right knowledge does not yet give us strength to fulfill the law, says Luther. For that, we need justifying faith in Christ and, most importantly, we need Christ himself who is truly present in us in our faith. The saving union with Christ is the precondition of our justification and eternal life, but it is also needed for fulfilling the will of God in our life. We misunderstand Luther’s theology totally if we start to think, as some Lutheran pietistic groups have thought (at least in Finland) that the only goal of faith is to obtain the forgiveness of sins and our individual portion of eternal life. Luther did not flee from this life and from the created world with his faith – and nor did Bonhoeffer, as we know very well.

If we read Luther’s Large Catechism carefully and investigate his explanation of the Decalogue, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer, we will find some surprising ideas. First, the goal of the Ten Commandments is not only to show us our sins (*usus theologicus*). These Commandments are the clarification of the natural law of love, and as such, they are also meant to be kept and fulfilled. Our life is given by God and therefore it has great value. For Luther, it does matter if the purpose of our life comes true, that is, if our contribution to the realization of a neighbor’s good comes true.

The second surprising matter is Luther’s answer to the following question: what is the goal of the Christian faith, expressed in the credo and also believed in personally? He answers: not only my individual salvation, neither some forensic justification without any effect on my human nature and human life. Instead, Luther teaches in the Large Catechism, at the beginning of his explanation of the Creed:

Thus far we have heard the first part of Christian teaching, and in it we have seen all that God wishes us to do and not to do. The Creed properly follows, which sets forth all that we must expect and receive

from God; in short, it teaches us to know him [sic] perfectly. *It is given in order to help us do what the Ten Commandments require of us.* For, as we said above, they are set so high that all human ability is far too puny and weak to keep them. Therefore is it just as necessary to learn this part as it is the other *so that we may know where and how to obtain the power to do this.* If we were able by our own strength to keep the Ten Commandments as they ought to be kept, we would need nothing else, neither the Creed nor the Lord’s Prayer.²⁹

The point of Luther’s explanation of the Creed is that the triune God, who is Love itself, has given godself and all God’s gifts to us so that we live now in union with Christ and are both counted *and made* justified. That means that the present Christ in us is, first, our perfect justification and holiness so that all our sins are covered and forgiven. We, who are *totally* sinful in terms of our own nature, are *totally* justified before God, thanks to Christ, present in our faith. Second – and this is the most important point from an ethical perspective – Christ is active in us, forming and changing us all the time so that we are growing towards his image. From that point of view, we are *partly* sinful and *partly* holy, growing towards the increasing fulfillment of the natural law of love in our life. Seen from this partial aspect of justification, we never become perfect during this life but, at the same time, Luther points out that increasing fulfillment of love is one of the goals of justifying faith and a fruit of Christ’s presence in and influence upon our nature. The way to Lutheran ethics which does not only set high ideals but also actualizes in the lives of Christians is open – thanks to faith and Christ. What is needed is living in communion with Christ, that is, living also in prayer and in the church-community, in the midst of which Christ is present in the Word and Sacraments. *Seen through the gospel and justifying faith*, the Golden Rule and the Ten Commandments are not the “killing” law for us any longer but a part of the life-giving and transforming Word, like the gospel, says Luther. So through individual and collective meditation upon the Golden Rule and the Ten Commandments, Christ “makes the tree good” in us, step by step, so that the creation of good fruits becomes possible.

To conclude the third ethical model, which is Luther’s own model, I summarize his ideas in the following way: Luther’s ethics represents the ethical tradition of natural law. At the same time, he takes the fall of human beings seriously. Since our ethical knowledge is partly corrupted, the biblical clarifications of the original content of natural law – that is, the Golden Rule and the Ten Commandments – are needed. That means also that, according to Luther, the church has a unique role as a moral voice in this

world, although the deepest content of the church's ethics is identical to natural law and, in principle, understandable and known universally. To be able to fulfill the law – not only externally but also before God and at the level of our deepest motives – we need faith in the triune God and Christ himself who is present in faith as our imputed and effective righteousness. Luther does not talk about the third use of law but, instead, he interprets the law meditated in faith as the life-giving Word, like the gospel, through which Christ transforms us towards his likeness.

2.2. Starting Points of Bonhoeffer's Ethical Thoughts

As we know, Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran but an exceptional one in many ways. One of his goals was to formulate an ethical model which would be relevant for post-war Christians. That is why he was writing his *Ethics* at the end of his life. However, he never completed that masterpiece, and his ethical thoughts, although profound, did not develop into the form of a completed ethical model. Therefore we cannot be absolutely sure what would have been Bonhoeffer's last word in ethical matters.

Nevertheless, Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* is a highly interesting and valuable source of many of his central ethical views. In addition, we can read his other books like *Life Together* and *Discipleship* which are also very rich when analyzed from an ethical point of view. In this last section, it is time to evaluate some starting points of Bonhoeffer's ethical thoughts presented in *Life Together* and *Discipleship* as well as in *Ethics*. Instead of formulating final claims, I am only presenting some preliminary hypotheses which should be tested in critical academic study on Bonhoeffer's texts.

First, it can be argued on the grounds of Bonhoeffer's books mentioned above that he knew and critically evaluated all three of the ethical models (or at least some version of them) described in the previous section. Second, I have formed a preliminary opinion that his ethical thoughts are in many positive ways related to the second and third models and that he has taken elements from both of them, *but*, strictly speaking, Bonhoeffer is *not* a representative of either of them. He has an ethical model of his own.

To sum up this brief section of Bonhoeffer's ethics as well as the whole latter half of this article, it is possible to draw some comparisons and conclusions which may contribute to reaching the church's goal of building a solid basis for contemporary Christian ethics. Luther's ethics and Bonhoeffer's ethical thought differ from each other. However, my own understanding is that they both avoid those problems which can be seen in the one-sided model of natural law (the first model) as well as in the second model of ethics which concentrates on following the biblical rules literally,

without any contextualization. Therefore, in principle, both Luther's and Bonhoeffer's ethics are suitable for use as a starting point of the Christian church's ethics today.

Notes

The text is based on a guest lecture delivered in Dr. Robin J. Steinke's course, "The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg on April 28, 2009. The writer spent the spring semester 2009 at the Seminary as a Finnish exchange student in the S.T.M. degree program and also as a post-doctoral scholar specializing in ecumenical trinitarian theology as well as Luther's theology.

- 1 "The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit." The basis as well as information on its background can be found on the WCC's website: World Council of Churches, "Theological and historical background of the WCC basis," <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/who-are-we/self-understanding-vision/basis/background.html>
- 2 "System" is a misleading word for Bonhoeffer's theology, which does not form any completed doctrinal system. However, systematic analysis can reveal certain elements of theological system in his theology, too.
- 3 Particularly, I refer to the recent Finnish Luther studies. See, for example, Tuija Mannström, *Oleminen on rakastamista: Martti Lutherin käsitys trinitaarisesta Jumalasta* [Being Is Loving: Martin Luther's View of the Trinitarian God], Unpublished licentiate thesis, University of Helsinki, 2000; Tuija Mannström, "Kolmiyhteinen Jumala" [The Triune God], in Pekka Kärkkäinen, ed., *Johdatus Lutherin teologiaan* [Introduction to Luther's Theology] (Helsinki: Kirjapaja, 2001) 112-26.
- 4 For detailed analysis of Luther's doctrine of the Trinity and its Augustinian and Franciscan aspects, see Mannström, *Oleminen on rakastamista*, 48-97.
- 5 Dr. Robin J. Steinke, a respected American Bonhoeffer scholar and the Dean of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, has made me aware of this problematic aspect of many Bonhoeffer studies.
- 6 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* 5 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).
- 7 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).
- 8 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* 6 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005).
- 9 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Katechismusentwurf: Glaubst du, so hast du," written together with Franz Hildebrandt in 1931, in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke* 11 (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1994), 228-37. This catechism has been translated twice into English. The latest translation is published in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* 11 in 2008, but it is not yet available to me. Therefore I have used – together with the critical German edition's text – the older translation published in 1965: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, [the English

- translation of Bonhoeffer's 1931 catechism], in *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1928-1936 from the Collected Works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Volume I* (ed. and intr. Edwin H. Robertson; trans. Edwin H. Robertson and John Bowden; New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1965) 141-49.
- 10 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Vortragskonzept Bonhoeffers zum Konfirmandenunterrichtsplan," written in Finkenwalde in 1936, in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke* 14 (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1996) 786-819. The 1936 catechism is much longer than the 1931 catechism, and there are also more examples of trinitarian theology in it than in the older catechism. I have made use of the critical German edition, since the 1936 catechism is not available in English.
 - 11 Bonhoeffer, 1931 catechism, in *No Rusty Swords*, 141. Bonhoeffer's exclusive language is quoted here and in the following citations in its original form and has not been amended for modern sensibilities, although the importance of such sensibilities is fully acknowledged by the writer of this article.
 - 12 Ibid., 142.
 - 13 Bonhoeffer's quotation from Luther; *ibid.*, 142. Italics mine.
 - 14 Ibid., 143.
 - 15 Ibid., 142-43.
 - 16 See the opening section, Bonhoeffer, 1931 catechism, in *No Rusty Swords*, 141-42.
 - 17 See particularly the christologically and soteriologically oriented section, Bonhoeffer, 1931 catechism, in *No Rusty Swords*, 145-47.
 - 18 Bonhoeffer, "Konfirmandenunterrichtsplan," in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke* 14, 786-819.
 - 19 Clifford J. Green, "Editor's Introduction to the English Edition," in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* 6 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005) 6-9.
 - 20 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 146-47. See also more broadly the opening section of the chapter "Ultimate and Penultimate Things," Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 146-48.
 - 21 Note Bonhoeffer's idea of *Christ's presence in us* as our justification; compare with Luther's similar ideas.
 - 22 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 47-51.
 - 23 Ibid., 48.
 - 24 Ibid., 48, n. 5.
 - 25 See also Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 50, where Bonhoeffer investigates the role of both Christ and the Spirit in constituting the foundation of Christian ethics.
 - 26 See, e.g., Simo Peura, "Tarvitseeko luterilainen etiikka Raamattua?" [Does Lutheran ethics need the Bible?], *Perusta* 33/3 (2006) 140-46; Antti Raunio, *Järki, usko ja lähimmäisen hyvä: Tutkimus luterilaisen etiikan ja diakonian teologian perusteista* [Intellect, faith, and a neighbor's good: A study on the principles of Lutheran ethics and theology of deaconal work], (Suomalaisen teologisen kirjallisuusseuran julkaisuja 252; Helsinki: Suomalainen teologinen kirjallisuusseura, 2007). The foundation of these and other recently published Finnish studies on Luther's ethics consists of Professor Emeritus Tuomo Mannermaa's and his colleagues' studies on Luther; see, for example, Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification* (ed. and intr. Kirsi Stjerna; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005). See also the handbook of ethics widely read in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland, written by Jorma Laulaja, Bishop Emeritus and Luther scholar: Jorma Laulaja, *Elämän oikea ja väärä: Eettiset valinnat tänään* [The right and wrong of life: Ethical choices today], (2nd ed.; Helsinki: Kirjapaja, 1996).
 - 27 Here and in the following paragraphs, the arguments on Luther's ethics and its distinctive features are particularly based on the following studies: Peura, "Tarvitseeko luterilainen etiikka Raamattua?" 143-46; Raunio, *Järki, usko ja lähimmäisen hyvä*, 57-77, 121-28, 160-87.
 - 28 The original verb in Latin is *meditor* (the corresponding noun: *meditatio*), which means, among other things, a) to "meditate" and "consider" and b) to "practice" and "learn."
 - 29 Luther's Large Catechism, Part 2: The Creed, 1-3. Italics mine.

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On Not Going It Alone Opening Academic Convocation 2009-2010

Norma S. Wood

President Cooper-White, Dean Steinke, faculty and staff colleagues, students and guests, greetings from the land of retirement and a hearty welcome to you this new school year. It is an honor to have this occasion to think with you about some of the challenges and opportunities that present themselves today for theological education at Gettysburg Seminary.

Every new year brings both fortuitous and troublesome circumstances in which to study, learn, and prepare for ministry. And at the start of this academic year, the world situation weighs on us: widespread political infighting and unrest, testy international relations, costly and ongoing wars, a growing chasm between rich and poor, perils in relation to world ecology, and a dance on the brink of possibility of a world wide economic meltdown.

We feel these pressures both personally and institutionally while making do with fewer resources and facing more to accomplish. We find ourselves re-sorting priorities, reorganizing our selves and our lives, making unanticipated sacrifices. We are anxious about the fragility of this Planet Earth as well as issues in our every day lives.

Future Shock

In 1970, Alvin Toffler, wrote his book *Future Shock*.¹ The title describes the feeling of being overwhelmed by too much change in too short a period of time. Long standing institutions were being and would be disoriented by rapid, confluent change: the influx of new media, new technologies, cultural

revolutions, and cracks in traditional societal structures. The effect of it all was at once exhilarating and destabilizing. The church and theological education, along with the other institutions were pressed to rethink their assumptions about the world in which they found themselves wanting to operate.

During that general period, Gettysburg Seminary was rewriting its mission statement, taking into account what it might mean to be effective in this rapidly changing world. It said that the curriculum depends upon the widest and most penetrating knowledge of the world in which the gospel is now to be spoken; and further, that the curriculum must respond to the question: What concepts, practices and formulation will in the future best serve the gospel?

So curricular revisions called for more and varied field education sites, including international ones. They were necessary for students to learn about congregations' changed and changing contexts. Required courses were refocused to communicate, interpret, and proclaim the Gospel freshly and effectively. Faculty did not always agree on how best to implement these curricular goals, but there was common recognition that the world and theological education were changing in both hopeful and dizzying ways.

Information Overload

No one, I think, would argue with the statement that we still live with future shock associated with continuing accelerated change. And now added to this awareness, we struggle with an information deluge. Alex Gregory's New Yorker cartoon (2002) depicted this with good humor.² A patient is sitting on an examining table in the physician's office and the doctor is putting up his hands saying, "Whoa, way too much information!" TMI refers not just to an aesthetic repudiation of the personal over-sharing that goes on during talk-shows, but to the whole explosion of information availability, immediate accessibility and even intrusions on us, of new information, statistics, sources, points of view and more. This information explosion threatens to overwhelm our mental and emotional faculties of absorption, understanding and coming to critical judgment. We struggle with periods of brain freeze.

But overwhelmed or not, these learning faculties remain central in theological education and in preparation for ministry. More than ever we need to learn how to read and respond to changing contexts, to acknowledge the multiple points of view and converse with them, understand the frames of reference in which information is imbedded, and to be able to weigh all of this continually. More than ever we need to hone our listening, sharpen our noticing, look for underlying assumptions, and recognize what interpretive lenses are at play. The pressures of too rapid change and too much informa-

tion merely heighten the necessity for us to internalize these values and skills as we prepare for service in the church and in the world.

Today's learning landscape has been revolutionized by cybernetics. We have amazing resources literally at our fingertips: a worldwide network of "information sharing," powerful microchips and search engines, and gigantic data bases. Classrooms and libraries look very different than they did even ten years ago. We've been google-lized and globalized: laptops for everyone, web-based courses, on-line libraries, all sorts of new and imaginative internet-related experiences along with many interesting new toys.

I think of a remark made in the late sixties by then Dean Herbert Stroup. It was a September orientation for new students and he was reminding that the seminary is a graduate school and that an appropriate level of maturity is expected. First-year students then were mostly single males coming directly from college, and there was an Eriksonian formational issue related to dependence vs independence.³ And so to make that point he advised the group, "The seminary is not a womb, so don't be wandering around campus with your umbilical cord in hand looking for a place to plug it in."

Who then could have imagined the scene, as we've gathered for classes over this last high-tech decade, lugging around laptops and chargers, other paraphernalia, and with our cybernetic umbilical cords looking for outlets to plug ourselves in. It's been a mixed blessing. Today, "plugging in" is a requirement; it provides us a desired global awareness and a sometimes disturbing sense of connection with world problems. And we are discovering, all the time, new opportunities and new resources to extend the church's mission and the potential reach of theological education.

But a reality is that many more voices, sources, and resources compete for our attention and for our affirmation. As always, we must learn to consider questions of authenticity, credibility and reliability, but the process of considering is considerably more complex: What are the parameters of inquiry and finding? Have we scanned right by a critical resource? What sources to trust? And other such questions.

In the midst of this fertile and daunting context for learning, theological education at Gettysburg Seminary turns to its vision statement and asks: How can we best bear witness at the crossroads of history and hope and proclaim Jesus Christ to a restless world?

This vision question serves as an organizing principle for the curriculum and for classroom teaching and learning. It brings focus and establishes criteria as we seek, receive, explore, and sift through an amazing abundance of resources. Our vision statement centers us as we navigate through information saturation, worrisome concerns about change, and about how to move forward faithfully.

We are not Alone

We are not alone in wrestling with these challenges that affect theological education, challenges that offer opportunities for new learning and preparation for ministry. In congregations, we have our closest institutional collaborators. We have always had some sense of partnership, sometimes strong and sometimes strained. But today even more we need the benefits of a robust synergism between congregation and seminary. Daniel O. Aleshire of ATS has made these remarks:

Theological schools are intellectual centers for the church, but it does not follow that they are its primary centers of learning. Some crucial lessons are best learned in parishes and congregations. School learning focuses on books, lectures, discussions, and experiences, and has a measured, disciplined process. In times of rapid change, the Spirit of God is at work, usually in unpredictable ways, and the first fruits of that work are often most evident in congregational life. Seminaries need to take seriously the faithful learning that occurs in congregations and parishes, and as centers of intellectual life, learn from the church's learning.⁴

Seminaries slide into isolation when they overestimate themselves as repositories of Christian wisdom while underestimating congregations, making too much of congregational flaws and theological shortcomings, when the hidden seminary curriculum is producing replications of its own self-estimate.

Although there may have been the occasional moment of hubris, Gettysburg Seminary has long demonstrated its high regard for an educational partnership with congregations. It was one of the first Lutheran seminaries to establish a full contextual education program and to hire a faculty member whose only portfolio was to direct and develop it. And while there may have been a few anxious second thoughts about "contracting out" a fourth of the curriculum to internship supervisors, in fact, a vigorous program was incorporated into degree programs and the seminarians over these last decades have indeed learned much from the congregation's learning.

At the time of his death in 1984, James F. Hopewell, Professor of Religion and the Church at the Candler School of Theology, was working on an assignment, developing a segment of the "contextual" curriculum intended to deepen students' understanding of ministry in congregations. His material was posthumously put together by Barbara G. Wheeler and published as *Congregation: Stories and Structures*. Wheeler, now Director of Auburn Theological Seminary's Center for the Study of Theological Education, noted this in her *Forward*.

Hopewell developed an array of courses of a new kind. Each was held in a congregation, was taught by a Candler faculty member and the church's pastor and took as its subject matter an actual issue or topic in that congregation's life. The participants were lay members and Candler senior students. The aim of these courses was less to solve problems than to gain critical and appreciative perspective on the dilemmas and strengths of local-church existence.⁵

The apprenticeship model for training seminarians, while helpful, was not sufficient, he felt, to give students a deeply appreciative understanding of congregations. They needed to learn more than good practice and technique. Hopewell and his colleagues insightfully pointed out that:

Much of what the world sees and knows of the Gospel and its meaning for life...it sees and knows through the life and activities of congregations.... It is through these frail, earthen vessels that the Word becomes flesh in different times and places and under changing circumstances.⁶

They held up this prime interpretive image: the congregation as frail, earthen vessel through which, in which, the Word's treasure is manifest.

I find at least two things commendable and even remarkable about Hopewell's curricular vision. First is its serious investment in a "congregation – seminary" collaboration, a purposeful interdependence. Its pedagogical structure prescribed that seminarians, congregants, faculty, and pastors should join in study and reflection on lively aspects of particular congregations. There was a recognized need for each other's participation and perspectives in this way. And second, there was an explicitly stated expectation that congregations would not be perfect, they would be earthen vessels and that, though frail, God's Word would be incarnating. Hopewell and his colleagues expected God to be at work there and were intent on discovering this with the help of congregational partners. The book, *Congregation: Stories and Structures*, lays out how this may be approached.

We don't often talk about seminaries as frail earthen vessels, but perhaps we should: congregation and seminary, each treasure and earthen vessel, in the soup together, sharing a common world of rapid change and information abundance that hurtles us forth and threatens to overwhelm. Seminary and congregation share a common mission to bear witness and proclaim Jesus Christ to a restless world. Though these are this seminary's vision words, I suspect that few congregations would want to disclaim them.

Today, we need an even stronger appreciation of seminary-congregation partnership in learning.

But another collaboration in learning cannot go unmentioned. That is the internal structure of learning right here that we refer to as seminary education. We often use individual consumer language to describe it. We speak of a student taking courses, paying for them, achieving mastery in them. A student is required to pass specific courses in order to receive a degree, and it is announced upon graduation that she or he is entitled to all the rights and privileges pertaining to that credential. Despite all the individual and consumer language, a more important reality is this: at its core theological education is an immersion into the very communal processes of teaching and learning. Together we visit the breadth and depth of the historical witness of faith, study complexities of the ancient world, and venture down historical paths that lead back to postmodernity. We hear the gospel repeatedly proclaimed and we share insights with one another about how God is at work creating, redeeming and sustaining the world. We do all of this in smaller and larger learning communities.

A Learning Community

If James Hopewell has helped me think about the importance of a seminary-congregation partnership in doing theological education, Parker Palmer has helped me gain fuller understanding of what is involved in teaching and learning, and what can be envisioned for these small and large learning communities that we often call classes.

Parker Palmer has had a long, distinguished career as an educator and is now senior partner of the Center for Courage & Renewal, whose mission is to help clergy and other professionals renew their vocational passion and deepen their service to others. In thinking about education at this seminary, I have turned time and again to two of his books: *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* and *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*.⁷

In these and other writings Palmer eloquently offers a vision of education and his teaching and learning experiences with it. One description is: education is engagement in thinking about things, in hearing other vantage points, and then more thinking about what that means, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually.⁸ Another: it is creating space that allows evidence and insight to emerge, but also allows emotive engagement with the content.¹⁰ It can be described as a great conversation where big stories get connected to the little stories of our lives.¹¹ It involves the creation of a learning community in which whole persons, not just cognitive processes, fully engage with the subject matter and the process of learning.¹²

Teaching and learning, then, are interested in our inner vocational landscapes and ask such questions as: Who is the self that is learning? Who is the self that is teaching? Who is the self who will preach, lead worship, give pastoral care, administer? Who is the self that will pastor – will minister?

In the wisdom of early feminist theological educator, Nelle Morton, a community of teaching and learning infolds: *hearing each other into speech*.¹³ Helping people find their voices, speak their voices and have their voices heard. Helping people to listen to others without losing their integrity, but listening to learn. Sometimes it involves wrestling ourselves into silence so we can hear another's truth.

A community of teaching and learning is constituted in connectedness – among students, between teachers and student, connecting with the subject at hand, connecting with self, connecting soul and role. Educational connectedness rejects uncaring and competitive relationships. It resists fears that lurk around. As students – the fear of exposing our ignorance, of making mistakes or holding theological views that others might judge unacceptable, the fear of failing a course, or having to repeat internship, fear that we'll be found wanting by a Candidacy Committee. As faculty – the fear of not being well-enough prepared, of not being able to connect with students' interests, of not being popular, the fear of not being able to do all that is expected of you. Educational connectedness wants to hold these fears at bay. Instead it invites a hospitable space for thinking about things, hearing other vantage points, and then more thinking about what that means, intellectually, emotionally and vocationally. We develop our capacity for connectedness as we talk to each other about our inner landscapes: about who we are as God's creatures, redeemed and sustained in love, and about what this means for ministry.

This kind of learning community is possible because, as Palmer reminds us, the fundamental structure of reality is a community of being: it is “an organic, interrelated, mutually responsive community of being”¹⁴ ... supported by a hidden wholeness that embraces the brokenness of our lives and the flaws in those around us and society in general.¹⁵ It is God who creates, redeems and sustains this communal reality.

Conclusion

And so a new academic year begins once again with a beckoning to immerse yourselves in learning and to join with these partners around you. So be ready to create open and hospitable spaces within and between yourselves. Be ready to be heard to speech and to be curious about the stories and the wisdom of others, past and present. Be determined to put aside those fears that might inhibit such learning and teaching. Be collaborators, be con-

nected. Enter the great conversation and its disciplines. Such learning brings its own joy, so tap the learner and the teacher in you and keep them going lifelong. Don't expect to get it all together and don't try to go it alone.

There will always be something new. Expect dizzying change and information overload. And though there are these challenges, let yourselves be focused and supported by the partnerships in our primary reason for being together – to be prepared as faithful disciples, able to proclaim and embody Jesus Christ to this our restless world.

Notes

- 1 Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Random House, 1970).
- 2 Alex Gregory, *The New Yorker*, April 15, 2002.
- 3 Erik Erikson elaborated a late adolescent, early adult stage of development which he labeled *identity versus identity diffusion*. One feature of this stage is the struggle between dependence and independence.
- 4 Daniel O. Aleshire, “Making Haste Slowly: Celebrating the Future of the Relationship of Theological Schools” (ATS/COA Biennial Meeting, June 2008). <http://www.ats.edu/Resources/PapersPresentations/Aleshire/Pages/default.aspx>, 3.
- 5 James F. Hopewell, *Congregation: Stories and Structures* (ed. Barbara G. Wheeler; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) xi.
- 6 Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley and William McKinney, *Handbook for Congregational Studies* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986) 19.
- 7 Parker J. Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known: Education As A Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993); idem, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).
- 8 Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 3–5.
- 9 Palmer, *To Know as We are Known*, 73–75.
- 10 Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 76.
- 11 Palmer, *To Know As We are Known*, 115.
- 12 Nelle Morton, *The Journey Is Home* (Boston: Beacon, 1985).
- 13 Palmer, *To Know As We are Known*, 53.
- 14 This is a thesis in Palmer's *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life: Welcoming the Soul and Weaving Community in a Wounded World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004).

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BOOK REVIEWS

From Jesus to the Gospels: Interpreting the New Testament in Its Context

Paul and His World: Interpreting the New Testament in Its Context

Helmut Koester (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007)

Reviewed by Eric H. Crump

These two volumes of essays selectively culled from a distinguished career spanning over fifty years, most previously published, richly document a meticulous practicing of the historian's craft and demonstrate the ongoing critical dialogue of the historical-critical method with its own, too often neglected heritage of previous practitioners of that craft in relation to the New Testament writings (e.g., the history of religions school and especially Koester's own teacher, Rudolf Bultmann). Both volumes seek to illumine the complexity and specificity of the historical contexts of the New Testament, early Christianity, and the world of antiquity in terms of the establishment of a historical trajectory regarding those writings. The outlining of the historical trajectory of the traditions informing and situating those writings in their complexity in a rigorous manner aids in avoiding positions that have proven to be dead-end roads (e.g., many of the quests of the historical Jesus) and "should be laid to rest for the time being" (*From Jesus to the Gospels*, viii). "The historian can be liberated from such presuppositions and prejudices only by the establishment of a historical trajectory. In such a trajectory it is necessary to consider the totality of the historical, religious, theological political, and social components of the entire history that reaches from the prophetic tradition of Israel (rarely considered in modern studies

of the historical Jesus!) and the Roman imperial eschatology to the reception of the tradition about Jesus in the surviving Gospel materials. It is especially important that the latter is not brushed aside in favor of a more genuine Jesus of Nazareth, whether it is the admittedly later understanding of Jesus as the suffering servant or the equally important understanding of Jesus as the teacher of Wisdom. Palestinian or especially Galilean social milieu tends to establish a much too narrow context for Jesus' ministry and proclamation. Jesus of Nazareth must be understood as a historical moment that must be situated within the story of Israel and the renewal of its prophecy as well as in the story of the Roman empire and the Augustan eschatological ideology" (*From Jesus to the Gospels*, vii-viii). Yet, as he himself notes in his essay "Insights from a Career of Interpretation" (in *Paul and His World* [279-290], charting the path of the trajectory of his own path as a scholar, "I have never given up my first love: biblical exegesis and theology" (290).

The trajectory and its range that must be covered in the illumination of the manifold and multifaceted historical context of the New Testament writings is impressively exhibited in the contents of these two volumes. Koester divides the contents of *From Jesus to the Gospels* into three sections: "I. Gospels Apocryphal and Canonical;" "II. The Gospel of John;" and "III. Jesus, His Sayings and His Story." The essays in Part I are: "Apocryphal and Canonical Gospels (3-23); "Gospels and Gospel Tradition in the Second Century" (24-38); "The Text of the Synoptic Gospels in the Second Century" (39-53); "From the Kerygma-Gospel to Written Gospels" (54-71); "The Synoptic Sayings Gospel Q in the Early Communities of Jesus' Followers" (72-83); "The Extracanonical Sayings of the Lord as Products of the Christian Community" (84-99); and "Mark 9:43-47 and Quintilian 8.3.75" (100-102). The essays pertaining to the Johannine gospel are: "The History-of-Religions School, Gnosis, and the Gospel of John" (105-121); "History and Cult in the Gospel of John and in Ignatius of Antioch" (122-133); "The Story of the Johannine Tradition" (134-147); "Dialogue and the Tradition of Sayings in the Gnostic Texts of Nag Hammadi" (148-173); "The Farewell Discourses of the Gospel of John" (174-183); and "Gnostic Sayings and Controversy Traditions in John 8:12-59" (184-196). The final grouping of essays related to the historical Jesus are: "Jesus the victim" (199-210); "The Memory of Jesus' Death and the Worship of the risen Lord" (211-224); "The Historical Jesus and the Cult of the Kyrios" (225-234); "The Story of Jesus and the Gospels" (235-250); "The Sayings of Q and Their Image of Jesus" (251-263); "The Historical Jesus and His Sayings" (264-284); and "Eschatological Thanksgiving Meals: From the *Didache* to Q and Jesus" (285-291).

Paul and His World is likewise organized in three sections: "I. Reading Paul: His Letters and Their Interpretation;" "II. Reading Paul's World: The

Cultural and Religious Environment;" and "III. Reading Early Christianity." The essays in the first part are: "Paul's Proclamation of God's Justice for the Nations" (3-14); "first Thessalonians: An Experiment in Christian Writing" (15-23); "Apostle and Church in the Letters to the Thessalonians" (24-32); "The Text of 1 Thessalonians" (33-37); "Archaeology and Paul in Thessalonike" (38-54); "From Paul's Eschatology to the Apocalyptic Scheme of 2 Thessalonians" (55-69); Paul and Philippi: the evidence from Early Christian Literature" (70-79); "Wisdom and Folly in Corinth" (80-85); and "Hero Worship: Philostrato's *Heroikos* and Paul's Tomb in Philippi" (86-90). The essays in relation to the cultural and religious environment of Paul's world are: "Suffering Servant and Royal Messiah: From Second Isaiah to Paul, Mark, and Matthew" (93-117); "The Figure of the Divine Human Being" (118-125); "Natural Law (Νόμος Φύσεως) in Greek thought" (126-142); "The Cult of the Egyptian Deities in Asia Minor" (143-159); "Associations of the Egyptian Cult in Asia Minor" (160-167); "The Red Hall in Pergamon" (168-176); "Lefkopetra: Inscriptions from the Sanctuary of the Mother of the Gods" (177-179); and "Melikertes at Isthmia: A Roman Mystery Cult" (180-191). The third assortment of essays pertaining to the interpretation of early Christianity are: "Thomas Jefferson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, the *Gospel of Thomas*, and the Apostle Paul" (195-206); "Writings and the Spirit: Authority and Politics in ancient Christianity" (207-223); "The Apostolic Tradition and the Origins of Gnosticism" (224-237); "The Theological Aspects of Early Christian Heresy" (238-250); "Ephesus in Early Christian Literature" (251-265); The Designation of James as ΩΒΑΙΑΣ" (266 – co-authored with Klaus Balzer); "Early Christianity from the Perspective of the History of Religions: Rudolf Bultmann's Contribution" (267-278); and "Insights from a Career of Interpretation" (279-290).

Many of the matters in the individual essays examined by Koester will be critically debated by scholars and specialists. Yet there are several themes that are particularly noteworthy when considering these essays in their trajectory breadth that should be highlighted, especially those significant for theology. First of all, there is the clarity as to the methodological criteria and principles informed by the history of religions approach and Bultmann's appropriation of that approach that inform Koester's practicing of the historical craft: (i) "the question of early Christianity's relationship to its religious environment must not be reduced to specific terms and concepts, but must be seen as a problem of the entire language world that Christian and non-Christian authors share" (*Paul and His World*, 278) – one must accept the syncretistic character of religions and their languages in antiquity (see *Paul and His World*, 240-5); (ii) "[t]echnical definitions of certain concepts, ...

as more “materialistic” or “religious-ethical” or “spiritual” are meaningless” – rather “one must ask for the understanding of human existence that is evident in the use and interpretation of such concepts in specific historical situations” (278); and (iii) “[t]heological statements about the presence of salvation in Jesus or about the uniqueness of Christianity cannot be used as arguments against the total dependence of Christian soteriological language upon its non-Christian environment” (278). Koester augments these guides or principles from Bultmann’s acceptance and refinement of the history-of-religions approach by developing them with attention to their concrete historical ramifications: “We must learn that early Christianity shares not only the language world of the religions of the late Hellenistic period, but also their agonies, predicaments, and failures. New sociological investigations into the religious world of that time will serve to deepen those insights, while games with new literary methods will tend to obscure the critical burden of the task” (278).

However polemically stated in relation to the fascination with and appropriation of literary methods by members of the New Testament guild – and Koester has been taken to task for this claim, one must underscore its significance in illumining the concrete socio-communal, ecclesial, and political character of the historical ramifications through attention to the intertwining of ritual, cult, and story for the understanding of early Christianity. The development of these insights by Koester also represents a corrective to hermeneutical approaches often taken in relation to the various “quests” for the historical Jesus (see *From Jesus to the Gospels*, 199-284): “Historians are therefore treading on very thin ice if they try to recover the historical person of Jesus through a critical analysis of the sayings tradition. A person of past history can only be understood if the extant sources reveal traditions to which such a person belongs as well as the subsequent structures, practices, and institutions of a community in which the memory of this person is preserved. The investigation of the sayings tradition is ultimately a dead-end in the endeavor to understand the historical Jesus and, at the same time, the historical effects of his ministry” (*From Jesus to the Gospels*, 231). In addition, the emphasis on ritual, cult, and story is a corrective to abstractions of kerygma from its historical rootedness in cult and ritual as constitutive elements of the formation of religious community, such as Bultmann’s dichotomy between Jesus as the proclaimer of the kingdom of God and the kerygmatic Christ that is the object of the Christian faith: “..., this almost exclusive focus on the proclaimed word, deeply rooted in the emphasis upon word and faith in the dialectic theology of the time after World War I, is a poor hermeneutical instrument. The scholars of the history-of-religions school from the time before World War I knew better when they empha-

sized cult and ritual as constitutive parts of the formation of religious community. To such ritual belongs the narrative of remembrance and the recourse to the language of tradition and Scripture” (*From Jesus to the Gospels*, 232). All too often the New Testament appears as a special kind of document separated from its non-Christian context and further isolated from other early Christian literature. The theological significance of the emphasis on ritual and cult is shown by Koester, especially in his essays “The Memory of Jesus’ Death and the Worship of the Risen Lord” (*From Jesus to the Gospels*, 211-224) and “The Historical Jesus and the Cult of the Kyrios” (*From Jesus to the Gospels*, 225-234) which demonstrates the significance of eucharistic celebration for the question of the continuity between the historical Jesus and his passion and the early church: “The earliest tangible presence of Jesus must therefore have been the story of his suffering and death. It utilized the tradition and language of the ancient scriptures of Israel in order to narrate an eschatological event in the context of a cultic action that was rooted in a ritual practice instituted by Jesus himself. It was in this ritual and story that the earliest Christian communities established their relationship to the history of Jesus” (222). Parenthetically, it can be noted that this exegetical claim would support Tillich’s contention, in the third volume of his *Systematic Theology*, of the anteriority and priority of the sacraments to the proclaimed word – though, for Tillich, such an affirmation would not undercut the theological primacy of the word (as long as one distinguishes properly between priority and primacy!).

The final significant theme is his treatment of the debates concerning the relation between orthodoxy and heresy in the early church in light of a methodological emphasis on the rise of early Christian heresy as a history-of-religions problem. Methodologically refusing as a historical theologian the anachronistic utilization of later theological criteria (e.g., the *regula* of the New Testament canon and the intra-canonical criteria of apostolic authority, early Christian kerygma, and the life and teaching of Jesus) and appeals to linguistic characteristics of orthodox theological discourse in light of the syncretistic diversity of New Testament language, Koester argues that “[h]eresy arises, then, when the radical nature of the historical dimensions of the new existence are not recognized, when the crucifixion of the revealer is not seriously taken as the shattering, that is, the demythologizing, of that security which is the attempt to escape through religiosity, piety, and theology from existence within history” (*Paul and His World*, 247). For Koester, the task of proclamation and theology is not the repetition of a petrified religious content and mode of expression, but rather the critical reinterpretation of the linguistic contexts whose standard is related to the historical revelation in the cross of Jesus. However, the historical understanding of faith

that corresponds to the cross “cannot be used as a new standard for the further distinction of heresy and orthodoxy. In itself it is valid only in any unrepeatable historical situation in which it arises from the critical confrontation of the preaching of the cross to the mythological language associated with it. Naturally the historian and the theologian have much to learn from the latter. But faith remains bound to its source, the historical cross of Jesus, which from time to time in a new situation and in a different language must be reappropriated as the critical standard of faith. This task may or may not succeed. But appealing to the orthodoxy of an age that is past is no protection against failure; for it gives no guarantee that we can thus rediscover the historical origin of faith in our interpretation of tradition and of the language of our own world” (247). Koester draws out the significance and import for contemporary theology of understanding heresy as the failure to demythologize: “If, on the one hand, “orthodoxy” is the venture of a theology that has learned from the crucified Jesus and that wants to speak of the latter suitably in a language it cannot choose for itself, then the real alternative to orthodoxy is not heresy in the traditional sense, but heresy as the uncritical continued use of traditional language, ...: it is the escape into tradition. Such an escape might seem to be completely safe, since it does not expose one to the possibility of new heresies; for tradition repeats only what earlier generations have already accepted. But merely repeating tradition does not create an “orthodox” theology, for no orthodoxy originates in tradition. Rather it is only codified and set up as a sign in tradition, indeed as a sign that needs to be interpreted. Here we can find the voices of former debates, now become past history, and their attempts to answer the problem. But those answers have lost their present historical actuality and acuteness the moment they are accepted as valid tradition; indeed, tradition as such becomes heresy as soon as one attempts to use it as if the historical context had not changed since it was formulated” (249-250). Salutory words that do not negate the critical use of traditional language “even at the risk of heresy”!

Koester’s writings testify to the continuing significance of the historical-critical method and the requisite critical need for methodological rigor in its use. His writings give evidence of the critical correction of the dangers of misuse of the historical-critical method that often occur in the interpretation of the New Testament writings that cannot be abstracted from the manifold and syncretistic historical context of early Christianity, but also methodologically serve to remind us of the dangers in too quickly declaring that one has moved beyond the time of the historical-critical method in theological disciplines. One should always remember the dictum that the abuse of the historical-critical method never justifies getting rid of the proper and demanding use of the historical-critical method. It is ironic in the present

age that the concluding words of Gerhard Ebeling’s classic essay on the historical-critical method continue to be as relevant as when they were written – and sadly how little has changed: “And finally, the proclamation of the church – and the form of church order is also closely connected with that – must be required to take the work of historical criticism seriously. It is a real question whether the widespread frightful lameness and staleness of the church’s message, her powerlessness to speak to men of today, and likewise the lack of credibility that attaches to the church as such are not very largely connected with its fear of letting the work of critical historical theology bear fruit in the proper way and its failure to take sufficient account of the nature of the hermeneutical problem, which is acutely concentrated in the act of preaching. ... [T]he dangers of a movement of concentration are by its very nature those of one-sidedness, foreshortening and isolation, of striving for security and impregnability, of seeking to avoid conflict and testing... Yet certain main tendencies stand out in various degrees: a new theological dogmatism and traditionalistic confessionism, a clericalism and sacramentalism, an over-simplification through insistence on pietistic edification or else through catchword theology, radicalism, confessional rhetoric, etc. The critical historical method is certainly recognized in principle, except by a few outsiders. But in practice it is widely felt in ecclesiastical and theological circles to be really a tedious nuisance. Its results may perhaps be noted, but then they are left aside after all instead of being worked through. And where the critical historical method is seriously applied today, it remains a matter for the individual historical disciplines, and does not have an effect on theology as a whole, still less on the church – or when there is any visible sign of consequence of such a kind it is pronounced to be rationalism and liberalism, or even rouses the cry of heresy. The path which theology has to tread in this situation for the church’s sake is certainly full of unsolved problems, but there is no doubt as to the direction it must take” (Gerhard Ebeling, “The Significance of the Critical Historical Method for Church and Theology in Protestantism,” in *Word and Faith* (trans. by James W. Leitch; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963:59-61).

These essays also give both direct and indirect witness to the immense accomplishment and continuing relevance of the work of Rudolf Bultmann. Many of Koester’s critiques of Bultmann call for renewed attention to aspects that had been neglected or overlooked, e.g., the emphasis of community, cultic worship, and ritual. Koester highlights the continuing significance of Bultmann’s *Exegetica* for examining the literature of early Christianity, that, unfortunately, have never been translated. Yet Bultmann also engaged in critical conversation with philosophy and other disciplines, especially on hermeneutical issues, dialogue partners unfortunately not pres-

ent in the texts in these two volumes. Interdisciplinary discussions with philosophers and literary theorists would possibly have been beneficial in further unpacking the concepts of ritual and story/narrative that Koester employs.

Koester's commitment to and demonstration of the significance and import of the historian's craft for the interpretation of the writings of early Christianity are richly evidenced in these two volumes of selected essays. Hopefully readers will be encouraged to explore further the remainder of his writings noted in the bibliography of his writings in the *Festschrift* honoring him and of those publications from 1991 to 2007 to be found at the end of *Paul and His World*. And, hopefully, they will learn that the critical historical method yet lives!

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Heart Language: Elsie Singmaster and Her Pennsylvania German Writings

Susan Colestock Hill (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009)

Reviewed by Kent Gramm

Susan Colestock Hill has produced not only an interesting and valuable book on an author who was a significant writer in the early 20th century, but also a collection of stories that is a pleasure to read. The volume contains an excellent 75 page introduction by Hill, who began her work on Elsie Singmaster Lewars as a student at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, where Singmaster's father was a professor and president, and where her house, the Lewars House, still stands.

The introduction contains not only a useful summary of Singmaster's life and work ("A Sketch of Elsie Singmaster"), but supplies a view of critical reaction to the literature produced by Singmaster over a long career. Hill argues that Singmaster's fiction dealing with the ethnic and religious subculture known as "Pennsylvania Dutch" (Dutch being a popular and misleading corruption of "Deutsch," meaning German) is applicable to today's American society, which also contains ethnic and religious minorities that challenge and enrich the dominant culture.

Elsie Singmaster's father was a Lutheran pastor who served churches in the heart of Amish country, where the young writer grew to admire the (literally) stout values of the German sectarians. They value hard work, cleanliness, honesty, kindness and hospitality, and resist what they see as the corruptions of consumerism, sexual liberalism, and industrialization. They hew to the "simple gifts" offered by community, family, and severely biblical Protestantism. Depending upon the particular group, the traditional Pennsylvania Germans might deny themselves electricity, automobiles, and contemporary dress. The men tend to wear long beards, bowl haircuts, old-style hats; and the boys and girls look like figures out of *Tom Sawyer*. What sets them apart more than the visuals, however, is their particular "Pennsylvania Dutch" – an amalgamation of German dialect and English.

This "heart language" isolated and protected the Pennsylvania Germans, creating what Hill calls "an intentional and effective cultural barrier." (39) Singmaster wonderfully reproduces this language in her stories. She

soon learned that dialect cannot be written effectively by resorting to phonetic spelling. Walter Scott pointed out in the first Waverley novel that the more accurate the written dialect, the more unreadable it is. By the third story in this collection, Singmaster was reproducing Pennsylvania Dutch through cadence and word order. (I.e., “They get pretty good along.”[259] In German, the preposition “along” always comes at the end of its phrase.)

Leafing through the book’s photographs and seeing images of a ridiculously dowdy and severe Elsie Singmaster, one might expect little in the way of literary sophistication, much less humor. Further, the book’s introduction tells us that Singmaster believed that her writing’s purpose was to improve, not merely entertain, her readers. This point of view, central to Milton, Dr. Johnson, and Tolstoy, for example, faded from the literary program during the time that Singmaster was coming to the end of her commercial writing career – the post World War One era. But like the people she admires, Singmaster holds to her values – perhaps wishing to take a longer view than that of her more lasting contemporaries.

But the later photographic images – taken when Singmaster was a pillar of Gettysburg society, enjoying the stature and authority that her husband’s position and her literary success brought to her – these are misleading. The stories in this collection are pervaded by humor. Furthermore, they are unfailingly *interesting*, a quality that requires literary sophistication and an engaging intellect.

Singmaster is always aware of the comic potential of her characters, such as the heavyweight Improved Mennonite spinsters, Betsey and Tilly Shindledecker. In “A Sound in the Night,” the sisters awaken to realize that their farm is being used as a hideout and distribution center by gin runners. At the beginning of “The Suffrage in Millerstown,” Lizzie Kerr is seen “reclining upon an outside cellar door:”

It was not a position which Lizzie chose for herself. In the first place, she had no time for this extraordinary proceeding. When one has a husband and seven children . . . a farm where there are fourteen cows, twenty pigs, and a few hundred chickens . . . one should be busy every moment. In the second place, Lizzie found the position exceedingly uncomfortable. Lizzie was very large and she was accustomed to rest upon a feather bed – not a hard board. Besides, it is apt to be a little cool on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November; and besides, it is neither dignified nor decent to slam a cellar door upon one’s husband and then lie down upon the door. (161)

Lizzie’s husband plans to vote for the anti-Prohibition candidate, and, denied suffrage herself, Lizzie is voting with her – well, let the reader supply the proper anatomical term.

Singmaster was opposed to alcohol, but in favor of women’s suffrage. Such a tug of apparently opposing forces runs throughout these stories. In “Big Thursday,” a young woman restless with the confinements of her sect and her fiancé goes off by herself to the great Lehigh County Fair; but she does not like her experience there and returns grateful to have her community and her future husband. In “The Eternal Feminine,” a complex ending leaves the reader with the main character’s dilemma: she is married to a mean, life-killing man, but “The whole trouble is – I – I – like him!” In “Settled out of Court,” a young Amish husband whose wife and child have been killed by a drunk driver comes upon the man just as he has rolled his car again, at the same curve. The Amish do not go to court, so the rich drunkard has not faced the consequences of his actions – until confronted by the bereaved husband.

This last story suggests that a reader can find tragedy, and perhaps irony, in Singmaster’s stories. But it is not so, which is why these stories have not remained in the canon of American literature. However, a comparison with Garrison Keillor can be instructive here. Keillor’s Lake Wobegon stories also present characters from an ethnic and religious minority who are sympathetic even as they are amusing. Keillor’s Lutherans live in a tragic and ironic world, and sometimes we resonate with them at our deepest levels. This is not the case with these Pennsylvania German stories. But on the other hand, Singmaster never adopts Keillor’s attitude of superiority; and therefore there is a different kind of honesty that can be found in Singmaster. Her people are immediately and fully real.

As she says in one of her stories, “Pennsylvanians were kindly, hospitable folk, a little given to gossip, perhaps, but possessing in the main many more virtues than faults.” (136) Her stories are saved from being mere propaganda for Singmaster’s own values by the humanity of her characters, a humanity that she not only appreciates but loves – as will her readers. For all the complexities and vicissitudes of life, “Whatever happens, one must wash and iron.” (234)

Susan Hill aptly concludes her introductory sketch of Elsie Singmaster by stating that “her insight into the ever-evolving American dream. . . the fiction, the reality from which it was imagined, and the writer’s craft all have earned a place in the telling of the American story.” (68)

Kent Gramm was educated at Carroll College, Princeton Theological Seminary, and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He has taught literature, American Studies, and creative writing in the U.S. and Germany. His books include Gettysburg: A Meditation on War and Values; Gettysburg: This Hallowed Ground; Somebody’s Darling; Essays on the Civil War; November, which was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize; and Clare.

No Mere Dialogue: Engaging World Religions

Lawrence D. Folkemer (Gettysburg: Thomas Publications, 2009)

Reviewed by Christy Lohr

At first glance, one would not expect such a small, unassuming book to engage such large questions, but as the saying goes, “Good things come in small packages”. In *No Mere Dialogue*, Lawrence Folkemer has presented a timely, relevant text that delves into weighty issues of interreligious engagement. The title suggests a trend in interfaith relations to move away from “mere dialogue” in which people of various faith traditions simply talk to (or sometimes past) one another. Instead, what Folkemer proposes is a means of engagement that is authentic to a rich tradition deeply steeped in dialectic, proclamation and discovery.

Folkemer’s operating premise is twofold: dialogue with non-Christians has theological significance, and Christian proclamation is dialogical. The reader, then, comes to realize that moving out from one’s own tradition to encounter another is a worthwhile and theologically sound endeavor. One should feel free to address the interreligious partner from a perspective of faith commitment and conviction. “Christians out of commitment to the Gospel and equally as well, out of genuinely selfless interests in the religious commitments of others, are summoned to engage in inter-religious conversation.” (111) Suggesting ten theses on the relationship between dialogue and proclamation, Folkemer lays out theological rationale for engaging the religious “other”. These outline the operating principles that should undergird interreligious engagement. Folkemer tackles the centuries-old reality of religious plurality head-on and encourages interfaith encounter as a means of engaging a common human quest for Truth – thus presenting acts of dialogue as necessary and valuable.

Folkemer devotes a significant portion of the book to clarifying the roles and distinctions of dialogue and proclamation. As people of a particular faith, Christians are compelled to share that faith in meaningful ways. This does not always come through conversation geared towards conversion. When faith becomes active in love toward neighbor, Christians make a proclamation about the nature of God’s commitment to all humanity.

Throughout the book Folkemer makes simple, yet bold, statements that remind the reader of profound theological insight: God is, ultimately, in control of salvation. A faith secure in God can risk interreligious encounter. True dialogue cannot be reduced to proselytism. The Holy Spirit moves through proclamation.

Folkemer addresses important issues of relevance beyond the Christian tradition such as the challenges of secularism for religious systems today, concepts of universality and unity, and the interplay of philosophy and religious understanding in the history of the Christian faith. He explores such topics intelligently and succinctly and provides resources to which the reader can turn for greater depth. While he approaches such topics from their points of concern for Christians, he relates them to similar issues in other traditions – specifically Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Islam. Folkemer is certainly not the first to tackle weighty topics such as salvation, the Incarnation, Scriptural authority and the nature of God from a comparative perspective, and while his contribution to this discussion can be seen merely as scratching the surface rather than being exhaustive, he does provide fodder for a deeper conversation on important issues.

The chapter “Biblical Postures” appeared in the Autumn, 2009 issue of this journal. In this Folkemer explores a few of the places in which religious pluralism is addressed in the Bible. He introduces some often cited passages and challenges traditional, exclusivistic interpretations of them. In the end, Folkemer suggests a Biblical hermeneutic that views the religious other as worthy of and wrapped up in God’s grace and universal love. What better means of expressing faith active in love is there than taking a generous and charitable approach to the “other”?

In terms of critique, Dr. Folkemer has a long and distinguished career in theological education and church service. His commitment to faithful expression and engagement in the midst of religious diversity is commendable. Yet, at times references in this work come off as a bit dated. For example, he writes of trends in Transcendental Meditation and Chavez’s United Farmworker’s movement which do not claim the same prominence today as they did several decades ago. Additionally sources cited are often forty or fifty years old. While such texts certainly still hold relevance today, and one or two are now even considered to be “classics”, the fields of theology of religions and comparative theology are among the fastest growing in the religion and theology-focused publishing industry today. This book would have benefitted from the engagement of more contemporary works.

No Mere Dialogue is a good resource for those looking for a way to ground their interfaith encounters in purpose and direction. Folkemer re-

minds the reader of important traditions within the Christian faith, but encourages a “new hermeneutical task” (23) in which fresh interpretation leads to greater openness and engagement with the non-Christian. He rightly challenges clergy and seminarians to view interreligious dialogue as a worthy pursuit and a skill to be cultivated and calls theological schools to live up to the task of preparing church leaders to deliver the Christian message in a world marked by pluralism. In this way, the book could also be a resource for parish education. Folkemer’s style is easy and understandable, and his assertions make for good discussion points. A pastor looking for a new adult education resource would do well to turn to this book.

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The Promise of Despair: The Way of the Cross as the Way of the Church

Andrew Root (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010)

Review by Chandler R. Carriker

A few weeks ago I spent a Saturday with youth, young adults, and bishops from Region 7 of the ELCA, talking about the Church, our hopes and vision for it. Often in the conversation the young people returned to the topic of unity. Above all else, this was central to what they saw as the Church’s witness to the world. After the word had come up several times a bishop spoke up to ask, “How do we achieve this unity?” The first to respond to the bishop’s question was a young woman who had remained quiet to that point. “By losing yourself,” she said. Andrew Root’s book *The Promise of Despair: The Way of the Cross as the Way of the Church* exists in the space of the brief silence that held our group after her words.

As a part of the “Living Theology” series published in conjunction with EmergentVillage.com, it would be far too easy to lump this with another in a long series of books which have come in the wake of Brian McLaren’s *A Generous Orthodoxy*. Coming from the emerging church movement, it would be natural to assume this book is another exploration of ancient church practices existing alongside post-modern thought. It would be natural to assume that the chorus of “let’s **be** Church rather than do Church” could be found throughout its pages, but this is not a work that rests in easy places. Root works through his premise of the centrality of death to Christian discipleship by telling stories of his own life, questioning and doubting his own theological conclusions, and comfortably leaving questions unanswered. It is far from being a work of “systematic” theology, but in the end *The Promise of Despair* creates a tangible space for hope in the Church.

It is Root’s treatment of death that quickly grabs a reader and alerts to the fact that this is not a book for quick answers. Telling stories of his first encounters with death as a child, Root pulls the curtain back on the terror that death holds over us and the typical weakness of the Church’s response to it. He echoes Luther’s call for the Church to call things what they are, or to be a “bearer of what is.” Death is a reality, and the cross continually reminds us of that. If we are to reach out to a world that has lost all sense of authority or meaning, the Church is called to be a community that engages death honestly.

Careful not to become another theologian proclaiming to have found something in Luther that everyone else has missed, Root's application of the Theology of Cross is not an answer to the riddle, but creates the space for more questions to be asked. Instead of Luther being cast as the hero that solved the puzzle of justification, for Root the Theology of the Cross is "Luther's starting point...that the God of Jesus Christ is known in the despair of death," (pg. 73). From this starting point Root continues on to engage a faith that holds at its very center the experience of death and the despair it brings.

All of this could sound like a theology that is better suited for the pages of another Twilight novel or a Goth-Rock band, but it is the discomforting nature of these depths that Root descends to that gives weight to the promise and proclamation of hope found in discipleship. Making strong distinctions between the emptiness of optimism and the grace-filled reality of hope, Root offers a strong call for, "a community that worships the crucified God." "When optimism is the church's business," Root writes, "then we allow it to screen us from seeing reality. The church is not in the business of optimism and positivity but of trust in a new reality that will be born within this broken one," (pg. 143).

With a calling so challenging and deep the natural response of any reader is, "Okay, but how?" Root does offer a few examples of congregations finding hope in the midst of the despair of daily life. More often though, the question of how this is lived out is left to the reality of the communities we all live amongst. This book not only serves as a good scholarly read, but offers direct scriptural reflections and discussion questions at the end of each chapter, to lend it well to use in congregational and small group settings. Questions like, "Do you think our sermons, education programs, and coffee hours are as deep as our yearning? How could they be?" do not just exist in this work to give guidelines for conversation, but are part of this practice in theology. Root is deftly aware that for him to attempt to answer these questions he would be prescribing a universal fix to needs and problems that differ from community to community. In fact the "emerging" and "post-modern" theologian may be seen as a direct response to theologians before them whose universal fixes for what is broken in the Church have left many of our communities with a false sense of inferiority or unfocused mission. Root's thesis dwells in the universal reality of death, despair, and the cross, and invites the reader to bring their congregation into this space.

Root serves as assistant professor of Youth and Family Ministry at Luther Seminary, and much of his previous work has focused on youth ministry. While this work does not connect directly to that field, I could not help but be reminded of Kenda Dean's book *Practicing Passion* as I read

Root's. Dean's thesis that youth yearn for a passion worth giving of themselves for displays the importance for genuine engagement with Christ's Passion and the shockingly self-giving love found within. For those young disciples to come to the unity they so desire with the Body of Christ, Root's book calls us to be honest with them and the world about the depths of loss and despair where Christ and hope is found.

Chandler R. Carriker is the Director of Theological Education with Youth (TEY) a joint initiative of two Lutheran seminaries, which creates meeting places for theological and vocational discovery with high school disciples. His B.A. is from North Carolina State University, his M.A.R. and S.T.M. are from Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary.

Martin Luther's Understanding of God's Two Kingdoms: A Response to the Challenge of Skepticism

William J. Wright (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010)
Reviewed by Gerald Christianson

The standard interpretation of Luther's two governments or realms remains F. Edward Cranz, *Luther's Thought on Justice, Law, and Society* (Sigler Press, 1998), originally published in 1959 with a closely following chapter in Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther* (Fortress, 1972), originally published in 1965. Both are highly recommended for readers in the 21st century who are not familiar with Luther's thought on this core principle, a key to his entire theology, or who wish to review this principle because of its importance for an understanding of creation, society, and the Christian life. While Wright, who is a professor of history at the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, does not substantially move the discussion beyond Cranz and Althaus, he provides three contributions that make this a book worth looking into. First Wright argues for Luther's dependence on early Italian humanism and its skeptical milieu, by which Wright means not a modern skepticism directed toward religion itself, but an intellectual "cool" toward abstract dogmatic systems that drove humanists back beyond superficial assertions to original texts and original assumptions. Second, his conclusion supports Cranz's thesis that the two realms formed Luther's world-view in which the Christian lives simultaneously before God and in the world (*simul coram deo et coram hominibus*) and that this holistic world-view encompasses even justification by faith. In addition, Wright draws on an impressive array of references to underscore that the two kingdoms were a "reality" for Luther, and affirms that the principle formed a lively part of Luther's outlook from his early to his mature period. Finally, the author offers a survey of nineteenth and early twentieth century literature to establish that some leading scholars, and above all the German National Socialists, perverted Luther's outlook by "politicizing" the two kingdoms and turning them into the separate spheres of church and state. In this new and "perverse" interpretation the world and human institutions are autonomous, free from the laws of God, with their own rules and ethical norms. The pleasure in Wright's book con-

sists most of all in the varied quotations from Luther's own writings written across a long span of years. These include not just the obvious treatises such as *Temporal Authority*, but lesser known sermons, and the commentaries on Genesis and the Lord's Prayer. On the other hand, the author fails to set these refreshing texts into context with a solid chronological framework. Without this framework he cannot build on Cranz's significant insight that Luther continued to develop after *Temporal Authority* and eventually moved beyond a simple identification of the two kingdoms of God and "the world" (or Satan) in which the main role of government is to restrain human sin. Ever evolving, Luther eventually sets the believer at the same time into both realms (each under God's benevolent care). Not only did Luther thus "creaturize" the world, making it a more positive place where the whole creature, not just the "spiritual part," can serve the neighbor, but decisively destroyed any notion that one can use – indeed, abuse – the world and the neighbor as a means to achieve one's own salvation. For all its salutary points, a certain ambiguity remains in the current book, for example in the statement that "The knowledge of the natural world that was derived from Christian Scriptures was certain and far more marvelous than the competing speculations of the natural philosophers" (p. 145). Although the author may not have intended such an interpretation, he seems to contradict the very text from the *Commentary on Genesis* that he is quoting and implies that the two realms can be collapsed into one, rather than celebrating both as God's amazing creation, with the result that the Bible can become a science textbook.

Gerald Christianson is Professor Emeritus of Church History at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg. His Ph.D. is from University of Chicago. The author and co-editor of several works on Nicholas of Cusa, the fifteenth century theologian and reformer and on the reform councils of that era, Christianson inaugurated the International Seminar on Pre-Reformation Theology which brings students and scholars from around the world to Gettysburg.

POETRY + THEOLOGY

When the Rubber Hits the Road

Katy Giebenhain

A few years ago I attended a poetry workshop in Monticiano, Italy, a village west of Siena. We did a great deal of writing and talking about writing, but there was also a bit of time for exploring. While on a walk outside of the village, a few of us discovered an unexpected companion. The path was knit with trees and bushes on either side, and a sizeable snake casually glided along overhead, at exactly our pace. That snake found its way into one of my poems (of course). The goose bumps come back just thinking about it, even though the situation was harmless and the day was gorgeous. Loaded image. Loaded word. Visual art, literature and scripture are littered with snake and serpent references, both literal and metaphorical. The snake is a frequently-used symbol of deceit or wisdom from the Old and New Testaments. You only have to see “snake” and “apple” in the same sentence for those Garden of Eden scenes to appear in your head like a slide show.

I always appreciate different ways of presenting images which are prone to clichés from frequent use. In this issue of *Seminary Ridge Review* we bring you not one, but two snake poems, along with Mary, quantum physics, disappearing farms, and seminary commencement. Our poets come from Minnesota, Pennsylvania, England, Kentucky, and Wisconsin. First, here are a few book recommendations to read and share on the poetry and theology front this spring.

Pretty Mother's Home: A Shakeress Daybook

The Shakers were nineteenth-century America's largest and best-known communal society. By the 1840s, nearly 3,500 Shakers lived in communities from Maine to Kentucky. They believed in equality of race and sex, and freedom from prejudice. Pleasant Hill was established in central Kentucky in 1805. *Pretty Mother's Home* is a fictional, yet well-researched collection of

poems set in and around Pleasant Hill. Here, author Vickie Cimprich has brought us accounts of Shaker life which manage to be earnest but with a light touch.

As a reader, I feel like a fly on the wall throughout this book, and very happily so. The author's tone is both fresh and restrained, never naive. See "Shade Vines" on page 84.

The scenes and characters in *Pretty Mother's Home* include Shaker Brothers and Sisters of varying ages, freed slaves, soldiers passing through, and family members who do not choose to join the Believers at Shaker Hill. We find ourselves in the midst of stacking linen, cleaning and making molasses "jobs change once a month," relationships and cooperation, the outside world, death and the harvest. There is a matter-of-factness in "Our Nurses – January 1856" when all 71 residents (children and adults) become sick. "Instead of Miss Bryant's homeopathic skills, / Kitty said it was toddies that all needed." Rather than a denial of the world there is a constant interaction with it, and the assertion of individual choice in poems like "What I Tried and Left Behind" or "Arriving, 1831," in "Killing Shot," or "The Finished Rugs" or Charlotte whispering in the moving wagons "Your mind gets lively and limber in some ways / you never would have picked" (75).

In an excerpt from "Hush Arbor" (67) a freed slave articulates her identity:

I be a Shaker. It was Shakers freed me,
bought Mastor Hessor's breath from off my neck.
I thirty-one, now: knowin other heights and depths,
a Shaker I be. I goes when I can to hush arbor.

The deeper observations and questions are not as different as we may think today. We are at war. We are immersed in communities of faith and family. We struggle with political and social differences in these communities.

Visit the publisher, Broadstone Books (Frankfort, KY) at <http://broadstonebooks.com>. To learn more about The Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill visit www.shakervillageky.org.

Hebrew Feminist Poems from Antiquity to the Present

Hebrew Feminist Poems from Antiquity to the Present is a title from the "Defiant Muse" series from The Feminist Press at the City University of New York. It's edited by and with an introduction by Shirley Kaufman, Galit Hasan-Rokem, and Tamar S. Hess. Alicia Suskin Ostriker wrote the foreword. I'm not just suggesting this for alums who could brush up on their Hebrew (although this excellent bilingual anthology can help with

that...). *Hebrew Feminist Poems from Antiquity to the Present* is a reminder that there is a danger in scholarship and history of having too many voices from one direction. Women were not always allowed to tell their stories, rather, they were not allowed to write them down. Jewish women, historically, were especially not to write in the Hebrew language. The act of giving voice to an unheard group is in and of itself the act of defiance. Each of us can be more aware of the still voices in our parishes, classes, and synods. Our individual worlds. That's what the root of feminism is: a defiance in the name of equality and practicality. It is a just and faithful seeing of each other and ourselves.

One of the strengths of this anthology is its range. These are different women. Their identities stand out from the pages in a marvelous explosion through time and circumstance. We begin with excerpts from "The Song of Miriam" and "The Song of Deborah" and proceed through laments, advice, declarations, narratives and observations. From Tel Aviv to California, there is gentleness and admiration here, gratitude and rage, power and lack of power. In her foreword, poet Alicia Ostriker emphasizes that this book provides a chance for us to hear "the poetry of women in the world's oldest and youngest language," since modern Hebrew needed an expanded and more colloquial vocabulary than the older and more exclusively "holy language." The silencing of women is far too wide a topic to begin here, but this collection of voices asserts itself against such silence. "Individually and collectively, these poets bring into play their love and anger, their experience of sex, motherhood, war, and religion, their critiques of society, myth, and language" (xiv).

We stand, deal-making with a refugee in Hamutal Bar-Yosef's poem "Jaffa, July 1948" translated by Shirley Kaufman "...through the border fence I am doing business with a thin girl/ bubble gum from wet mouth to dry, for a slice of bread / with salty American butter ..." (159). We hear "Lore for Healing" from the Babylonian Talmud "Yoma 78b" in "A growing child needs oil and hot water; / a little older, egg with sour milk; / older still, dishes to break" (59) translated by Shirley Kaufman with Galit Hasan-Rokem. We read the challenging poem of a female Joseph pretending to be a boy in "She is Joseph" by Nurit Zarchi, and Esther Raab's announcement "I want beautiful trees – / and not wars! / and a coat of many colors / and not uniforms / for all my dear ones" (97) in "Requests" translated by Catherin Harnett Shaw. A sharp personification of language unfolds in "Hebrew" by Yona Wallach, translated by Lisa Katz and in "Data Processing 60" Maya Bejerano asserts an undercurrent throughout the book "My face is beautiful when I am understood" (215) translated by Miri Kubovy.

Visit The Feminist Press at the City University of New York (New York, NY) www.feministpress.org.

Beloved on the Earth

Another anthology brings familiar and new voices together over a common theme. *Beloved on the Earth: 150 Poems of Grief and Gratitude* is edited by Jim Perlman, Deborah Cooper, Mara Hart and Pamela Mittlefehldt. I want to slip this book into the suitcases of students heading off to their internships and CPE sites. The editors have compiled a fine group of poems about many aspects of death. Among the poets included are heavy hitters such as the current Poet Laureate of the United States, Kay Ryan. Mary Oliver, Sharon Olds, Marvin Bell, Rainer Maria Rilke, Jane Kenyon, Ted Kooser and Wendell Berry appear alongside other well-known and newer writers. These poems are personal. Each one lifts up, yanks up or holds up something taken from deep within the experiences of loss. It is, however, by no means a downer of a book.

When I began reading this anthology I was reminded of a conversation I recently had with three Germans. We were talking about German and English idioms. One of them said his favorite American phrase of all time is “when the rubber hits the road.” Well, clinical pastoral care or parish life will pitch you onto every kind of road you can imagine (and plenty you can’t) where death and dying are taking place. You will be asked the hard questions. You will be privileged to share in these journeys. You will be reminded of your own private brushes with death, disease, and accidents as they unfold. Take the opening lines of Maxine Kumin’s “How it is” (104):

Shall I say how it is in your clothes?
A month after your death I wear your blue jacket.
The dog at the center of my life recognizes
you’ve come to visit, he’s ecstatic.

Or the beginning of “The Death of a Parent” by Linda Pastan (145):

Move to the front
of the line
a voice says, and suddenly
there is nobody
left standing between you
and the world, to take
the first blows
on their shoulders.

Or the first lines of “Dream” by Paul Hostovsky (93):

You’re alive and riding your bicycle

to school and I am worried about you
riding your bicycle all the way to school
so I get in my car and drive like a maniac
through the dream over curbs and lawns

From anticipation to aftermath to the changed future of loss and thankfulness for a person’s life, we deal with death. As in the title, “grief” comes before “gratitude.” Where the rubber hits the road we wake up and listen to God and each other. “*Beloved on the Earth* is filled with words that take our anxiety and grief, our anguish and fear, and magically turn them into meaning, wonder, and yes, even gratitude” says author Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, “An anthology filled with healing and hope.”

Visit Holy Cow! press (Duluth, MN) at www.holycowpress.org.

Bearing the Mystery: Twenty Years of Image

Gregory Wolfe is the founder, publisher and editor of the quarterly journal *Image* in Seattle, WA. He has selected the stories, essays, poems and artwork which comprise *Bearing the Mystery*, a handsome hardcover edition published by Eerdmans. Stanley Hauerwas puts his finger on the role of the magazine “*Image* has done what no other journal has done over the last twenty years – that is, make available art and reflection on what artists do with serious theological purpose.”

Wolfe’s introduction to *Bearing the Mystery* is helpful for those who are not familiar with the journal. I appreciate the way he articulates the prevalent misunderstanding that great contemporary art can “no longer be made by those who wrestle with matters of faith” (xi). This opinion was (and to some degree still is) held by both secular artists and artists of faith. “The myth that there is an absence of religious concerns at the heart of modern literature and art has remained stubbornly persistent” (xi). The perception is still out there, but it simply isn’t the case.

The book is organized alphabetically by authors. The artwork is grouped in the middle. It is easy find what you are looking for after a straight-through reading. A bit more art would have been desirable, but that would make it more expensive. Let what is here whet your appetite. I recommend this anthology for graduating seniors with any room left on their wish lists. It is both a resource and a pleasure read. Poems included are by the likes of Patiann Rogers “Born, Again and Again,” G. C. Waldrep “Invisibility,” B. H. Fairchild “Frieda Pushnik,” (see *Usher*, below) Robert Cording “The Parable of the Moth,” Denise Levertov “Dom Helder Camara at the Nuclear Test Site,” Alfred Corn “Anthony in the Desert” and Mark Jarman

"Psalm: First Forgive the Silence" (203) with a final stanza that pries at all of us who work with words:

Forgive God
For being only a word,
Then ask God to forgive
The betrayal of language.

If you have, or have ever had a pet, or if you are even acquainted with someone else's pets, I guarantee you will absolutely, jazz-hands-in-the-air love Michael Chitwood's poem "Dog." A prayer poem if there ever was one.

Bearing the Mystery prose contributors include Annie Dillard, Clyde Edgerton, Wim Wenders (yes – as in the films "Wings of Desire," "The Million Dollar Hotel," "Buena Vista Social Club" etc.) and others. A nice surprise amongst the visual art selections is a color plate of the Edward Knippers painting "The Foot Washing (Christ and His Disciples)." Knippers is our feature artist for the Seminary's 2010 spring exhibit "Grace in the Time of Need." Visit the Library Pioneer Room to see his work before the exhibit closes on May 15.

Visit Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, U.K.) at www.eerdmans.com.

Usher

How could I resist *Usher* when I found out some of the poems are written in the voice of a Union Theological Seminary student in New York City in the 1950s working part-time in a movie theater? Seminarians can identify with the perspective of this student, and can imagine the public tides moving in and out of his theater. The "usher," Nathan Gold "... saw a woman, hair swept across one eye / like Rita Hayworth, walk into a bus-stop bench. / Blind humanity. Niebuhr would have loved it, / Tillich, too, the grandeur and the misery, New York, / " (28).

When I learned the author was B. H. Fairchild, I was sold. Having been deeply impressed by his writing since *The Art of the Lathe* I was more than ready for this book, and not disappointed by it. The collection is arranged in five parts: Trilogy (a Pushcart Prize-winning sequence with postcards from Hart Crane before his suicide in Havana, thoughts from the perspective of Frieda Pushnik the armless, legless circus sideshow and the theology student at a cinema on 83rd Street in Manhattan "... while I wait, armed with flashlight and Kierkegaard" (28)), Gödel (after the Czech-born American mathematician and philosopher known for his completeness theorem), Five Prose

Poems from the Journals of Roy Eldridge Garcia (a voice from earlier Fairchild books), The Beauty of Abandoned Towns (class, work, Christianity and geography figure heavily here, and the resonating point that problems began when farming was taught as a business rather than a vocation) and Desire (with "Tryptich" referencing voices from the earlier "Trilogy").

These are not religious poems, but there is religion all through them. Fairchild's mix of intellectual knowledge and hands-in-the-grease experience along with his feel for lyric dialogue creates an ache for readers after many poems. He's just very, very good at what he describes. The first poem "The Gray Man" sets us up for what's to come. Imagine men and boys working on a highway crew in a Kansas summer "... he speaks in a kind of shattering of glass cutting / through the hot wind's sigh, the fear" *Love thine enemy*. / He says it to the weeds or maybe what they stand for" (20).

The internal conversations throughout *Usher* bring us to other points of view. We observe the observations made by people in these poems. We learn from this double observation, and start seeing the world through their eyes (and, more pointedly, learn more about the way the world sees them) as in Frieda Pushnik watching the circus visitors (23)

... They should be walking on their lovely knees
like pilgrims to that shrine in Guadalupe, where
I failed to draw a crowd. I might even be their weird
little saint, though God knows *I've wanted everything*
they've wanted, and more, of course. When we toured Texas,
west from San Antonio, those tiny cow towns flung
like pearls from the broken necklace of the Rio Grande,

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Shade Vines

Vickie Cimprich

Muscadine vines bowered us
on the hillside. Elizabeth on the pallet,
Joanna and I held her hands.
We watched the farm
our sister's last days blessed.

We talked of the rat snake
who'd visited us here at a picnic
some years ago,

the length and loop of his life
there for us on the basket
a kind of good practice
in forgetting to be afraid.

Vickie Cimprich performs with The Western Shaker Singers and lives in Northern Kentucky. Her poems have appeared in The Journal of Kentucky Studies, Cincinnati Poetry Review and the anthology Poetry as Prayer – Appalachian Women Speak. Her oral history work focuses on the East Covington African American community between the 1940s and 1970s. "Shade Vines" © Vickie Cimprich is reprinted with permission from Broadstone Books.

Our Fathers

Joyce Sutphen

Our fathers, who lived all their lives on earth –
are going now. They have given us all
we need, and when we asked, they gave us more.

Their names are beautiful to us, holy
as the names of stars, as familiar
as the roads we traveled, falling asleep

on the way from one farm to another.
Their kingdoms were small; they were never
interested in more than one homestead,

and as for evil: although they could not
keep it from us, they tried to keep us from
temptation, though we were like all children

and wanted our own power and glory,
world without end, forever and amen.

Back Before

*There is a house that is no more a house
Upon a farm that is no more a farm
And in a town that is no more a town.*

— Robert Frost

This was when the house was still a house,
and the farm was everything a farm
was meant to be; this was before the town
swallowed up the fields with streets and houses.

We lived on that farm, never dreaming that
anything about it would ever change —
it seemed immortal to us, poor mortals,
as if our loving it would make it last.

About wind and fire we knew that either
would suffice to end our world, but there were
years when the apple trees were filled with fruit
and the grapes hung heavy on the vine.

We were climbers of ladders and birches —
what did we know of the ruins of time?

Joyce Sutphen is Professor of English at Gustavus Adolphus College. Her poems have been read by Garrison Keillor on NPR's "The Writers' Almanac" and have appeared in many journals. Sutphen's poetry collections include Straight Out of View, Coming Back to the Body, Naming the Stars and Fourteen Sonnets. She co-edited the award-winning anthology To Sing Along the Way: Minnesota Women Poets from the Territorial Days to the Present.

Berry Picking as Spiritual Practice

Todd Davis

On the south-facing slope stones have fallen
over themselves, and low-bush blueberry
consumes granite. If God speaks, it's in the sweet

colors of this dark fruit, in the berry's leaves
which will turn scarlet a few months from now.
Why do myths slither into our unconscious,

lay beneath the lip of a rock until someone
steps carelessly over them? When I entered
this field, bucket strung around my neck,

a timber rattler shook his ribbed castanet,
kindly letting me know he was there.
Snakes mean no harm, so I walked closer

for a better look, and after gazing upon his singular
beauty, I moved lower in the field, ate God's holy
indulgence, and picked enough fruit to freeze

for the year. I also kept an ear for any rustle,
hoping to stay clear of the snake, to make
my way out of this garden and back to my wife.

Todd Davis is Associate Professor of English at Penn State Altoona, where he also teaches Environmental Studies. Winner of the Gwendolyn Brooks Poetry Prize and a Pushcart nominee, he has published both scholarly books and poetry collections, and his poems appear in numerous anthologies and journals. His newest poetry collection, The Least of These, was published this spring by Michigan State University Press.

*A month of short days and failing light,
smoke in the air, things perishing*

— Raymond Carver, 1968

Rosie Shepperd

It seems like hours pass
in the apple house, where the green
light is sweet and sacks of pippins rise into the rafters.

Sunday falls behind the swing, my bones shift in the damp.

I pull a stick of bamboo from the quince cover,
write your name in the earth
over and over.

Maybe there wasn't that much time.

I knew there were creatures there, little black and brown things.
All that summer, I feared the quick click of their legs.

September is a better time. I am grateful.

Sometimes I like to see simplicity.
A fence post, a planter, a puddle before a car passes.
Anything by itself, without even you.

Rosie Shepperd's poems have appeared in Rialto, Smiths Knoll, Magma, The SHoP, Poetry Ireland Review and Poetry Wales. She was awarded the 2009 Ted Walters/Liverpool University Poetry Prize and, most recently, was selected by Poetry Ireland into their "Introductions Series," which includes a featured reading in Dublin in May, 2010. She lives in London.

Mary Rising

Travis Du Priest

What if? What if both the post-modernists and the Quantum physicists are right? And there is no such thing as a "world" or a "universe?" What, then, would be expanding?

Poet Stevie Smith wondered too. When asked about the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, she responded: "If the universe is expanding, Is Mary still going up?" Of course, back then, Stevie didn't know, or she momentarily forgot, that there is no "up," only "out."

But, wouldn't you rather have a Mary Rising
than a Mary Arrived? I would: Maria AEternis, floating forever
through what we call space, through what we call time.
Maria Libre, Mary free of both Heaven and Earth. Mary
un-tethered, like a moonwalker cut loose from mother ship.

Cosmic Mary in the sky – high, soaring farther and farther out –
away from our pin-pointed minds that have morphed her into
doctrine, stolen her soul in order to save our own.

Ave, Maria ortus, voveo nos quod nostrum impend mens:
Hail, Mary rising, pray for us, and our expanding minds.

The Last Word: A Homily for Seminary Graduation

Let me begin by saying what an
honor it is to be here today.
To be asked to deliver the sermon
to your class of seminary graduates.

Normally I don't go in for a lengthy
apologia before a talk, nor do I care
to listen to one from others.

But I beg your indulgence this once,
lest you think I sound a bit pretentious.
when I say, I address not only this
august assemblage of Divines – but also –
how else can I say it? – Everyone in the
world. Everybody, Everywhere.
Or be deemed pompous when I ask
that you allow me, please, to offer
the last word on an important subject?
The subject of God.

I shall be brief, as my text and
message are one: a quote from
the great Cambridge philosopher
Wittgenstein who said, and,
in my opinion, correctly:

“What we cannot speak about,
we must not speak about.”
So, let me conclude by saying again
what an honor it has been to be here.
Thank You for your kind attention.

Travis Du Priest is a retired Episcopal priest who taught English and Creative Writing at Carthage College in Kenosha, Wisconsin and was the Director of The DeKoven Center in Milwaukee. He serves as chaplain at Mary's Margin retreat facility. Du Priest has published chapbooks and scholarly books as well as more than 250 essays on literature and spirituality, prayer, and meditation. He is currently working on a manuscript on his French Huguenot family.

GETTYSBURG SEMINARY FINE ARTS

Collecting, Assembling, Sensing

Megan L. Weikel

I am a collector, gatherer, gleaner. Butterflies and beetles live quietly in the china cabinet. Spotted pebbles from a rocky beach in Ireland nest silently in brooding ceramic bowls. Shoe forms and spools of weaver's yarn, heavy with the weight of purpose-past, wait humbly on the coffee table.

Mary Helene Wagner, whose exhibition "Assembled in Spirit" recently graced Seminary Ridge, is a collector too. Like a curious crow drawn to pretty things, her eye and mind are awake to the presence of objects that speak to her; "pick me, pick me, I have found a home with you."

Much of our conscious purpose as adults is seeded in earlier times. This process of gathering and giving new life and meaning to the detritus of other people's lives began for Wagner when she was young. Growing up in the New York metropolitan area during the depression, on her way home from school she and her siblings passed construction sites abandoned as hopeful plans for neighborhood and community gave way to the reality of survival. Families that might have lived in these homes that were not to be creatively claimed the sites' gaping foundation holes as repositories of the cast away, broken and unwanted. In turn, Wagner and her siblings mined these treasure troves to transform their backyard into imaginative environments.

Reclamation and transformation are predominant characteristics of the art of assemblage Wagner has practiced exclusively for twelve years. The offspring of collage, Dadaist ready-mades and Surrealist object constructions, assemblage marries diverse elements to create new meaning. While collage maintains primarily a two-dimensional surface, ready-mades, constructions and assemblages extract three-

dimensional objects from their utilitarian contexts and re-present them under new guises.

Pioneering the concept of ready-mades in the early twentieth century, Marcel Duchamp deified isolated objects as a kind of ironic anti-art¹; a defiance of traditional aesthetics and painting in particular as the highest of art forms. Later, the Surrealists altered and juxtaposed found objects to craft constructions intended to spark and provoke strong emotional response. Accessing what they perceived as the revealing truth of dreams, and abandoning editing filters, the Surrealists questioned the validity of long-held cultural norms, reliability of visual icons to explicate meaning, and ultimately the very nature of reality. Both Dada and Surrealism were driven by an underlying philosophy of confrontation. Dadaism was born of protest² while Surrealism, influenced in part by the theories of Freud, was born from acute self examination and a desire to access and reveal the subconscious.

One artist loosely associated with Surrealism whose work emerged gentler in form and intent was Joseph Cornell. Cornell worked from his home studio on Utopia Parkway in Queens, New York and his character was imbued with contradictions of reclusive deliberation and earnest childlike wonder. His box constructions and assemblages reveal an insatiable curiosity about and ever-expanding knowledge of European history, astronomy, film and photography, French literature and art, poetry, the ballet, and countless other subjects.

During the years Mary Helene Wagner was retrieving her first collectables as a child, nearby the adult Joseph Cornell was scouring his treasure trove, the island of Manhattan, for anything that could inform, enlighten or captivate. Flea markets, archives, second-hand bookstores, thrift and specialty shops as well as the Metropolitan Museum, and Public Library Picture Collection³ were among his favorite sources.

A most intriguing aspect of Cornell's work is the way his various interests were processed or, more accurately, intuited into each piece. His visual lexicon was filled with icons that symbolized concepts within subjects or about relationships. These icons in turn evoked his feelings about and visceral responses to the ideas they represented. Cornell's art contains no grandiose gestures. In total it remains a humble and mysterious affirmation of his personal fascinations. To experience his highly intimate and enigmatic work is almost like opening and stepping figuratively into a diary or journal.

Like Cornell, Wagner engages emotions and feelings while uniting found objects in dialogues that defy the absolute. Both frequently incorporate text as well. While Cornell tends to employ text to aug-

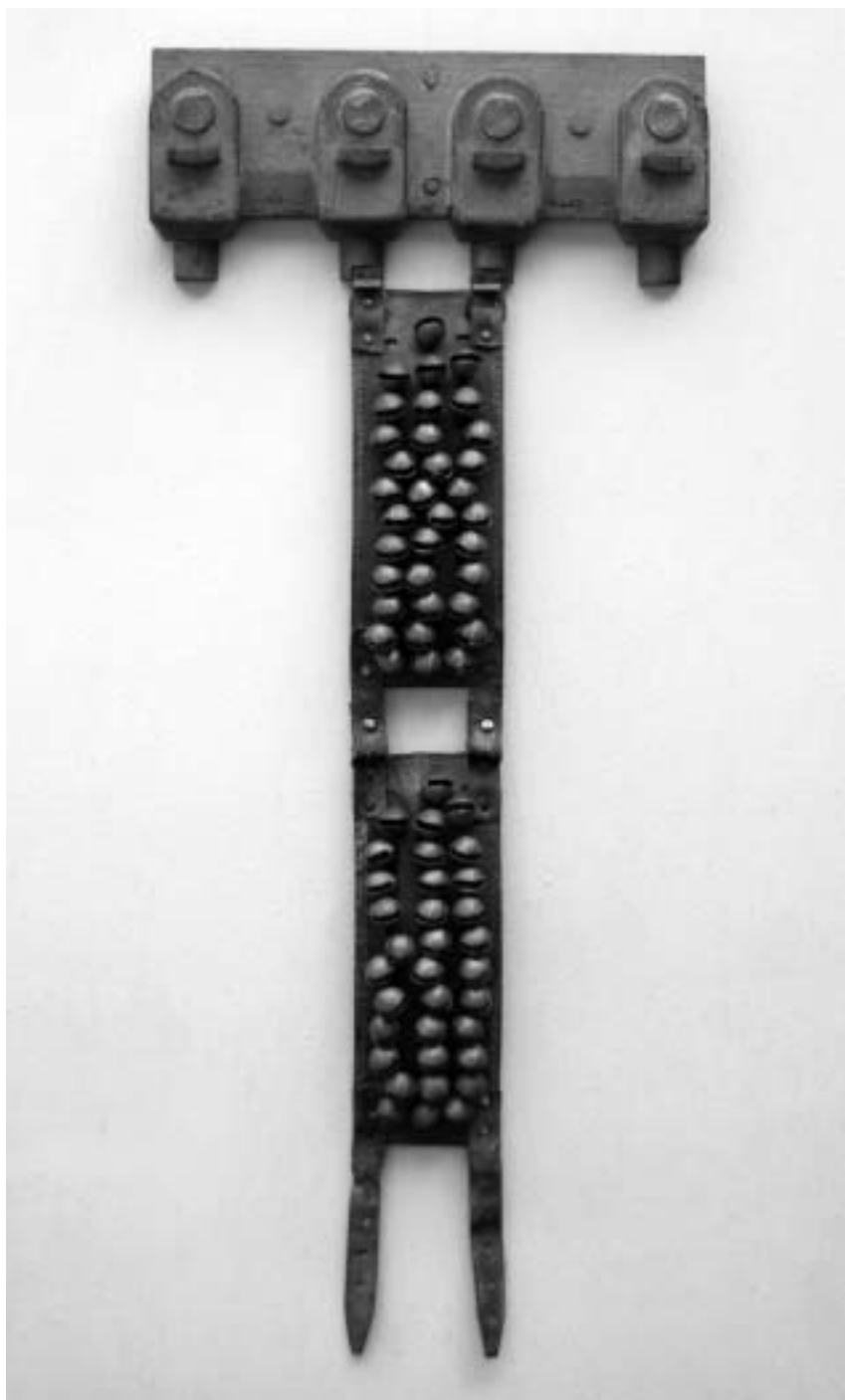
ment but not define the dialogue, Wagner's choice of both text and title enhances our ability to grasp her intent. At the same time however she allows enough ambiguity for us to bring ourselves and our personal associations to the "reading." Better described as visual poems or short stories, the allure of this kind of work is the contemplative adventure of sensing your way through it.

For Wagner too, the process of creating assemblage is one of sensing. She describes being guided by something outside herself; saying "it's not me, it's not from me, it's a gift."⁴ Setting aside the overt biblical references in the pieces exhibited here (much of her work is secular in content), it is not surprising that she discerns this spirit as she constructs her work. Growing up the daughter and granddaughter of Lutheran clergy, it is as if her immersion in a "parished" place, with the spirit ever present in its gatherings, routines and rituals, became a kind of abstract treasure trove which she mined almost unawares and assimilated into her art.

Recounting how her assemblages come to be Wagner indicates that certain objects speak immediately to formed ideas. Others resonate in her studio for years until newly-found sister components invoke pieces or until themes she is contemplating foster ideas that claim the objects. In many of her pieces word play, and hidden personal associations and stories add layered meaning.

"Pour the Full Tide" is one such layered piece. Conjoined of a simple frame saw, bamboo beads and almost 100 tiny strips of laminated paper on which Wagner has meticulously written phrases from the Gospels, the piece plays with the idea of proclaiming good tidings. The strips cascade from the bottom of the frame in a metaphorical wave of words that wash over you, referencing the way we hear and receive Gospel messages in a liturgy. A violin tailpiece centered on the frame is a humorous nod to Handel. Wagner cannot think of proclaiming the tidings without hearing "Oh Thou That Tellest..." from the Messiah.

Formal elements of certain of Wagner's pieces also enhance their power. "Benediction" at first seems straightforward in its message: "The love of God, the grace of our Lord Jesus, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, grant you peace." More a collage than assemblage it consists of a round scalloped wooden tray (which Wagner says reminds her of a cathedral medallion), three shallow wooden bowls, three jade leaves and three bone beads with a strip of laminate on which the message is written. The three sets of threes unmistakably represent the Trinity and the meaning is clear to all who believe. It is the laminated strip



Above: "Turning Points."

dissecting the piece horizontally though that activates its power. The right side of the strip, as a kind of arrow, curves back on itself and returns us to the words. This repetitive cyclical gesture profoundly becomes "...grant you peace," forever grant you peace.

The simplicity of a work like "Turning Points," constructed of just two objects; a wooden machinist's mold and a belled harness, provides insights about Wagner's fleeting thoughts and associations. The two pieces seem made for each other. Circular elements in the mold and its red and gold touches of paint are reflected in the bells on the harness. Horizontal openings in the bells echo horizontal elements on the mold. The word "points" in the title is enlivened by the four descending points of the mold and, at the bottom, in the harness straps. As in "Pour the Full Tide," again Wagner's auditory senses are engaged. The bells represent for her the vast number of choices we deliberate on in a lifetime. When our choices become clear they have a certain ring of truth.

In the interactive "Pick Me – Pick, Me" with its seven apples waiting to be plucked, we are joined palpably to everyone who has and will participate in and discover something in the work. Representing the seven deadly sins, each apple is labeled as one. Six are red and the seventh brown. Do the red signify temptation and fall, or if left on the tree the antithesis? Could the brown indicate the temporality of temptation as it withers and dies? Perhaps these fruits represent redemption because we are allowed to put them back, or in picking one are we reminded to consider how much we may have enacted that vice today? In this wonderful ambiguity and uncertainty rests the opportunity freely to invest ourselves in the piece and depart richer for the experience.

Notes

- 1 Jenetta Rebold Benton and Robert DiYanni, *Arts and Culture: An Introduction to the Humanities*, combined edition (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999) 538.
- 2 Diane Waldman, *Joseph Cornell* (New York: George Braziller, 1977) 13.
- 3 Waldman, *Cornell*, 11.
- 4 Conversation with Mary Helene Wagner, February 20, 2010.

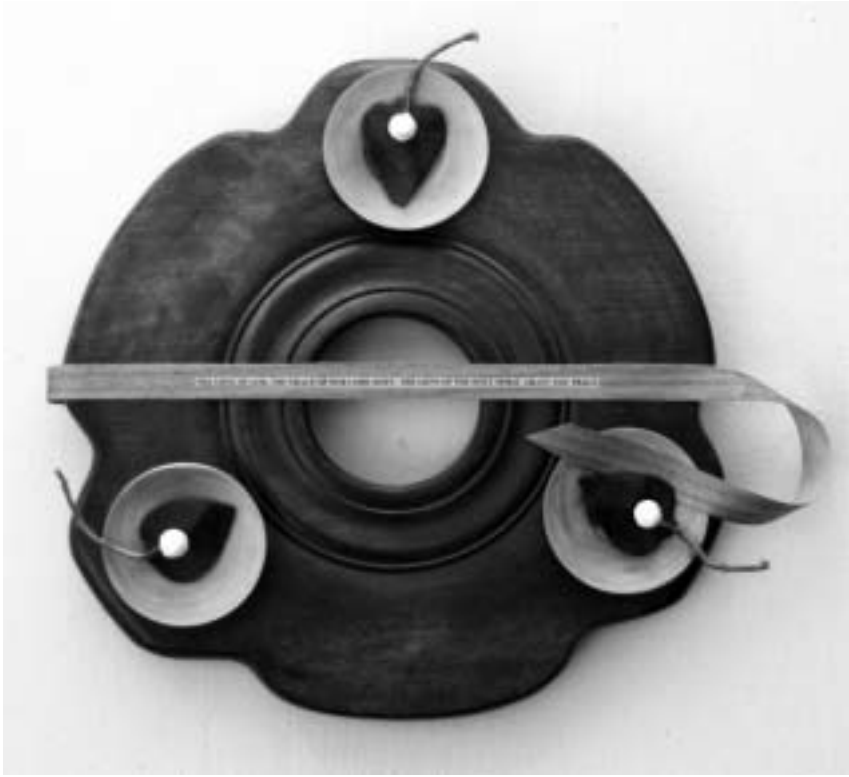
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Above: "Pour the Full Tide" (detail).



Above: "Benediction."

All assemblages © Mary Helene Wagner.



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