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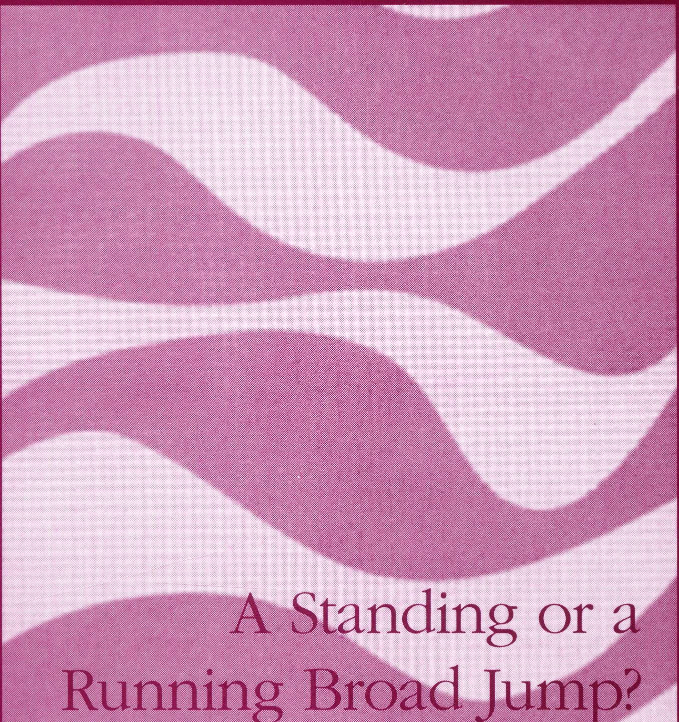

A Standing or a Running Broad Jump?

CURRENTS

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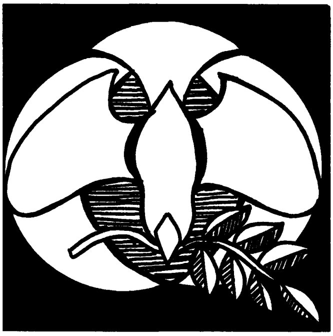

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A Standing or a Running Broad Jump?

A standing broad jump begins where we are now and moves forward. A running broad jump starts back of the take-off point and only then moves forward. This image from the late Jaroslav Pelikan points out the importance of tradition for Christians and Muslims, and for Christian-Muslim dialogue. We Christians and Muslims ignore our mutual pasts to our own peril. The first three essays in this issue were originally delivered at a conference in 2006 to inaugurate LSTC's Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice. They point out the urgency of this new center and the difficulties faced by Christians and Muslims as we attempt to move toward a more just and more peaceful future. The final two essays provide additional resources for those who will preach or listen to sermons based on Matthew's Gospel in Lectionary Year A.

Willem Bijlefeld points out that recent polls have shown a significant rise in negative feelings toward Islam and in the view that Islam encourages violence. The public press has widely ignored Muslim scholars who sharply distance themselves from this view. Kenneth Cragg's *The Call of the Minaret* has led numerous Christians to a sincere appreciation of the Muslim heritage. All through history there have been Christians who affirm that the God of Islam and Christianity are one, although not without significant dissenters. Another point of contention for Christians is the question whether the Qur'an is the word of God. A third issue is the attempt of many Christians to assign Islam a place in the history of revelation. Many Muslims suspect that Christian-Muslim dialogue is a new and subtle form of Christian mission. Dialogue can begin not on the basis of a religious bond but on the basis of common humanity since we all are children of Eve and Adam. Common action for the sake of the common good is another starting point for dialogue. A third aspect of interfaith dialogue is dialogue for the sake of better mutual understanding, including beliefs and doctrine. Natural catastrophes raise the question of God's omnipotence and of history's independence from God for both Muslims and Christians. A fourth dimension of interreligious dialogue is an intuitive recognition of a shared experience of the Transcendent Reality. While tensions between Christians and Muslims are growing in some places, in Chicago and at other places there are encouraging new initiatives for a better mutual understanding. There is a great need to counteract the impact of one-sided and distorted images of Islam. We Christians and Muslims cannot give up finding each other as fellow pilgrims on our way to God.

Vincent J. Cornell observes that Islamic traditionalism is giving Islam a bad name all over the globe. Outside of the Muslim world, the belief that Muslims are violent archtraditionalists is most responsible for Islam's bad name. But the religious, social, and ethical disjunctures between the values of the present and the past are challenges for all contemporary societies, not just for Islam. Prejudices that developed in the Islamic past are perpetuated and accentuated by the tendency to equate the loss of traditions with a loss of faith. The idea of reciprocity that leads to social ethics is an important corollary to the Five Pillars of Islam. The Prophets of Islam are the bearers of the divine message and reminders to countries and peoples of humanity's obligations to God and to each other. Muslims share with Christians a reverence for Jesus and John the Baptist, who are not recognized in Jewish Scriptures. Part of the crisis of tradition that Muslims face today is that they are unable to admit openly to the innovations of tradition that they make every day in nearly every context. The task of the constructive theologian in today's Islam is to engage critically with the legacy of tradition as it impacts the experience of Muslims in the modern world. Perhaps the real crisis in Islam is the loss of that spirituality that makes Islam not just a tradition or an identity but a true submission to the will of God.

Robert Schreiter notes the recent effects of globalization (disparate economic growth and migration from poorer countries to wealthier ones) and a resurgence of religion in many parts of the world. Dialogue between religious traditions has assumed new urgency in this context. Painful memories of the past can preclude any resolution of past differences or finding new ways of living together. The first part of the article deals with the role of traumatic memories, such as the Armenian Massacre of 1914–15, the Jewish Holocaust in World War II, and the Rwandan Genocide of 1994, in social formations. Somehow these memories must be embedded in new narratives that do not continue to generate negative emotion. The second part of the article offers a case history of the ways in which memory has complicated current realities in the Balkans, the area of the former state of Yugoslavia. The establishment of an interfaith council there hopes to separate religion from national politics and to build on the resources of peace in the various religious traditions that are part of that council. The third part of the article identifies some general lessons about building peace and reconciliation and how these goals relate to the processes of interreligious dialogue.

Edgar Krentz shows that the year of Matthew invites us to stress in preaching our rootedness in the Scriptures and our traditions, our concern for justice and the marginalized, our character as a community of forgiveness, and our need to make disciples through baptism and teaching. Matthew's Gospel provides the themes for that teaching and reminds us that Jesus is and will be with us as we live the life he describes. One needs to interpret each Sunday's Gospel within the overarching theological and social concerns of Matthew. Matthew wrote his Gospel to help his Jewish Christian community understand who they were after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and what his audience should be doing in the identity crisis they faced.

Thomas Haverly reviews the findings of several recent polls that indicate that the posture of many Christians toward issues like terrorism and torture falls far short of what we should expect. Also, American civil religion and individualism offer little inhibition against a tolerance of torture and attacks on civilians. Investigation of a series of recurring phrases in Matthew's Gospel provides a prophetic framework for reading the Sermon on the Mount. Both John the Baptist and Jesus have prophetic characteristics in Matthew. Doing the will of the One in heaven is both less and far more than prophecy and deeds of power. The bearing of good fruit is best characterized by an active love of neighbor and also by a love of the enemy as well. The call to discipleship within the pungent expressions of the Sermon on the Mount is a call to a deeper engagement with the realm of the God who subverts our world and in the subversion restores it.

Tradition, Pelikan insisted, is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. Both Christians and Muslims face the challenge: Do we bank on tradition or traditionalism? Do we recognize and honor and lament our past? Or do we sail blindly into the future? What resources do our Sacred Texts offer? How are we doing so far in the year of Saint Matthew?

Ralph W. Klein, Editor

Christian-Muslim Relations: Developments of 2006 in Historical Context

Willem Bijlefeld
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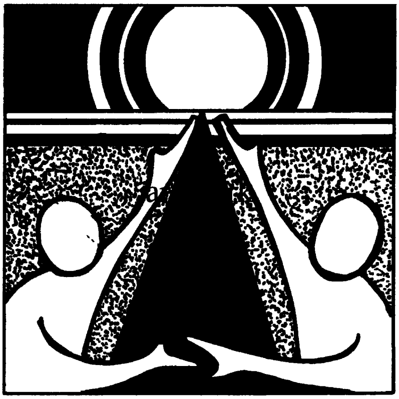
When we reflect on the present stage of Christian-Muslim relations, it seems logical to pay special attention to theological perspectives on that relationship. But we would misinterpret the present situation and fail to grasp the challenges of the future if we limited ourselves to these theological contributions and overlooked the fact that attitudes toward Muslims and views of Islam apparently are influenced much more directly by political developments and critical public events than by conciliatory declarations from Rome and Geneva. A steady stream of dialogue meetings and a wide range of easily accessible and highly informative texts about Islam seem to have at best a very limited impact on a large segment of the American population.

Two national polls, taken in March and April 2006, suggest a significant rise in negative feelings about Islam. The March survey, conducted by the *Washington Post* and ABC News, showed since 2002 a 22 percent increase of people with an unfavorable view of Islam. The CBS News poll of April indicated an astounding 9 percentage points increase for this category since February. The figures for unfavorable and favorable were an alarming 45 percent over 19 percent. It should be noted that polls of the Pew Research Center taken between 2004 and 2007 give significantly different numbers for the percentages of favorable views of Islam, but they, too, lead to the conclusion that "public attitudes about Muslims and Islam have grown more negative in recent years": the favorable section down from 48 percent in 2004 to 43 in 2007 and the unfavorable view edging upward from 36 to 42 percent.

One of the questions in several surveys is whether Islam encourages violence. The *Washington Post*'s survey in January 2002 found a remarkably low 14 percent answering that question affirmatively, but four years later the outcome was almost twenty percentage points higher. The CBS News poll placed this category still higher, at 46 percent. While violence was earlier primarily associated with small groups of radical extremists, increasingly Islam itself is seen by many as the motivating factor behind it. The 2007 Pew poll reported a noticeable increase in the percentage of respondents who think that Islam encourages violence, up from 36 in July 2005 to 45 in August 2007. The most striking increase is among white mainline Protestants, up from 28 percent in 2005 to 47.

The same phenomenon was also noticed in Germany. In an article about attitudes toward Muslims in Germany, in January 2006, Eberhard Seidel observed that from 2005 onward Islam itself is seen more and more as the reason for the conflict situations involving Turkish communities in the country.[1]

Especially because of this changing perspective, the remarks about Islam and violence in the September 12, 2006, address of Pope Benedict XVI at the University of Regensburg were unfortunate.[2] Several Muslims challenged immediately the way the Pope dated the Qur'anic verse "there is no compulsion in religion" and contrasted it with later Qur'anic instructions concerning "holy war." But the main point of contention was the Pope's reference to the fourteenth-century Byzantine emperor who challenged his Persian interlocutor with the remark: "Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached." In an endnote to this passage the Pope later explicitly stated that this was not his personal view and that he had quoted this passage "solely to draw out the essential relationship between faith and reason."



No matter how one interprets this "retreat" and explanation, significant harm was done by what many saw as yet another example of the Western tendency to interpret Islam as a religion characterized by violence. That this event became an incentive for violent outbursts by some extremists has been widely reported. Far more representative were various considerate responses that sought to bring about a certain rapprochement. They include an "Open Letter" of October 13, 2006, signed by 38 Muslim leading figures, followed exactly a year later by a more elaborate letter, "A Common Word between Us and You," signed by 138 Muslim scholars and clerics from all over the world, including several from the United States. "The Unity of God, the necessity of love for Him, and the necessity of love of the neighbour is the common ground between Islam and Christianity,“ the letter states. "Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world. The future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians."[3] These responses received relatively little attention. The same had happened on earlier occasions, including 9/11, when several Muslim organizations and individuals expressed their great concern about brutal actions they considered to be contrary to the basic teachings of Islam and denounced sharply and unequivocally any form of violence in the name of Islam. Three days after the attacks of 9/11, a joint declaration of the United States Council of Catholic Bishops and various national and regional Muslim organizations strongly denounced all acts of violence and hate.[4]

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[1] *http://www.qantara.de.* An English translation of the article, with the subtitle "Islam Implicated as the Motivating Factor behind Social Conflicts," can be found at *http://martijn.religionresearch.org/?p=1194.*

[2] The full text in English translation is at *http://www.cwnews.com/news/viewstory.cfm?recnum=46474.* One of the very critical analyses that followed almost immediately was George Friedman's "Faith, Reason and Politics: Parsing the Pope's Remarks," Stratfor Geopolitical Intelligence Report, 9-19-2006: *http://henwood.blogspace.com/?p=3727.*

[3] The text of the letter is at *http://www.acommonword.com.*

On July 28, 2005, the Fiqh Council of North America issued a fatwa endorsed by 100 Muslim organizations in the U.S., condemning all acts of terrorism and religious extremism as fundamentally un-Islamic. A few months later, the day after the Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian embassies in Damascus were set afire (February 4, 2006) as a protest against the caricatures of the Prophet, a group of Muslim scholars and organizations meeting in the same city condemned those actions in unambiguously clear terms. The very same day the Organization of the Islamic Conference used similar wording in its statement, describing those attacks as "detrimental to the image of Islam." On the American scene one of the many declarations in the same spirit came from the Islamic Society of North America on February 22: "ISNA and all Muslim Americans reject the use of violence in response to the defamatory caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad."

Notwithstanding all these declarations, Muslims continue to be seen as a security risk, also in this country. One illustration may suffice: According to the Gallup poll of summer 2006, four in ten Americans think that Muslims should carry special ID. The USA-Gallup poll was taken July 28-30, 2006. The *Newsweek* poll of July 11-12, 2007, reports that more than half of all Americans are "somewhat" or "very worried" about radicals within the American Muslim community, and 52 percent are in favor of the FBI's wiretapping of mosques.

All available data confirm the impression that we are witnessing a rapid deterioration of feelings toward Muslims and "sinking perceptions of Islam," the wording used in the announcement of the CBS poll. That this trend is interrelated with political events and developments is evident. Both the *Washington Post* and CBS News mentioned some specifics of the political context of its polls, including the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and escalating violence between Shi'ite and Sunni factions in Iraq.

For several parts of Western Europe one can point even more precisely to "political" events that have affected the relations between Muslims and Christians. They include two much-publicized murders in Holland. The first, in May 2002, was that of the Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn, whose warning that Muslims are "busy conquering Europe" and that we need a "cold war against Islam" had a far greater impact after his death than in his lifetime.[5]

In November 2004, the filmmaker Theo van Gogh, a harsh and provocative critic of Islam, was assassinated. It became a turning point in public opinion about Muslims, not only in the Netherlands but also in other parts of Western Europe. "How Holland lost its innocence" was the title of an article in *Al-Ahram Weekly* that commented on this event, which, in the author's words, led to a "widespread conviction that Islam has in general done more harm than any other religion."[6]

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[4] For information on this and similar joint efforts see Jane Idleman Smith, *Muslims, Christians, and the Challenge of Interfaith Dialogue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 143–46. For numerous Muslim condemnations of the suicidal acts of 9/11 see the long list at *http://www.muhajabah.com/otherscondemn.php.*

[5] His book *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur* (Against the Islamization of Our Culture) was published in 1997.

[6] Gamal Nkrumah, in *Al-Ahram Weekly, International*, #717 (November 18–24, 2004).

Two years later a Dutch Internet poll showed that almost half of the respondents expressed an aversion to Islam, a result that the Netherlands Centre for Foreigners rightly called "extremely shocking."[7]

A similar pattern developed in Germany. A survey of May 2006 found that 61 percent answered negatively the question whether Christianity and Islam could peacefully coexist and 65 percent anticipated future conflicts between the cultures of the West and of the Arab-Islamic world.[8] The notion of an imminent "clash of civilizations" was accepted by 56 percent, a ten percentage-points increase over a two-year period.

On this issue a Pew Research Center survey of July 2005 seemed far more hopeful with regard to the American situation. "Most reject 'Clash of Civilizations,'" its report noted, indicating that by about two to one (60 to 29 percent) people saw ongoing terrorist attacks "as a conflict with a small radical group rather than as a major clash between the West and Islam."[9] However, the same report mentioned that "many of those who view it as a limited conflict think it will grow into a major world conflict (26% of the general public)." In his excellent critical analysis of Huntington's notion of civilizations, especially of Western civilization, Jorgen Nielsen refers to the widespread criticism of Huntington's theory but adds: "One sometimes wonders whether contemporary events are not conspiring to prove him right."[10]

An interesting twist to this discussion is given by Reza Aslan in the Prologue to his *No god but God.* Referring to the feeling of many that the world is indeed enrolled in a "clash of civilizations," he writes:

> But just beneath the surface of this misguided and divisive rhetoric is a more subtle, though far more detrimental sentiment: that this is not so much a cultural conflict as a religious one; that we are not in the midst of a "clash of civilizations" but rather a "clash of monotheisms.[11]

Undoubtedly there are in both communities persons who seem bent on a confrontational approach. As far as the Christian side is concerned, Aslan mentions, among others, Franklin Graham and Ann Coulter. We should not underestimate the harm done by remarks such as the accusation that the Muslim community is "motivated by demonic power and is satanic," even if that verdict is later explained as applying only to "radical Islam."[12]

Statements like this may be few and far between, and many of them are openly challenged by other Christians, but once widely publicized they help to shape the image of America and American Christians in the Muslim world. As important is the effect they have on opinion forming among those to whom these remarks are primarily addressed. The 2005 Pew survey found that while the overall unfavorable view of Islam was at that time 36 percent, that percentage was 47 among white evangelical Protestants. Similarly, the percentage of white evangelical Protestants convinced that Islam was more likely than other religions to encourage violence was 49, compared with an overall rating of 36. The Pew Center poll of 2007 shows the same pattern. The overall unfavorable view is 35 percent, but that for white evangelical Protestants is 57; and for the affirmative answer to the question about Islam's encouraging violence the percentage for white evangelical Protestants is 56 compared with an overall percentage of 45.

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[7] Margreet Strijbosch, "Xenophobia on the increase in the Netherlands," *http://www.getinonline.net/pdf/Xenophobia_on_the_increaseNL.pdf.*

[8] Elisabeth Noelle and Thomas Petersen, "Eine fremde, bedrohliche Welt," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (June 2, 2006).

[9] Pew Research Center, "Views of Muslim-Americans Hold Steady after London Bombings. Fewer Say Islam Encourages Violence" (July 26, 2005), 2.

[10] "Western Civilization: Myth or Reality? A Debate about Power," in *Islam and Other Religions. Essays in Honour of Mahmoud M. Ayoub*, ed. Irfan Omar (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 181.

[11] Reza Aslan, *No god but God. The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam* (New York: Random House, 2006), xxiii.

[12] The reference is to Pat Robertson's March 13, 2006, "700 Club" show and its follow-up. *Comments in Church and State* 59/4 (April 2006).

There is a second perspective on Christian-Muslim relations that is in some respects the opposite of the confrontational approach but shares with it a very critical view of what the two faith traditions have in common. It is the position of those who are convinced that all theological references should be avoided when we want to promote any form of cooperation. This outlook represents a significant deviation from recently widely accepted views. Throughout the Western world we have in the past five decades talked endlessly about the bond that unites us, Jews, Muslims, and Christians, as children of Abraham. A February 2006 article in a leading German newspaper pointedly characterized the new trend in the words of its title, "Abschied von Abraham"—Farewell to Abraham.[13] Reporting about the ways in which German Christians responded to the upheaval surrounding the cartoons published about the Prophet Muhammad, the author concluded that, in the eyes of many, Abraham is no longer a useful point of reference in our contacts with each other because conversations have shown that "nowadays Abraham divides much more than he unites." The search for a theological basis for Christian-Muslim cooperation has failed, they believe, and they are convinced that the only common ground can be found in the realm of ethics discussed in purely secular terms, without any God-reference. Some churches in Germany seem to fall back on a civil religion outlook, the author of the article maintained, and he quoted in this context the appeal of a German bishop who called for "an alliance of reason to defend the freedom of Western democracy." The suggestion is that an alliance of reason, not a kinship as Abraham's children, is the only framework within which Christians and Muslims can come together meaningfully.

There are also numerous Muslims and Christians who, while firmly rejecting the confrontational approach, are convinced of the crucial significance of an ongoing dialogue on theological issues. In this presentation I deal mainly with Christian contributions to this discussion.

In the literature of the last few decades about other people of faith, one notices a decisively different tone than we heard in the past. Where to place the beginning of this new phase is a debatable issue. Many refer to the Second Vatican Council documents of 1964 and 1965 as a watershed in Christian reflections on the relationship with Muslims.[14] Muslims are recognized as holding the faith of Abraham and as adoring together with Christians the one, merciful God. It is a view that shows the influence of Louis Massignon, who published thirty years earlier his reflection on Abraham's prayer for Ishmael.[15] The significance of these solemn affirmations of Vatican II cannot be denied, but neither can their silences be ignored. We return to that point later on.

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[13] Alexander Kissler, "Abschied von Abraham," *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (February 14, 2006).

[14] *Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Austin P. Flannery (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975). "Lumen Gentium," 1964, and "Nostra Aetate," 1965. The references to Islam are on pp. 367 and 739–40.

[15] Louis Massignon, *Trois prières d'Abraham*, no. iii (Paris, 1935). It became

No matter how important the mid-1960s are, many of us would probably go back another decade and suggest as the beginning of the new phase 1956, the publication date of Kenneth Cragg's *The Call of the Minaret.*[16] This study, probably the most influential of all his works, has led numerous Christians to a sincere appreciation of the Muslim heritage. That a Muslim critic, in a review of the second edition thirty years later, branded Cragg's account of Islam as "to a great extent both unconvincing and misleading,"[17] shows how difficult it is to understand each other's language. That the transition from controversy to dialogue demands patience is evidenced on the Christian side by the appearance of three shocking examples of a vilification of Islam, published in 2001, 2003 and 2005.[18] I should mention that these three titles were included and sharply rebuffed in a recent article by Warren Larson, Director of the Zwemer Center in Columbia, South Carolina.[19]

To highlight some new emphases and perspectives in mainline Christian reflections on Islam during the past half century, I return in slightly different wording to three themes I selected for the same purpose more than fifteen years ago.[20]

1. All through history there have been Christians who wholeheartedly affirmed from their side the basic truth of S. al-'Ankabût (29).46: "our God and your God is One." At many times and in many places, however, these voices were drowned out by a much larger number of people who seriously questioned or vehemently rejected this notion. By the middle of the twentieth century this issue was in most Protestant circles still so sensitive that the affirmation of "the same God" had to be presented very cautiously. When Montgomery Watt pleaded in 1953 to abandon the use of the word "Allah" in English, he reassured readers of his conviction that "to recognize that Muslims have some knowledge of God and worship Him is not to place Islam and Christianity on the same level with regard to truth and falsity or to minimize the differences between them." "Muslims and Christians have somewhat different conceptions of God," he wrote, "nevertheless . . . the Being to whom their words refer and . . . to whom their worship is offered is one and the same, namely, God."[21]

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widely available when the three prayers were republished in *Dieu Vivant* 13 (1949):15–28 and reprinted in Massignon's *Opera Minora*, ed. Y. Moubarac, II (Beirut: Dar al-Maaref Liban, 1963), 804–16.

[16] Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret,* 2d ed., revised and enlarged (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, and Ibadan, Nigeria: Daystar, [1956] 1985.

[17] Review by Ishtiyaque Danish in *Muslim World Book Review* 8/2 (1988).

[18] John MacArthur, *Terrorism, Jihad, and the Bible: A Response to the Terrorist Attacks* (W Publishing Group, 2001); Don Richardson, *The Secrets of the Koran: Revealing Insights into Islam's Holy Book* (Regal, 2003); and Ralph W. Stice, *From 9/11 to 666: The Convergence of Current Events, Biblical Prophecy and the Vision of Islam* (acw press, 2005).

[19] "Unveiling the Truth about Islam. Too many Christian books miss the mark," *Christianity Today* 50, no. 6 (June 2006): 38.

[20] "Christian-Muslim Studies, Islamic Studies, and the Future of Christian-Muslim Encounter," in *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, ed. Yvonne Y. Haddad and Wadi Z. Haddad (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995), 19–21.

[21] W. Montgomery Watt, "The Use of the Word 'Allah' in English," *The Muslim World* 43 (1953): 245–47. See also his "New Paths to Islam," *International Review of Mission* 36 (1947): 79.

Early on in *The Call of the Minaret* Cragg accounted in a similar way for his decision to avoid throughout the book the use of the word "Allah":

> Since both Christian and Muslim faiths believe in One supreme sovereign Creator God, they are obviously referring when they speak of Him, under whatever terms, to the same Being. To suppose otherwise would be confusing . . . .
>
> The differences, which undoubtedly exist, between the Muslim and the Christian understanding of God, are far-reaching and must be patiently studied. But it would be fatal to all our mutual tasks to doubt that One and the same God over all was the reality in both.[22]

After the Second Vatican Council the question whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God may be "officially" closed for Catholics (among the faithful it still seems to be very much alive),[23] and the affirmative answer, which Watt and Cragg expressed in guarded terms in the 1950s, is by now taken for granted in most mainline Protestant literature.[24]

2. Serious discussion on the second topic was initiated by Wilfred Cantwell Smith in his famous lecture of 1963–1964, "Is the Qur'an the Word of God?"[25] He pointed out that among neither Muslims nor Christians has the question been asked, "because the answer has been constant." But in the present situation, he argued, we have to move beyond a simple Yes or No answer, realizing that "in fact, the question . . . in as far as it is a genuine question, is a threat—both to Christian and Muslim theology, simultaneously and for the same reasons." In conclusion he asserts, "Christian theology must, and I think will, ponder this question, and hammer out some answer for itself."[26]

Even in the past some Christians affirmed the possibility of God's speaking to people everywhere, but very often the qualification was added that this was a speaking "directly to the human heart, and particularly so when neither human messenger nor printed page is available to bear their testimony."[27] This same refusal to admit that God speaks through the Qur'an is manifested in the deliberations regarding the earlier mentioned Second Vatican Council document *Nostra Aetate*. Those in authority rejected the amendment to insert the words "through prophets" in the reference to Muslims' belief in the God who "has spoken to men." This was obviously done, as Michael Fitzgerald and many others observed, because otherwise "the church might be giving the impression of accepting the prophetic role of Muhammad."[28]

Of those who wanted to overcome that revealing silence, Claude Geffré deserves to be mentioned and his suggestion of 1983 to look upon the Qur'an as "a different Word of God."[29] Several Christians appropriated this view of the Qur'an, and it played a major role in the discussions of the Muslim-Christian Research Group which resulted in the publication of the document *The Challenge of the Scriptures*. There the Qur'an is recognized as "an authentic Word of God, but one in part essentially different from the Word in Jesus Christ."[30]

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[22] Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, 30.

[23] George Dares, *Do We Worship the Same God? Comparing the Bible and the Qur'an* (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2006), 1–5.

[24] Timothy George's *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002) is a notable example of a different perspective.

[25] Published as Chapter 2 in his *Questions of Religious Truth* (New York: Scribner's, 1966), 39–62; reprinted in *Religious Diversity*, ed. Willard G. Oxtoby (New York and London: Harper & Row, 1976), 22–40.

[26] *Ibid.* (1966), 48–49, 60–61.

[27] J. N. D. Anderson, *Christianity and World Religions: The Challenge of Pluralism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984), 148–49.

[28] Michael L. Fitzgerald, "Relations among the Abrahamic Religions: A Catholic Point of View," in *Heirs of Abraham*, ed. Branford E. Hinge and Irfan A. Omar (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 68–69.

[29] Claude Geffré, "Le Coran, une Parole de Dieu differente?" *Lumière et Vie* 163 (July-August 1983): 21–32.

While these articulations of a Christian perspective on the Qur'an certainly reflect a new appreciation of its central message, the drafters of this document were fully aware of the fact that these formulations remain incommensurable with

> the essence of the Muslim faith, especially its vision of the history of revelation, which culminates and terminates in the Qur'an as the ultimate scripture manifesting the eternal Word of God, transmitted to Muhammad, "the seal of the prophets."[31]

Deliberations on the Qur'an obviously imply the question of the prophethood of Muhammad. We can leave aside those approaches that first mitigate the notion of prophet to the point that it becomes practically unrecognizable for Muslims, and then apply it affirmatively to Muhammad. But even with regard to some of the best known Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox assessments, David Kerr concluded that these "discussions must be read as essentially intra-Christian in nature. Their Christian theological criteria largely fail to address Islamic understandings of prophecy and prophethood."[32]

More than once, most clearly in the exposition of Cragg, the recognition of Muhammad's prophethood is set in the framework of the discussion

> that there is need for "more than prophecy", and that this "more" is because of a more radical despair and hope, of man. . . . We see that the full acknowledgement of Muhammad . . . must entail a Christian concern for a larger, more loving, comprehension of divine transcendence and, as its sphere, a deeper estimate of human nature and its answer in what is 'more than prophecy.'[33]

New Christian perspectives on the Qur'an and the prophethood of Muhammad have been opened up, but the search for greater clarity needs to continue in an ongoing dialogue with Muslims and, equally important, in intra-Christian consultations that do justice to the diversity of Christian perspectives.

3. The third point concerns the attempt of many Christians to assign Islam a place in their view of the history of revelation. Suggestions that the Qur'an represents a Mosaic, pre-Mosaic, or "patriarchal" phase in the history of revelation are as objectionable to Muslims as the 'sectarian" designation was in the past. They keep Christians from coming to terms with Muslims' firm belief in the Qur'an as the fulfillment of God's revelation to humankind. For both Muslims and Christians the notions of "finality" and "fulfillment" remain of crucial importance and should continue to be themes for common reflection and exploration. This clearly is an area in which we must move, using Mahmoud Ayoub's terminology, from a "dialogue of beliefs" to a "dialogue of faith," in which we dis-

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[30] *The Challenge of the Scriptures. The Bible and the Qur'an* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989). The original French edition was published in Paris, 1987. See the section pp. 47–76; the quote is on 73, the expressions "a Word of God" and "another expression of the Word of God" are on 71–72.

[31] *Ibid.*, 73.

[32] David A. Kerr, "'He Walked in the Path of the Prophets': Toward Christian Theological Recognition of the Prophethood of Muhammad," in *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, 441.

[33] Kenneth Cragg, *Muhammad and the Christian. A Question of Response*, new ed. (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 134, 139; see also 126–27. This edition offers a "gentle revision" of a feature in the first edition (1984): "It has to do with what was called 'the Caesar in Muhammad.'"

cover the possibility of a fellowship of faith that transcends the differences in beliefs.[34]

So we have reached the overcrowded field of the dialogue discussion. Numerous Muslims continue to remain skeptical about dialogues with Christians. In his critical observations on this point Ziauddin Sardar mentions the danger that such events can easily "degenerate into preaching exercises" and "seldom rise above the scoring of theological points." He draws attention to the fact that "they always seem initiated by Christians with Muslims normally unwilling participants" and asserts that "these dialogues are the product of an unnatural fear of Islam." His final comment concerns the at best limited outcome of most dialogues: "Once the dialogue conference is over, the participants return to their respective theological shells; there is no fall-out, no joint projects, nothing that can take participation beyond the level of discussion."[35]

Most of these challenging observations seem valid to a large extent. Many Muslims have expressed the suspicion that for some Christians dialogue is not so much an alternative to missions as a new and subtle form of it. One example must suffice. "Muslims have yet to be convinced that dialogue is a way for reconciliation or expressing their beliefs. Given the history of Christian missionary work in Muslim countries, many Muslims see dialogue as a subtle form of evangelization."[36] That the relation between dialogue and mission, or between dialogue and proclamation, dominated the dialogue literature on the Christian side in the 1960s and 1970s helps to explain the still-lingering distrust.

Sardar's remark about Muslims as "unwilling participants" needs to be qualified, because numerous dialogue meetings resulted from joint efforts of Muslims and Christians, and several invitations came directly from the Muslim side. Yet, the warning concerning one-sided Christian initiatives needs to be taken seriously. A Muslim theologian well known in Germany, Hüseyin Inam, deeply involved in interfaith dialogue, observed a few years ago that dialogue tends to be initiated by the dominant party, both at the diplomatic level when representatives of different nations meet and in any society where the majority "reaches out" to minority groups.[37]

Many Muslims have expressed the suspicion that for some Christians dialogue is not so much an alternative to missions as a new and subtle form of it.

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[34] Mahmoud Ayoub, "Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Goals and Obstacles," *The Muslim World* 94 (2004): 318. See also his "Abraham and His Children: A Muslim Perspective," in *Heirs of Abraham*, 107.

[35] "The Ethical Connection: Christian-Muslim Relations in the Postmodern Age," in *Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures: A Ziauddin Sardar Reader*, ed. Sohail Inayatullah and Gail Boxwell (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 158–59.

[36] Liyakatali Takim, "From Conversion to Conversation: Interfaith Dialogue in Post 9-11 America," *The Muslim World* 94 (2004): 349.

[37] Hüseyin Inam, "'Schlechter Dialog' ist besser als kein Dialog," in Bernd Neuser, *Dialog im Wandel* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlagshaus, 2005), 109.

Regarding Sardar's third point, there is no doubt that a fear of Islam has been an obsession for generations of Christians especially in Western Europe. But his suggestion that Christian-Muslim dialogues are a product of this fear seems more than questionable, and it is simply incorrect to maintain that the call for dialogue began only in the early 1980s and that "no one was remotely interested in dialogues during the seventies, sixties or fifties." The definition of dialogue that Spencer Trimingham gave in 1955 suffices to show that we can trace the dialogue discussion back to at least the 1950s as far as Muslim-Christian relations are concerned:

> We use this term . . . in its modern continental meaning of a constructive meeting between Christians and Muslims, devoid of polemical purpose or attempt at conversion, on the level of mutual respect and understanding of each other's faith, in the attempt to find common ground and action for the welfare of society as a whole.[38]

As early as 1973 Eric Sharpe cautioned that "it might serve the cause of sympathetic inter-religious encounter if a moratorium on the word 'dialogue' were to be proclaimed."[39] Regrettably it did not happen. What we have witnessed since then is an overwhelming flood of discussions about dialogue and what Dr. Seidel called a "real dialogue industry." At the same time there seems to be ample justification for J.-C. Basset's question, in 2000: "Has Christian-Muslim dialogue already begun?" His discouraging assessment of the situation includes the observation: "Not only have the 350 or more interreligious dialogues not prevented mistrust and conflict but they have been of little help, if any, in the process of healing wounds and restoring peace."[40]

Can anything still be said about dialogue that is not disappointingly redundant? The existence of several useful "Guidelines" make it superfluous to again rephrase the basic principles for interfaith dialogue.[41] But the ambiguity around the term continues to exist. In 1976 someone complained that the word dialogue "has been simultaneously overworked and underdeveloped."[42] Overworked, I would now say, because many use it as a generic term to denote all efforts that promote positive Muslim-Christian relations.

The first two points I make below are of momentous significance for our relations with each other as Muslims and Christians, but denoting them as two forms of dialogue seems more than questionable to me. Yet I adhere in this essay to the common terminology and deal with some aspects of the four most frequently listed types of dialogue.

Most classifications begin with the human dialogue. This nomenclature clearly points to the task of building relations of trust and mutual appreciation between people on the basis not of a religious bond but of their common humanity, their shared humanness as "Children of Adam."[43] These relations of friendship and mutual recognition are tremendously significant for building more harmonious relations in society. Among Americans who personally know a Muslim, only 10 percent say that they do not want to have a Muslim as neighbor, while that percentage is 31 among those who don't know any Muslim. The value of these relationships is undeniable even when the subject of religious convictions never comes up in neighborly conversations.

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[38] J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Christian Church and Islam in West Africa* (London: SCM Press, 1955), 45.

[39] Eric J. Sharpe, "Dialogue and Faith," *Religion* 3 (1973): 101.

[40] J.-C. Basset, "Has Christian-Muslim Dialogue Already Begun?" in *Muslim-Christian Perceptions of Dialogue Today. Experiences and Expectations*, ed. J. Waardenburg (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 281.

[41] Perhaps the best known is the publication by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims*, prepared by Maurice Bormans, English trans. from the French original (1981) by R. Marston Speight (New York: Paulist Press, 1990).

[42] Lawrence D. Folkener, "Dialogue and Proclamation," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 13 (1976): 420.

In his description of "the dialogue of life,"[44] Mahmoud Ayoub covered both this first aspect and what is regularly discussed as the second dimension: common action for the sake of the common good, sometimes called the secular dialogue. In principle such cooperative efforts are not based on any particular faith commitment, and generally they are aimed at very concrete needs in a society, from improving the water supply in an African village to fighting forms of discrimination in this country and elsewhere. In areas where suspicion persists as to what Christians have in mind when they talk about dialogue, the term should be avoided, and it should be made absolutely clear that there is no hidden religious agenda behind these joint projects.

Because serious collaboration in the way of peace and justice is bound to be for the sake of all those in need—sick, hungry, marginalized by structures of society, suffering under false suspicions, or whatever—it cannot be a closed Muslim-Christian affair. Some may wonder, therefore, why the new LSTC center is set up as explicitly "A Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice." This designation does not necessarily rule out the possibility that the center will in due time initiate projects involving also other people of faith and persons without any specific faith commitment. But its focus on Muslim-Christian involvement seems fully justified. Statistics quoted earlier show the high level of distrust and prejudice against Muslims and the appalling lack of knowledge of Islam. On both the Muslim and the Christian sides, the Chicago area has remarkably rich human and academic resources for a program of joint action that can change this situation. "Our experience of fifteen years of joint action in South America, Africa, and Asia has convinced us not only that this path [of joint involvement] is necessary but also that it is the only way to eventually change minds and build mutual respect and trust," asserts one of Europe's widely known Muslim leaders, Tariq Ramadan.[45] What it means to work together for peace and justice will need to be spelled out in a diversity of activities aimed at rectifying causes of disharmony, injustice, and discrimination, primarily but not only those that have a direct impact on Muslim-Christian relations.

The third aspect of interfaith dialogue is often referred to as a dialogue for the sake of better mutual understanding, the dialogue of beliefs and doctrine, or the dialogue of theological exchange. Although this can take place at the level of personal conversations, it occurs most often in the setting of meetings specifically organized for that purpose. In all situations we should

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43. Mohammed Fathi Osman, *The Children of Adam. An Islamic Perspective on Pluralism* (Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding. History and International Affairs. Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, Washington D.C. [1996]), 7–16. In his survey of Qur'anic data, he draws special attention to S. 7.172, which mentions "the common spiritual compass created by God within everyone," pp. 9–10.

44. In *Heirs*, 105–6; *The Muslim World* 94 (2004): 317.

45. Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 211.

An often-expressed observation about inter-faith dialogue is that it can strengthen and deepen our existing faith commitment.

heed Sardar's warning that any theological exchange can deteriorate in a debate in which the positions of all participants are fully predictable. That certainly could be the case if the conversation prematurely turned to what one participant of the Muslim-Christian Research Group called the "traditional bones of contention," among them "Trinity, divinity of Christ, the meaning of his death on the cross." On these points, he claimed, "our positions remain irreconcilable."[46] Views on these issues certainly will remain distinctive, but we may discover that on various points our perspectives are complementary rather than irreconcilable. Contributions such as Mahmoud Ayoub's essays on Christology[47] show that new avenues of reflection can be opened up even when dealing with themes that in the past have led to a polarizing "double monologue."

However, the most personal and most pressing theological reflections often arise not from a consideration of well-established theological formulations but from (bewildering) experiences in everyday life. One example is the seven-year-old boy in a tsunami relief camp in Banda Aceh who, a year after the storm that killed 200,000 people, voiced this song of despair:

> At eight in the morning there was an
>   earthquake shaking the earth.
> Houses and hills were brought down.
>   Everything is flattened.
> There are bodies everywhere.
> Allah, Allah, is this your will?
>   We didn't believe in you before.[48]

The tsunami led many Muslims and Christians in Indonesia to explore the question why God allowed such a disaster to happen, and the most common answer in both communities was apparently that it had to be seen as God's punishment for forsaking God's way. Relatively few rejected explicitly the idea that there was a link between "Sin and Punishment," the title of an article by an Indonesian lay theologian.[49]

The painful question of divine nonintervention in personal and communal calamities has long occupied many searching minds, but most of the studies about God and the problem of evil remain primarily the concern of an inner circle of theologians and philosophers. Perhaps the time has come to talk about these questions also in wider circles, whenever possible in interfaith conversations. Millions worldwide have been shocked and terrified by natural disasters of horrific proportions, among others the tsunami in December 2004, a few months later the earthquake in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province where some 80,000 persons died, and the calamity of the almost 2,000 who lost their lives due to hurricane Katrina in August 2005. While in some situations of immense suffering humans can and should be held accountable, even there the riddle of God's nonintervention is, for many, deeply painful and profoundly unsettling. In such conversations about this agonizing issue the topic of suffering and punishment will continue to be raised, and affirmations of their interconnectedness will be maintained alongside sharp denials such as Wendy Farley's remark: "One of the most terrible beliefs of Christianity is that God punishes us with suffering."[50]

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[46] Jean-Paul Gabus, "Reservations," Appendix 2 in *Challenge*, 93.

[47] These include "Towards an Islamic Christology: An image of Jesus in early Shi'i Muslim writing," *The Muslim World* 66 (1976): 163–88; "Towards an Islamic Christology II: The death of Jesus: Reality or delusion?" *The Muslim World* 70 (1980): 91–121; and "Jesus the Son of God: A study of the terms ibn and walad in the Qur'an," in *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, 65–81. A "Select Bibliography" of his works is printed in *Islam and Other Religions*, 195–99.

[48] Scott Baldauf, "In tsunami relief camps, kids sing their hearts out," *Christian Science Monitor* (December 9, 2005).

[49] The article by Herlianto is one of the Christian and Muslim contributions discussed in Andreas A. Yewangoe, "A Post-Tsunami, Indonesian Theological Perspective," paper prepared for the Tripartite Meeting in Washington, D.C., August 26, 2005.

At stake in these deliberations is the notion of what usually is called God's omnipotence and, related to it, the question of history's "independence" from God. Making use of Buber's "surprise center" expression, Farley maintained: "Because of its independence, history constitutes a 'surprise center' even for God."[51]

In a language that is unmistakably his, Cragg touched upon this issue with his innovative alternative to omnipotence: "God's is an omnicompetence which has made room within itself for a caliphate of ours."[52] It could well be highly illuminating and personally healing to be involved in such a common search for answers to what it means that God leaves room for an "over-against God" in human actions and in nature's seeming capriciousness, and it could well help many Muslims and Christians to recognize distinctively different perspectives within their own traditions and between them. Some of us hope that the exchange of deeply felt faith perspectives will some day lead to the articulation not so much of one "World Theology"[53] but of still-distinct theologies truly formed in part from within our dialogue with each other. An often-expressed observation about interfaith dialogue is that it can strengthen and deepen our existing faith commitment, "make Muslims better Muslims and Christians better Christians." That should mean more than reverting to previously held positions, now perhaps somewhat differently articulated. Once again one of Cragg's observations comes to mind: "Must we not say that dialogue, in fact, failed—or rather, has not really occurred—if it merely entrenches identity?"[54]

We should be careful, however, not to make such openness to a rethinking of our faith a condition and a prerequisite for participation in the dialogue. Well-intended preconditions for a fruitful exchange have held many Christians and Muslims back from participating in interfaith dialogue, people whose voices urgently need to be heard even if some of their reactions may be seen by others as being counterproductive in the search to find and understand each other.

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[50] Wendy Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion. A Contemporary Theodicy* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), 118.

[51] *Ibid.*, 124; she lists the Buber reference as Sehertum: Anfang und Ausgang, 59.

[52] Kenneth Cragg, "Ibn al-Sabîl wa 'Abd al-Sabûr. Biography in Inter-Faith Study," in *Islam and Other Religions*, 166.

[53] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology. Faith and the Comparative History of Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981).

[54] Kenneth Cragg, *Troubled by Truth. Life-Studies in Inter-Faith Concern* (Edinburgh: Pentland, 1992), 264.

Several suggestions have been made with regard to the fourth dimension of interreligious dialogue, the interior dialogue. Some see its goal as an "intuitive recognition of a shared experience of the Transcendent Reality,"[55] others describe it as a coming together and finding each other in and through prayer and silent meditation. A reverent listening to the message of the Qur'an has been for me the form of dialogue that has most directly influenced my own Christian faith. It is specifically this dialogue that has convinced me that God is seeking to address us in and through the diversity of the world's religious traditions. The immense suffering caused by religious wars and interreligious conflicts belongs to the reality we need to face. But there is also that other dimension: religious plurality as a gift of God and therefore a realm in which we can recognize God's voice. On this point some Muslims and Christians may sense a deep affinity of convictions. That the world's diversity is God-willed is a recurring theme in Muslim reflections on pluralism,[56] and many appeal in this context to S. 11.118: If that had been God's will, God could have made all humankind "one single community: but [He willed it otherwise, and so] they continue to hold divergent views."[57] And more than once attention is drawn to the Qur'anic assurance that the diversity of races, colors, communities, and religions is a sign of God's mercy, a sign for "those who pay heed" and who are truly thankful.[58]

How shall we in retrospect assess the events and developments of the last few years and especially of 2006 as far as they impacted Muslim-Christian relations? At least in the United States and in many areas in Western Europe, tensions seem to be rising and a sense of alienation growing. But there are also, in Chicago and elsewhere, on both the Muslim and the Christian side, encouraging new initiatives to come to a better mutual understanding and to join in actions for the common good. Throughout her 2007 publication *Muslims, Christians*, Jane Smith provides evidence for her statement on p. 141,

> one of the most encouraging changes in the field of Christian-Muslim relations is the notable increase in the ways that respective organizations are taking the initiative for promoting better understanding and fostering dialogues at the local and national levels.

The statistics with which we began underline the necessity to widen the scope of our activities beyond conferences and meetings of Muslims and Christians who are already interested in such efforts. One of the greatest challenges is a nationwide public education task. We need to counteract the impact of one-sided and dangerously distorted images of Islam, and we have to remedy the alarming lack of any real understanding of this tradition among Americans. It is embarrassing that the criteria used in some polls to determine a knowledge of Islam is the ability to identify the two words Allah and Qur'an. Even so, only one-third of the population did report that they have "a great deal" or "some" knowledge of Islam, compared to 66 percent who know "not very much" or "nothing at all." The Pew Center poll of 2007 states that, in spite of all information available, "the number of people who say that they know little or nothing about Islam has changed very little since 2001." That in the poll of 2005 the "knowledgeable" group was even smaller than it was in 2000 shows how crucially important it is to find ways to encourage people to make use of the helpful information that is already easily accessible. To this educational task also belongs the preparedness to challenge all statements that stigmatize Islam and distort history.

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[55] Sharpe, "Dialogue and Faith," 95.

[56] Smith offers an excellent analysis of Muslim perspectives on pluralism in chapter 7 of her *Muslims, Christians*, 121–40.

[57] Muhammad Asad's translation, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980), in a note refers also to some related verses, including S. 5.48.

[58] Smith (*Muslims, Christians*, 128–32) refers to the discussion of Qur'anic perspectives on pluralism by Farid Esack (*Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*) and Abdul Aziz Sachedina. Adnan Aslan quotes S. 49.13 as the Qur'anic evidence for the proposition that "multiplicity of races, colours, communities and religions is regarded as the sign of God's mercy and glory exhibited through his creatures." *Religious Pluralism in Christian and Islamic Philosophy* (Richmond, Surrey, U.K.: Curzon, 1994), 188–89. In this context a more appropriate choice might have been S. 30.22.

Earlier we touched upon the need for concerted efforts to break down the barriers that keep Muslims and Christians in this country isolated from each other, and the challenge to concretize what it means at this moment and in our society to work together for peace and justice.

In the field of theological deliberations on our relationship we find among Christians as well as Muslims encouraging signs of a new willingness to listen to what the others are really saying and to correct and modify our preconceived images of them. A few Muslim contributions to the discussion of the theological dimension of our relationship were mentioned above, barely scratching the surface of the rich field of Muslim perspectives on all dimensions of our relations. From the long list of Muslim scholars who have enriched the interfaith dialogue by their writings and/or by their direct participation in different parts of the world, I mention here a few, an admittedly somewhat arbitrary selection of persons who represent a great diversity of visions and approaches: Ghulam Haider Aasi, Hasan Askari, Mahmoud Ayoub, Abdokdjavad Falaturi, Ismail R. al-Faruqi, Riffat Hassan, Muhamad Kamil Hussein, Ali Merad, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Sulayman Nyang, Abdul Aziz Sachedina, Muzammil H. Siddiqi, and Mohammed Talbi.

It is more than a pious afterthought that we end with a reference to God. All of us know that appeals to God can be the worst form of blasphemy, and examples abound, from the past and from the present. After 9/11 it has become extremely painful for many in this country to hear the words *Allahu akbar*. And the expression *Deus vult*, God wills it, remains forever associated with that horrible travesty of Christianity, the Crusades. But the misuse of those words should not prevent us from using them. Whatever the realities are of human failures and shortcomings, the other dimension of life and history is the reality of God with whom all of us do take refuge: *Allahu akbar*. And since "what God wills" is equally important to all of us, we dare to set those two Latin words free that were so badly profaned ten centuries ago. We, Muslims and Christians, simply cannot give up finding each other in ever growing numbers as fellow pilgrims on our way to God. We must move ahead, together; *Deus vult*, God wills it.

Tradition and the Past: Impediments or Boons to Envisioning the Future of Islam?

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"Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living."[1] This aphorism by the historian of Christianity Jaroslav Pelikan sums up one of the greatest challenges faced by world religions today. After more than three centuries of Enlightenment critiques of religious "enthusiasm" and obscurantism, "traditionalism," says Pelikan, "is what gives tradition a bad name." This statement is particularly apt for contemporary Islam. Islamic traditionalism—or, more accurately, the attempt by various groups of Muslims to reconstitute tradition under conditions of postcolonial modernity—is giving Islam a bad name all over the globe. One could cite as an example the superficial traditionalism of the Taliban of northwest Pakistan and Afghanistan, who ignore the actual intellectual traditions of Islamic history and idolize a constructed past that puts more emphasis on tribal custom and the vanities of male self-image than on the establishment of justice or respect for women and minorities.

One could also cite the postmodern pseudo-traditionalism of Al Qaeda, which combines an overt rejection of modern political and social thought with a covert embrace of the destructive potential of modern technology. The interest in technological warfare of Osama Bin Laden and his closest associates stands in stark contrast to the Luddite simplicity of their personal lives, their ascetic moral code, and their desire to recreate Medina, the Prophet Muhammad's City of God, in the postmodern environment of the contemporary Muslim world. Although the nostalgia for a purer and simpler past has always existed in the Muslim world, one is hard put to find Medina among the skyscrapers of Dubai or Kuala Lumpur.

Such an attempt to clothe postmodernity in the garb of the past must be seen as either a deception or a delusion—*talbis* in Arabic—as was famously expressed in the title of the Hanbali theologian Ibn al-Jawzi's (d. 1201) apologia for tradition, *Talbis Iblis* (The Deception of Satan). This fantasy is disturbingly reminiscent of a comment made by an unnamed Bush aide, who criticized Democrats and journalists for languishing in a "reality-based community" while the White House creates "its own realities.[2]

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[1] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition*, The 1983 Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), 65.

Outside of the Muslim world, the belief that Muslims are violent and intolerant archtraditionalists is most responsible for Islam's bad name. Recent polls suggest that more than 60 percent of U.S. citizens have a negative opinion of Islam. In Western Europe, Islam has replaced Catholicism as the religion that secular intellectuals most love to hate. According to this view, Islam is by nature both militant and obscurantist. Islamic traditionalism, it is said, leads to the nonassimilation of Muslim minorities in Western societies. It also leads to the rejection of Western political values and the oppression of women. Islam desires theocracy rather than democracy. Muslims are seen as the most uncivil members of civil society. This negative European image of Islam can be observed in the writings of right-wing French Protestant intellectual Jacques Ellul, who has abandoned his role as a critic of technological society and has become a modern Savonarola who crusades equally against Islam and the Second Vatican Council. "What a wonderfully civilized empire would have been set up if all Europe had been invaded [by Muslims]," Ellul ironically remarks in his book *The Subversion of Christianity.* The West should never forget "the horrors of Islam, the dreadful cruelty, the general use of torture, the slavery, and the absolute intolerance notwithstanding zealous apostles who underline Islam's toleration."[3]

To sum up, for Ellul as for many in the West, the traditions of Islam are fanatical, intolerant, antidemocratic, oppressive of women, and represent all the evils of religion that the Enlightenment sought to overcome. If, as culture critic Guillermo Gomez-Peña claims, the myth of the cultural melting-pot has been replaced by that of the "menudo chowder," the refusal by Muslims to conform to Western social and political norms means that they will be marginalized as "stubborn chunks" that "are condemned merely to float," rather than becoming part of the menudo chowder of American society.[4]

Of course, one hardly needs to be reminded of how unfair Ellul's criticism of Islam is, or how easy it would be to find "stubborn chunks" of Christianity and Judaism in the menudo chowder as well. Furthermore, many Muslims in countries such as France, Russia, Germany, Denmark, and Israel might say that the majority populations of those countries are not very civil to them, either, even when they try to assimilate majoritarian values. The road to toleration is a two-way street. School districts in the United States offer civics classes because responsible citizenship needs to be taught to everyone, not just to religious minorities. Being a responsible citizen in a pluralistic society is a skill that is learned, not a characteristic that is present from birth. The liberal ideals of pluralism and multiculturalism are largely alien to traditional religious perspectives in general. Although resources for understanding may be found in every tradition, it is important to remember that tolerance and pluralism are not the same thing. It is a challenge for all democratic societies to maintain the principle of minority rights along with majority rule.

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2. Quoted in David Remnick, "The Wanderer: Bill Clinton's Quest to Save the World, Reclaim His Legacy—and Elect His Wife," *The New Yorker* (September 18, 2006), 54.

3. Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 96, n. 3.

4. Guillermo Gomez-Peña, "The new world (b)order," *Third Text* 21 (Winter 1992–93), 74, quoted in Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2004), 313.

This challenge is particularly acute when the rights claimed by minorities are sanctioned by religious beliefs that are not shared by the majority, or when minority traditions go against majoritarian norms. The right for women to cover their hair is just as important for Orthodox Jews as it is for Muslims, and the right to marry more than one wife is claimed by Mormon Fundamentalists just as it is claimed by some traditional Muslims. The religious, social, and ethical disjunctures between the values of the present and the past are challenges for all contemporary societies, not just for Islam. When the state interferes with the free practice of religious traditions, issues that normally would remain in the background suddenly take center stage. The relationship between religious citizens and secular states is characterized by negotiations that constantly pit the demands of tradition against the values of modernity. The challenge for religious people today is to remain sufficiently mindful of the past while recognizing that all of us now share the "original sin" of modernity.

"Tradition demands to be served even when it is not observed."[5] This further aphorism by Jaroslav Pelikan is also applicable to Islam and Muslims. One of the most important issues debated by Muslims today is where cultural traditions end and where supposedly "true" religion begins. The Qur'an states, "Verily, the religion (*din*) of Allah is Islam" (3:19) and "I have chosen Islam for you as a religion (*din*)" (5:3). Some observers, such as the late Canadian scholar Wilfred Cantwell Smith, have taken these verses as a sign of Islam's unique ability to define itself doctrinally and ideologically.[6] However, these verses alone do not tell us what either "Islam" or "religion" means. *Din* is the Arabic word for "religion." However, in premodern times *din* meant both more and less than the Western idea of a church or an institutionalized religion. The Arabic root from which *din* comes has four primary significations: (1) mutual obligation; (2) submission or acknowledgment; (3) judicial authority; (4) natural inclination or tendency. Never in its premodern connotation did the term *din* refer to a "system" as many reformers of Islam claim today.

In fact, the idea of Islam as a system (Ar. *nizam*) came not from the time of the Prophet Muhammad but from South Asia around the time of the Second World War. In 1943, the Indian Muslim activist Mawlana Hamid al-Ansari Ghazi used the term to refer to Islam as a political system. A year earlier, in 1942, the founder of Jamaat-i Islam Abu al-'Ala al-Mawdudi (d. 1979) used the Urdu term *Islami nizam* (Islamic system) in a speech about Islamic ideology. The concept as it is known today was popularized in the Arab world through the writings of the Muslim Brotherhood activist Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966).[7] However, even though Islam was not traditionally thought of as a system, two of the premodern significations of the term *din*, mutual obligation and judicial authority, do have social implications. Religion in Islam is more than just a personal relationship with God. It also entails a relationship with a community of believers and a society, which necessitates an involvement with culture and tradition through continuous engagement with the past. As Pelikan might have predicted, in Islam as in Christianity the traditions of the majority of believers always have to be served, even by those who choose to reject them.

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5. Pelikan, *Vindication*, 70.

6. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, [1962] 1991), 80–82.

7. *Ibid*, 274, n. 10.

A particular challenge for the tradition of Islam today is that its own discourse has come to haunt it. Prejudices that developed in the Islamic past are both perpetuated and accentuated by the tendency to equate the loss of tradition with a loss of faith. One does not really serve tradition by turning the Shari'a into a reified ideological concept, as was done by Sayyid Qutb and his followers. In his famous manifesto *Signs along the Road* (*Ma' alim fi al-Tariq*), Qutb calls the Shari'a a "universal law" (*shari' a kawniyya*). By using this term, he means much more than to say that Islamic law is universally applicable. Rather, what I have elsewhere called Qutb's "Shari'a Fundamentalism" is based on a notion of Universal Law that approximates the Law of Nature. Says Qutb, the concept of the Shari'a "goes back to its most comprehensive root in its decisive role in all of existence, not just in human existence alone, and in its application to all of existence, not in its application to human life alone."[8]

Although at first glance this argument may seem similar to natural-law theory, Qutb takes a much more sectarian stance than do Western theorists of natural law, who conceive of natural law as standing over and above the legal systems of individual nations. For Qutb, natural law *is* the Islamic Shari'a. Islam is the fundamental expression of the *namus* (Gr. *nomos*), the divine law that governs and regulates the universe. For this reason, rejection of the Shari'a amounts to rejection not only of the historically revealed laws of Islam but also of God's Universal Law, and is a denial of God's power to determine existence by saying "Be! And it is" (16:40). "The Shari'a," he says, "is part of the Universal Divine Law (*al-namus al-ilahi al-'amm*) that governs human nature and the universal nature of existence together. [God] has made it a single and comprehensive totality (*wa yunassiquha kulluha jumlatan wahidatan*).[9]

For Qutb, the human being is not capable of creating a legal system that is in harmony with both human life and the laws of the universe. Therefore, the obligation to obey the Shari'a is greater even than the obligation to believe in Islam. Any system of laws other than the Shari'a is nothing but the indulgence of human whims (*ahwa' al-bashar*).[10] The epistemology of Shari'a Fundamentalism is central to Qutb's political argument in *Signs along the Road.* It is primarily on this basis that he dismisses all non-Shari'a–based political systems as *jahili*, as existentially and theologically "ignorant" manifestations of human vanity. Political systems that are not based on the Shari'a are not condemned for their moral failings alone but especially because of their Promethean disregard for the rights of God in favor of the rights of humanity. This position echoes tradition, but it does not follow the classical tradition of Islamic theology. As Pelikan might say, in Qutb's view of the Shari'a, historical Islamic traditions are served, but they are certainly not observed. Qutb takes tradition, conceived in modern terms as an ideological system, to erase the premodern theological and legal distinction between *al-Din al-Ilahi* and *al-Din al-Muhammadi* and to turn Islamic law into a positive law, not only of nations, but of the entire universe as well.

Among Muslims in the United States and Western Europe, many of the debates about traditionalism and the value of the

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[8] Sayyid Qutb, *Ma' alim fi al-Tariq* (Beirut: Dar al-Sharq, 2000), 108. *Ma' alim fi al-Tariq* was written in 1964, two years before Qutb's execution by the Nasser regime of Egypt.

[9] *Ibid*, 110.

[10] *Ibid*, 112.

past revolve around the distinction between religion and culture. For example, the previous discussion of the premodern meanings of the word *din* shows us that the concept of religion in Islam puts a high premium on the idea of reciprocity, which creates both personal and social obligations. The Qur'an tells believers that God "owes" the human being a fair return for her worship. "Who is the one who will lend to God a goodly loan, which God will double to his credit and multiply many times?" (2:245). The Qur'an also reminds believers that a person's "loan" to God is to be paid not only in worship but also in works of charity for other human beings: "Verily, we will ease the path to salvation for the person who gives out of fear of God and testifies to the best. But we will ease the path to damnation for the greedy miser who thinks himself self-sufficient and rejects what is best" (92:5–10).

Qur'anic teachings such as these moved the twelfth-century Moroccan Sufi Abu al-'Abbas al-Sabti (d. 1205) to declare, "Divine grace is stimulated by acts of generosity." For Sabti, each charitable act performed by a human being called forth a response from God that rewarded the giver in proportion to the gift. Sabti, the patron saint of the city of Marrakesh, used this doctrine to encourage the elites of the city to provide charity for the poor.[11] How is the modern reformer of Islam to assess a tradition such as this? Is it culture or is it religion? Whatever it may be, it has a distinct advantage over contemporary interpretations of Islam, because it grounds the practice of ethics firmly within a deeper context of spirituality. It also provides a theological warrant for ethical behavior that goes beyond the rules and regulations of the Shari'a.

The idea of reciprocity that leads from the theology of the Qur'an to the social ethics of Sabti is an important corollary to the Five Pillars of Islam. For Muslims, the Five Pillars frame the entire concept of religion, including the divine revelation of the Qur'an. The pillars of religion and faith are also products of tradition, since they come from a famous Hadith account in which the angel Gabriel quizzes the Prophet Muhammad on these subjects. An important part of the tradition of the Hadith of Gabriel is the concept of goodness or virtue (*ihsan*). *Ihsan* means, in the words of the Hadith, "to worship God as if you see Him, for even if you do not see Him, He sees you."

The notion of reciprocal awareness that is expressed in this Hadith—the human being looks to God as God looks to the human being—is the spiritual foundation of the idea of religious obligation in Islam. It is also a bridge to the type of social awareness expressed by Sabti, for Muslims are accountable to God both for how they fulfill their responsibilities of worship and for how they fulfill their responsibilities toward their brothers and sisters in the family of Adam. In the Qur'an, this responsibility extends beyond the confines of one's nation or religious group.

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[11] On Sabti, see Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 79–92.

In Islam, accountability to God is expressed as a covenant, in which humanity takes responsibility for the heavens and the earth. This covenant constitutes a major criterion by which faith and actions are judged. Sometimes called "God's covenant" in the Qur'an (2:27), it separates those who assign spiritual or material partners to God from true believers, who maintain their trust in the Qur'anic message (33:73). The person who trusts in God and does not break the covenant in thought, word, or deed is a trustee or vicegerent (*khalifa*) of God on earth (2:30–33).

The society that is made up of such individuals is a normative community, one that serves as an example for the world and is a collective witness to the truth (2:143). The Qur'an calls such a community the *Umma Muslima* (2:128), a community of people who submit to the will of God. The word *umma*, which is related to *umm*, "mother," connotes a primary community, literally, a "Mother Community." It implies that all Muslims, wherever they may live, share a common bond that transcends all other ties, from nationality to family. However, the Qur'an is also explicit that the "mother bond" extends beyond the Umma to humanity as a whole. "Oh humankind!" says the Qur'an, "keep your duty to your Lord, who created you from a single soul, and created its mate from it and from whom issued forth many men and women. So revere (*attaqu*) the God by whom you demand rights from one another and revere the rights of the wombs" (4:1).

The duty to revere God by fulfilling the promise of the pre-eternal covenant implies reverence for the rights of kinship (*al-arham*, "the wombs"). In the context of the Qur'anic message, this duty would apply to genealogical kinship but would also include the greater kinship of the human species, since all of humankind, as the children of Eve, were born "from the same womb."

The leading members of the universal *Umma Muslima*, the "mother bond" that links all human beings who are aware of submitting to God's will, are the prophets. The Prophets of Islam are God's Promise Keepers, to use a term now popular among evangelical Christian men. They are the bearers of the divine message and reminders to countries and peoples of humanity's obligations to God and to each other. Because all of them serve the same function and transmit the same general message, all of the prophets of the Abrahamic tradition are Muslims, even if followers of religions other than Islam revere them. Starting with Adam and ending with Muhammad, they form a single holy community that represents the continuity of the past and of tradition in the Abrahamic faiths.

Muslims share more than Abraham with Jews and Christians. Moses is the prophet most mentioned in the Qur'an, and Muslims share with Christians a reverence for Jesus and John the Baptist, who are not recognized in Jewish Scriptures.

The collective tradition of the prophets forms the background of the *Sunna*, the model of religious and ethical practice established by the Prophet Muhammad. It was well understood by premodern Muslims that the values the Prophet Muhammad's Sunna promoted were the same as those of the other prophets. Thus, the Sunna of Muhammad, the last prophet, is also the Sunna of the previous prophets, just as the essential message of the Qur'an is the same as the message of all previous revelations.

The Sunna as a model for Islamic practice formed the de facto basis of the Shari'a, or law conceived as the Way of God. When premodern Muslim jurists looked to the traditions of Islam for sources on Islamic law and ethics, they found that some accounts elucidated religious precepts, while others dealt with customary behaviors, such as matters of personal hygiene and etiquette. Modern scholars of the Sunna, whether traditionalists or reformers, look to these traditions to decide which are part of "religion" and hence obligatory and which are part of "culture" and hence optional. Premodern jurists asked similar questions, although without the modern notion of culture. They developed the tradition of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) to determine how to integrate the Qur'an and the Sunna into the social and religious life of the Muslim community. A key distinction made by these jurists was between traditions that formed the basis of the "jurisprudence of worship" (*fiqh al-'ibadat*) and those that formed the basis of the "jurisprudence of social relations" (*fiqh al-mu'amalat*).

It seems to me that the premodern distinction established by Muslim jurists between traditions having to do with worship and those having to do with social relations is a good place to start when critically assessing the remembrance of the historical past of a religion as an aid or as an obstacle to interconfessional understanding. Personally, I am a strong advocate of Islamic tradition when it comes to issues of worship and spirituality. I am more pessimistic, however, with regard to the chances of finding traditional Islamic solutions to the social and political problems of the present day. Much of the reinvention of tradition promoted by Muslims today consists of what Pelikan called "tradition that has undergone a frontal lobotomy."[12] Little or no interest is shown in the history that Islam shares with other civilizations or in the problems that Islam shares with other religions that face modernity. Instead, Islam is conceived as a *millet*—a self-contained religiocultural community that exists concurrently with but in isolation from other millets of the same type.[13] If a revival of the Ottoman millet is the best that Muslims can come up with, it is a strong indication that they have purchased pseudo-authenticity at the price of truth. Circling the wagons, whether culturally or theologically, is a sign not of strength but of fear and lack of confidence in one's beliefs.

Of course Muslims should be concerned about the authenticity of the traditions that they follow and should do their best to find resources in the traditions of the past to help them solve the problems of the present. As Pelikan says, "a 'leap of progress' is not a standing broad jump, which begins at the line of where we are now; it is a running broad jump through where we have been to where we go next."[14] When the resources of the past are not available, people innovate: They find new resources outside of their tradition or create them themselves, whether or not they admit to doing so. The invention of tradition, to borrow a concept from the historian Eric Hobsbawm, is a universal human response to change. Part of the crisis of tradition that Muslims face today is that they are unable to admit openly to the innovations of tradition that they make every day in nearly every context.

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[12] Pelikan, *Vindication*, 80.

[13] The Turkish word *millet* comes from the Arabic *milla*. Partisans of the communitarian and cultural view of Islam find justification in the following passage of the Qur'an, in which the Prophet Joseph says: "I have forsaken the *milla* of a people who do not believe in Allah and reject the Hereafter. Instead, I follow the *milla* of my fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Never was it our practice to associate partners with God" (12:37–38). Given the context of this passage, in which Joseph is speaking of his own people, the Children (or tribe) of Israel, one is entitled to ask whether such an interpretation constitutes either a Judaizing of Islam or a nineteenth-century romantic Islam in which Qur'anic universalism is replaced by a racially or culturally conceived nationalism, a sort of *volkische Islam*, as expressed in the Arabic terms *jinsiyya* ("*genus*-ism") or *qawmiyya* ("folk-ism").

[14] Pelikan, *Vindication*, 81.

The reinvention of tradition in the Muslim world is in many ways an expression of nostalgia for a lost cultural and political hegemony, which is reminiscent of European attempts to recoup tradition in the Romantic period of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Moroccan feminist writer Fatima Mernissi refers to this nostalgia as a *mal du présent*, a "sickness of the present," which plays itself out as "a desire for death, a desire to be elsewhere, to be absent, to flee to the past as a way of being absent. A suicidal absence."[15] Hobsbawm notes that the nostalgic reinvention of tradition is not a creative revitalization of the past but is instead a sterile process of "formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition."[16]

Such formalized and ritualized attempts to revitalize the past are commonly found among Muslims in Western countries, where the leaders of Islamic centers strive to create a more universalistic Islam through recourse to the Qur'an and Sunna instead of relying on the resources of localized Islamic pasts. The link between this reinvention of tradition and both Islamic fundamentalism and political Islamism is often overlooked by outside observers. In the Islamic centers of the European and American Muslim diaspora, Moroccan, Bengali, Syrian, Egyptian, Iranian, and Indonesian cultural backgrounds are often homogenized, as Muslims come together in ways that would never happen in their home countries. Communal ties replace those of family and neighborhood and an institutionalized internationalism, often marketed as Sunni orthopraxy, replaces the traditions of local and regional cultures. In such contexts, the ideological attempt to separate culture from religion makes perfect sense to many believers. However, all too often the search for the essential leads to an uncritical embrace of the ideological at the expense of the spiritual.

All too often the search for the essential leads to an uncritical embrace of the ideological at the expense of the spiritual.

Today Islam is undergoing a profound epistemological crisis, which affects the Muslim believer on every level. Traditionalism, whether ritualized or ideological, is an inadequate response to this crisis because it is no longer possible to pretend that pre-Enlightenment epistemologies can still be maintained in their original form. In addition, the twentieth-century holocausts caused by nationalism, racism, and communism have proven beyond a doubt that ideologies founded on Romantic notions of idealism and perfectionism oppress the individual by holding people to standards that they can never attain. It is similarly foolish to try to resurrect medieval theologies such as Ash'arism by arguing that quantum physics describes a similar view of reality. Such similarities are superficial at best, and modern theoretical models of relativity, perspectivism, and the Uncertainty Principle are far from the divine Foundationalism that Ash'arite theologians had in mind.

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[15] Fatima Mernissi, *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (New Delhi: Kali for Women reprint of Basil Blackwell original, 1991), 15. This work was published in the United States as *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1991).

[16] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 4.

If anything, the crisis of contemporary Islam is abetted rather than alleviated by the traditionalism that Muslims employ in defending Islam against modernity. The task of the constructive theologian in today's Islam is not merely to repeat the language of tradition out of context but to engage critically with the legacy of tradition as it impacts the experience of Muslims in the modern world. To do so, Muslims must engage their traditional sources of wisdom in new ways, "with both eyes open." The challenge is to maintain the integrity of God's teachings and to remain aware of the obstacles put in the way of understanding by a traditionalism that parodies rather than duplicates the worldviews of the past.

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus spoke of time as a flowing river in which one cannot step twice into the same waters because fresh waters are forever flowing past. In *The Passion of the Western Mind* Richard Tarnas highlighted the tendency of the River of Time to erode the foundations of tradition: "Many sense that the great determining force of our reality is the mysterious process of history itself, which in our century has appeared to be hurtling toward a massive disintegration of all structures and foundations, a triumph of the Heraclitan flux."[17] The flux that Tarnas speaks of is the Heraclitan notion of change, in which the world is in a continuous process of transformation and all notions of stability are illusions that will be washed away in the river of time. Many Muslims see the present age in the way described by Tarnas, in which traditions, values, moral precepts, and the truths of religion are all in danger of being taken by the flood.

Concurrent with the rise of modern Muslim political activism has been a host of predictions and warnings about the End Times, in which apocalyptic passages from the Qur'an and Hadith are cited to attract adherents to the teachings of Al Qaeda leaders and Sufi sages alike. The hysteria created in some quarters by this Muslim *mal du présent* is reminiscent of the attitude of the Aztecs of Mexico on the eve of the Spanish conquest. For the Aztecs, the present age is the Fifth Sun—the Sun of Change—in which all foundations are overthrown and the world is transformed into a new and hitherto unknown reality.

However, not all Muslims fear the unknown. While not denying the potential of destruction through change, the Spanish Sufi Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240) saw time as the theater of divine manifestation, where different aspects of the divine reality are displayed according to divine names that are appropriate to each age. A similar attitude was held by the Egyptian Sufi Ibn 'Ata'illah of Alexandria (d. 1309), who wrote a remarkable treatise on the practice of trusting in God titled *al-Tanwir fi Isqat al-Tadbir*

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[17] Quoted in Peter Coates, *Ibn 'Arabi and Modern Thought: The History of Taking Metaphysics Seriously* (Oxford, U.K.: Anqa Publishing, 2002), 81.

(Illumination in the Abdication of Personal Agency). In this work, Ibn 'Ata'illah counseled his readers to avoid trying to thwart change. Instead, he said, Muslims should accept the age in which they live and view it as an expression of the divine will. To be true servants of God Muslims should adapt themselves to present circumstances, to "go with the flow" and trust that God will see them through their trials. In a striking use of the Heraclitan metaphor, Ibn 'Ata'illah summarized the essence of this spiritual attitude in a way that is profoundly relevant to the situation of Muslims today:

> When I saw destiny flowing,
> And there was no doubt or hesitation about it,
>
> I entrusted all of my rights to my Creator
> And threw myself into the current.[18]

I find it highly significant that in my debates about Islamic spirituality with both political Islamists and Muslim modernists, no doctrine of the Sufis has been more criticized than *tawakkul*—the complete trust in God of which Ibn 'Ata'illah speaks. Trust in God should be seen not as an obstacle to human progress but as an essential spiritual attitude, the application on the level of the personal self of the God-consciousness that all Muslims are supposed to possess. If Muslims truly believe, following the Qur'an, "[God] is the doer of what He wills" (11:109) and "God has willed it. There is no power except through God" (18:39), then what Christian evangelicals call "letting go and letting God" is the most rational belief of the truly faithful. Over the last century, however, Muslim reformers have derided this attitude as an abdication of personal responsibility, as socially insensitive, and as an example of the "isolated spirituality" (*ruhaniyya i'tizaliyya*) that has rendered the Sufi perspective irrelevant to the modern condition. Is it not ironic, therefore, that those who think like Ibn 'Ata'illah seem today to be the only Muslims who can chart a course through modernity without selling out authentic tradition to the reinvented tradition of ideology? Perhaps this paradox highlights the basic problem of the current crisis of Islam. Perhaps the real cause of the crisis is not modernity or postmodernity after all. Perhaps instead it is the loss of a sense of the sacred, a loss of that spirituality that makes Islam not just a tradition or an identity but a true submission to the will of God.

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[18] Ahmad ibn 'Ata'illah al-Iskandari, *Kitab al-Tanwir fi isqat al-tadbir* (Cairo: al-Matba'a al-Maymuniyya al-Misriyya, 1306/1888–89), 11.

Sharing Memories of the Past: The Healing of Memories and Interreligious Encounter

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Peace building and reconciliation have become central themes in interreligious encounter today. This has been prompted by changes in the world situation since 1989.

Two such changes are of central importance here. The first is the rise of a new wave of economic and social globalization. This has fostered economic growth in some parts of the world and economic disruption in others. It has heightened patterns of migration from poor countries into wealthier ones—of highly trained personnel who cannot find work in their own countries and especially of the poor seeking to feed their families and improve their general lot.

The uncoupling of the East-West Cold War arrangement has also created a new political instability. When linked to a fast-moving market capitalism, it set the scene for a growing number of conflicts in the 1990s. Although the number of these has decreased since the turn of the century, they continue to contribute to an atmosphere of conflict in many parts of the world.

Paired with these developments in globalization has been a resurgence of religious feeling in many parts of the world.[1] Some of this resurgence has arisen out of a growing disillusion with secularization and its attendant ideologies, which have failed to offer a better life for many persons. While sometimes freeing them from the burdens of heavy obligations, they have only unanchored others, casting them adrift in a sea of anomie. A return to religion, seen especially in attempts to return to and revive older practices, has been strong among young adults who are seeking some direction in a world of too many choices (in the wealthier parts of the world) or as an alternative to the promises denied them (among immigrants to the wealthy world as well as those who have stayed behind in their poor homelands).

The religiosity that is emerging is often highly expressive and strongly communal in nature. It is apparent in the megachurches of the U.S. suburbs but especially in Pentecostal and charismatic formations around the world. The instability of the world has helped spark interest among conservative Protestant Christians in the apocalyptic themes of their faith, as can be seen in the immense popularity in those circles of the apocalyptic *Left Behind* series. Disillusionment with unfulfilled promises manifests itself also among young Muslims in the attraction of forms of Islam that claim to regain the pristine purity of that faith.

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[1] For a good overview of the issues the resurgence of religion raises for peace in the world, see Scott M. Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations: The Struggle for the Soul of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

Where issues of identity take strong hold in unstable and unfulfilled settings, dialogue between religious traditions takes on new urgency. The dialogue realized in shared social projects for development and for achieving greater justice, as well as the dialogue of scholars regarding their tenets of their faiths, have had to make room for a new kind of dialogue that has to combine attitudes and skills relating to conflict resolution with a deeper grasp of the tenets of one's faith to work toward healing past memories and resolving current conflicts. Where painful memories of the past have been reawakened, and where paths to reconciliation seem blocked, this newer kind of interreligious encounter will have to be undertaken if other forms of peaceful dialogue are to be pursued.

In this essay I look at one aspect of this process of interreligious encounter for building peace, namely, the role of memory and the healing of memories.

Dealing with memories has come to be seen as crucial to building a different kind of future. Painful memories of the past can occlude any resolution of past differences as well as any movement toward finding news ways of living together. This has become both evident and newly important for both Christian and Muslim communities. Not only are Christians and Muslim brought closer by the compacting powers of globalization; the migration of Muslims into Europe and North America has created new situations of closer encounter among two populations that were, for a long time, geographically distant from each other. Many political commentators have also noted that collapse of European Communism left the West without a perceived enemy. For too many people an amorphous sense of Islam has filled that void. The invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, plus a half-century history of conflict within the Middle East, have made this situation only more virulent.

> Painful memories of the past can occlude any resolution of past differences as well as any movement toward finding news ways of living together.

Perceptions of the current situation in the world in the first decade of the twenty-first century build in turn on histories that stretch back a millennium or more. Old memories are given new life by current conflicts. Coming to terms with present perceptions and realities entails dealing in some measure with the past as well.

My presentation falls into three parts. The first is a brief overview of the function of memory, especially traumatic memory, in social formations. The intent is to offer a general framework in which to understand how memory functions in shaping identity and how it can promote or derail attempts to forge renewed relationships in the present. The second part offers a brief case history where memory has complicated current realities: the Balkans area of Europe. The focus is on Christian-Muslim relations during and since the 1990s war there. The third section attempts to derive some general lessons about building peace and reconciliation and how these relate to processes of interreligious dialogue.

The role of memory in social formations

Memory is about the relationship between things remembered from the past and living in the present. It is of great significance both for individuals and for societies. We all know the heartbreak of having a spouse or a loved one succumb to dementia or Alzheimer's disease. While the person is still very much there, our capacity to relate to them in this situation changes our relationship completely.

Memory is the basis for identity—that sameness or recurrence that anchors and orients us in the stream of time. Memories change over time, with elements added or subtracted, and with perspectives shifted as new experiences call for or even require a different grasp of the past. This dialectic of sameness and change allows us to negotiate the shifting currents in our own day-to-day existence.

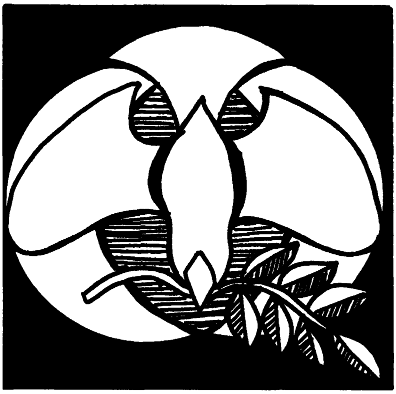
In the creating of a social world, memory serves not only to help create a steady state for our individual selves in the eddies and flows of life but also as a powerful means of creating and sustaining social cohesion. This cohering dimension of memory is maintained most strongly in a constructed narrative of the past that is then shared as a common legacy or heritage by a people. In the rise of nation-states in Europe beginning in the late eighteenth century, national narratives that transcended earlier ethnic and political entities had to be constructed. These narratives in turn were anchored visibly in monuments, artifacts, and practices to help cement relations between groups that heretofore may not have found common cause. Nationalism depended on developing these shared narratives. When narratives of struggle against outside forces took center stage, the identities could be bolstered by creating an us-versus-them boundary—a negative identity.

Memories are not always shaped by positive experiences and by stories of success. The memories of suffering and of defeat can often be more powerful than narratives of triumph. Their power is derived from senses of loss, injustice, humiliation, and resentment. The heroic capacity to endure amid great adversity can summon up a sense of moral strength and intensity even more potent than pride in achievements. Such negative identities gain their strength by having a common enemy—an enemy we can hate together even if for different reasons. The focus of strength then is in the resistance, whereas the relationships within the suffering community may not need any closer definition.

Among negative memories, traumatic ones stand out in a special way. These are memories of loss that express more than a yearning for an absent object; they represent rather loss that hovers at the edge of extinction and death. Examples of narratives coming out of mass death in the twentieth century include the Armenian Massacre of 1914–15, the Jewish Holocaust in the Second World War, and the Rwandan Genocide of 1994. These literally life-threatening memories do not admit of being incorporated into a collective narrative. They remain untamed and uncontrolled. They come back in unwanted flashbacks to those who have survived of how close they, too, came to extinction. They are triggered by contemporary events that at first might seem unconnected to those terrible moments in the past. Narratives that grow out of trauma break into the lives of survivors in unbidden and unwanted ways, and they are difficult to manage and to change. The power of painful memory can seem to have no limit; it feeds on underground springs of emotion that can be neither channeled nor dammed up. Moreover, the narratives that emerge are like images shaped in a mirror. They always reflect the primal terror of the original traumatizing events and can never be shaped solely out of their own elements. They never escape those founding events and remain ever subservient to them.

Can traumatic memories, and the narratives they generate, be healed and changed? This is a question with which we continue to struggle, especially in view of the traumatic memories of events in the past century. We know that individuals may escape them and even transcend them, but their collective power on the psyches of whole societies remains strong. The anger and attendant emotions of resentment and desire for retribution that accompany these memories are often easily manipulated by leaders for other, sometimes nefarious, purposes. In a crisis of identity in a suffering people, the memory of shared trauma can provide cohesion when everything else fails.

Healing of traumatic memory cannot be achieved by suppressing those memories; they always come back in other, often unwelcome, ways. Rather, over time these memories must come to be embedded in new narratives that do not continue to generate negative emotion. This may be done by establishing a pattern of meaning in a new narrative whereas in the old one the traumatic event had been the death of meaning. In the Bible, the Israelites returning from Babylon had to try to establish reasons for the destruction of the Temple and the exile. They were too small a people and too weak to strike out at their oppressors. Rather, they had to find a new way of living. By rebuilding the Temple and "rediscovering" the Torah they made a new connection with the past and found a way into the future.



Contemporary experience indicates that key to the healing of memories is the generation that comes after the generation who experienced the traumatic event as adults. It is as though the trauma has frozen the adult generation in the frame of the moment of the trauma. It is their children, who wish to honor the memory of their parents' suffering but who also have come to their maturity in the time after the traumatic event, who will find the way forward.

A key corollary to this point is that the way memories of trauma are transmitted becomes key in a processing of building peace. To be sure, many victims of trauma will try to keep the stories of their suffering from their offspring, with the intention of sparing them the pain of what happened. Thus it was not uncommon after World War II for Jews not to want to talk to their children about their experience of the Holocaust. But when those children reached adolescence and early adulthood, they began to ask questions.

When there has been no escape from the conditions of the trauma (as when the next generation is born in or grows up in a refugee camp), the trauma is transmitted directly. In other instances, the next generation will constantly hear stories and witness the effects of the traumatic event, and so cannot escape it. In such instances as these, trauma—and the anger, helplessness, and resentment it creates—can be transmitted through successive generations. It may appear to lie dormant for a time, but it can be summoned up again and again.

What can be said, then, about the healing of traumatic memories, especially in the social sphere? It is difficult for the adult generation that has experienced them to achieve much healing, especially if the consequences of the trauma remain unaddressed and unresolved. Healing involves being able to find some meaning in the whole story, that is, placing the traumatic events in a new narrative that can explain what led to the event occurring and what needs to be done to prevent its recurrence.

Second, attitudes toward those who suffered the trauma (the victims) and those who caused the trauma (the perpetrators) must find a place in a new narrative that leeches away the toxicity surrounding the event. Victims must be able to be seen as more than hopeless and hapless passive recipients of what happened; ways must be found to restore their capacity to act. Perpetrators must be seen to be more than simply identified with the evil deed; their humanity, too, will have to be restored. This requires new encounters between victims and perpetrators that do not repeat the horrors of the past but rather initiate new pathways into the future together.

In trying to bring those who suffered trauma and those who instigated it together, one must realize that their memories of what happened, and the narratives in which those memories are embedded, will differ from each other. Healing of memories can be seen to have been reached only when these two narratives can give way to a new, common narrative that both sides can claim.

Case study: Christianity and Islam in Southeastern Europe[2]

The bloody encounters of Christians—Croatian Roman Catholics and Serbian Orthodox—and Muslims in the former Yugoslavia can serve to illustrate many of the points about the role of the healing of memories and its role in interreligious encounter. The wars that took place in the first half of the 1990s had antecedent causes. Some of these antecedents were directly connected to the fateful encounters; others got fused into it in the narratives that were created during that time.

The Balkans lie on the cultural faultline between the Eastern and Western Roman Empires, between Latin and Orthodox Christianity. The Drina River often is adduced as its boundary. The Ottoman forces' victory over the Serbian Prince Lazar at the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 introduced a Muslim element into the already turbulent picture. After the area's annexation into the Austro-Hungarian Empire, nationalisms were stirred up throughout the region, culminating in the assassination of Archduke Leopold in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia, in 1914. The more immediate cause can be seen in the struggles of World War II, when Roman Catholic Croatians sided with the Nazis, and Orthodox Serbians were allied with the Soviet Russians, again reiterating the East-West division that had prevailed for a millennium and a half. The Serbs suffered greatly at the hands of Ustasi forces from Croatia, with thousands killed in detention camps. Josip Broz Tito then consolidated power as a Communist leader after 1945, though he later declared some independence from Moscow. With his death in 1980, the arrangement of the Balkan States threatened to become undone.

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[2] For a more complete survey of this history, as well as developments surrounding the interfaith council in Bosnia-Herzogevina, see Douglas Johnston and Jonathon Eastvold, "History Unrequited: Religion as Provocateur and Peacemaker in the Bosnian Conflict," in *Religion and Peacebuilding*, ed. Harold Coward and Gordon Smith (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 213–42.

Slobodan Milosevic struggled to consolidate power in the Serbian sector. In 1989, the East-West arrangement of the Cold War in Europe began to come apart. In that year, he gave a stirring speech at the site of the Battle of Kosovo (also known as the Battle of the Field of the Black Birds), on the 600th anniversary of that event. He vowed to create a greater Serbia by conquering the Muslims who had humiliated the Serbian people in that battle and then subjugated them for centuries thereafter; and the Croatians, who had perpetrated horrors against Serbia in World War II. The evocation of these traumatic memories was enough to set the Balkan War in motion.

Here we see how a number of different memories of trauma were fused together to create a powerful social feeling of being wronged that needed to be righted before further humiliation could be visited upon the Serbs. The result was years of warfare, with battle lines laid down along religious and ethnic differences and that now has been suspended in an uneasy peace. In the course of that warfare, new traumas were inflicted, most notably the massacre at Srebenica where some 7,000 Muslim men and boys were systematically executed. Ever-widening circles of new narratives have been woven around the events: Sarajevo, where World War I began and the Cold War arrangement came to an end; Sarajevo, the site of the 1984 Olympics, and the destruction of its historical and cultural heritage; the destruction of the bridge at Mostar, which for centuries had connected the Christian and Muslim populations of that city.

From an interreligious perspective, the most significant thing to emerge has been the effort to set up an interfaith council of Roman Catholics, Serbian Orthodox, Jews, and Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The explicit intent of this move is to separate religion from nationalist politics and to build on the resources of peace in those respective traditions to contribute to the healing of that suffering part of Europe.

Some lessons to be learned about peace building and interreligious encounter

This brief account of the tragedy that beset the Balkans in the 1990s, and the long aftermath in which many groups from within and beyond that region have struggled to bring healing and reconciliation, is intended as a thumbnail sketch of how building peace and interreligious encounter are being placed together today. What follows are five lessons that have been learned from the work done in that area and beyond, and their significance for interreligious encounter and building peace.

1. Interreligious dialogue by itself will not bring peace. The leaders of the major three religious communities in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Jews make up but a tiny minority) all tried to speak out against the hostilities as they commenced in that area in the early 1990s. But none of their voices was strong enough to be heard beyond their own communities—and often not within them as well. At that point even their trying to speak together would likely not have produced any positive effect. Their efforts in the latter part of the 1990s to create an interfaith council, by using the media to bring attention to their efforts, was an attempt to underscore the message that whatever caused the terrible war, its roots could not be in the differing religious traditions. Christianity in both its Eastern and Western versions has a strongly developed sense of peace in its religious traditions, as does Islam. Showing their willingness to talk to one another, however, was seen as not a sufficient response to the situation.

For interreligious encounter to be effective, it must build on a basis of trust—a foundation that takes years to develop.

For interreligious encounter to be effective, it must build on a basis of trust—a foundation that takes years to develop. Such development cannot begin as conflict is threatening. The trust must be strong enough to withstand the buffeting it will experience in the conflict itself.

2. *Interreligious encounter in building peace must work to help communities develop multiple networks of association and identification.* Conflict flourishes when dividing lines between parties can be sharply demarcated. The key to preventing such divisions from opening up in conflict is to develop networks of contact between communities that allow them to come to identify themselves by more than one label: Bosniak or Croat or Serb, Christian or Muslim. Such multiple forms of identification weaken negative boundaries of identity (i.e., I am identified by what I am not). This is being used successfully in Northern Ireland by church groups and other organizations, especially among the children of that troubled area. Religious traditions here need to draw upon universalizing elements in their teaching (such as: God is the creator of all people, we must all love one another, everyone is our neighbor) to help strengthen these bonds. Getting members of the different faiths to come together in youth groups, projects for development or social improvement, and the like can help create denser networks of association and identification.

3. *Learning about the impact of trauma and the healing of memories.* Learning about the dynamics of trauma, and especially the transmission of trauma, is an important part of the tool kit of anyone building peace. Learning how religious traditions deal with themes of suffering, justice, healing, and forgiveness is an important part of that, because most people who have been traumatized will not have access to medical services that can treat trauma. Their religious traditions often are their only recourse in such matters. Building up those resources, and making them the subject of interfaith discussions, strengthens both building peace and interfaith encounters. Key here is a better understanding of the social transmission of trauma and its potentially deleterious effects on the rebuilding of post-conflict societies. This involves not only understanding the dynamics of such transmission but also equipping local religious leaders to intervene effectively to stop harmful transmissions.

4. *Attending to narratives of suffering.* The experience of suffering of those who have

been beset by traumatic memories is something that religious traditions are especially attuned to. The great religious traditions all have developed ways of thinking that struggle to cope with suffering. Among the great contributions they can make to the building of peace are precisely contributing their insights into helping people deal with the suffering they cannot escape and building the capacities to struggle against suffering that can be changed. Secular traditions can counsel resistance to suffering but generally offer little as a resource to people to develop inner resources for living with suffering in the long term.

5. Deepening the religious traditions of peace. Because of the urgency of working for peace, especially in immediate and local contexts within national boundaries, religious traditions need to build up and expand their traditions of peace. One area in particular is the development of a better understanding of both victims and perpetrators. How to accompany victims in their healing process and keep them from lapsing into permanent patterns of victimization is especially important. Likewise, the delicate process of accompanying perpetrators who wish to repent and be reintegrated into society—a still underdeveloped area in peace studies—will need further exploration. Religious traditions about conversion, return, reparation, and forgiveness all play a role here.

Conclusion

The urgent need to engage in the building of peace is presenting a new agenda for interreligious encounter. Because religion is sometimes involved in the causes of conflict but can also be the source of healing after conflict, leaders of religious communities need to learn more about the dynamics of conflict transformation as well as plumb more effectively the traditions of peace in their respective religious traditions. The capacity of religious traditions to work together to prevent conflict and maintain peace has a new and urgent importance in many parts of the world today. This constitutes a major point of growth for interreligious encounter as we move forward in an unstable world.

Christ's Assembly: Community Identity in Matthew

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Preaching Matthew in Liturgical Year A asks for more than interpreting each Sunday's gospel reading. One needs to interpret the individual readings within the overarching theological and social concerns of Matthew.

Matthew writes after 70 C.E. and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, when Judaism had to rethink its identity. As Jewish scholars did this, they excluded Jewish Christians from their fellowship, which raised all sorts of questions for such Jewish Christians. Were they no longer faithful Jews? Were they wrong to accept Jesus as the Anointed One, the messianic King? Matthew wrote his gospel to help his community understand who they were and what they should be about during this crisis.[1]

This suggests that preaching on Matthew requires one to address questions of identity for the twenty-first-century church. An examination of the way in which Matthew creates identity discloses overarching themes and resources for proclamation that may inform preaching throughout the year. The following paragraphs illustrate some of these themes and resources.

The identity of the church

Matthew alone among the four gospels uses the term ἐκκλησία (16:18; 18:17). Although we usually translate this term as "church," a more accurate rendering would refer to the citizens of a *polis* gathered to function as the legal or judicial body for the city. The translators of the Septuagint used the term to translate קהל, the term for the congregation of Israel, the people of God. When Matt 16:18 says that Jesus calls Peter the rock on which he (Jesus) will build his ἐκκλησία, Isa 51:1–2 shimmers in the background:

> Look to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many.

Yelammedenu, a later Jewish homiletic Midrash, says that when a king planned to build a palace

> He dug in several places seeking proper ground for a foundation; at last he struck rock beneath, and said, Here I will build, so he laid the foundation and built. Just so, when God sought to create the world, He examined the generation of Enosh and the generation of the Flood, and said, How

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[1] The best presentation of this is J. Andrew Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990. This approach underlies his commentary *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel*

can I create the world when these wicked people will rise up and provoke me to anger? When He saw Abraham who was to arise, he said, Now I have found a rock (petra) on which to build and establish the world. For this reason He calls Abraham a rock (Is 51:1–2).[2]

Jesus stresses that Peter could confess him only because Jesus' Father had revealed Jesus' significance to him. Matthew 11:25–27 prepared the way for this statement by Jesus: "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have not revealed this to the wise and practical minded, but unto infants. Yes, Father, that was your gracious decision." Then, in response to Peter's confession, Jesus gives him a new revelation (16:18). Peter is to be for Christ's assembly what Abraham had been for Israel, the patriarch from whom it takes its foundation or beginning. As Abraham's response to God's call was the starting point for Israel, so Peter's confessional response is the starting point for Jesus' people.[3]

But just as Abraham was not repeatable, so Peter's role here is not repeatable. The Matthean community has what Judaism had, a founding father. It is a new community that begins with one who confessed Jesus as the Anointed One, the Son of the living God (Matt 16:16).

Preaching Matthew in our time means reminding a congregation what it is founded on, or, better, on whom it is founded. The church has a christological confession at its origin, as a hallmark of its existence. Matthew's Christ immediately goes on to predict his passion in Matt 16:21. The one we confess must be the Matthean Christ, who goes to the cross. Jesus' passion dominates the gospel from 16:21 on.[4] And it dominates the description of the disciples, too. Think of Matt 16:24–28 and the long eschatological discourse in Matthew 24–25. Matthew does not allow us to preach a comfortable Christ.[5]

Ties to the past

The term ἐκκλησία also ties the community to its past. Matthew stresses that Jesus and the church are both rooted in God's past actions. He identifies Jesus as Son of David and Son of Abraham in 1:1. The genealogy that follows (Matt 1:2–17) clarifies what that means: Matthew (1) highlights Abraham as the one from whom Jesus' genealogy begins and (2) stresses the Davidic descent of Jesus by adding the descriptive "the king" to David's name and by giving an edited form of the southern king list (Matt 1:6–11). He also stresses the number fourteen, a numerical acrostic for the name David.[6]

Jesus, the descendent of Abraham, is an ideal Israelite in Matthew. He responds to John the Baptist's call for baptism as preparation for the coming royal rule of the heavens (3:2).[7] When John does not want

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of Matthew. The New Testament in Crisis (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996). See also Daniel Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew.* Sacra Pagina 1 (Collegeville: Michael Glazier, Liturgical Press, 1991).

2. George F. Moore, *Judaism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954 = 1927–30) 1.538, as cited in T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1950), 202–3.

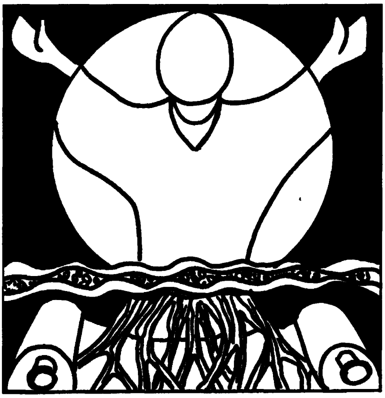
3. Note that Isa 51:1–2 also mentions Sarah, the only mention she gets after Genesis.

4. See also Matt 17:22–23, 20:17–19, and 20:28. The Jerusalem ministry and passion fill Matthew 21–28.

5. There are a number of good summaries of Matthew's interpretation of Jesus. See Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 165–93.

6. The Hebrew for David is *daleth* (the number four) *vav* (number six) *daleth*; thus the number 14 is the sum of the letters of David's Hebrew name.

7. Note that in Matthew John's basic message is exactly the same as Jesus' initial proclamation in Matt 4:17; cf. Matt 10:7



to baptize him, Jesus responds that it is fitting for him "to fulfill all righteousness" (δικαιοσύνη, 3:15). This is a key term in Matthew, occurring seven times (3:15; 5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, 33; 21:32); it denotes the proper relationship to God.[8] Since John summons people to get baptized in preparation for the coming kingdom of the heavens, Jesus responds to John's call for a baptism of repentance as a faithful Israelite. Jesus lives the relationship to God demanded of Israel.

The temptation story that follows (4:1–11) stresses Jesus as a true Israelite. Jesus goes into the wilderness "in order to be tested." Matthew stresses the intention of Jesus. Jesus went hungry for forty days and nights, as Israel had wandered for forty years. He is tempted as God's Son (Matt 4:3 and 6). Recall that in Exodus 3 God tells Moses to say to Pharaoh, "Israel is my firstborn son; therefore let my people go into the wilderness to worship me." Jesus conquers each temptation by citing Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy Moses warns the Israelites not to repeat their parents' failures in the wilderness. As Matthew relates the story, each temptation suggests a false way of being the messiah. Jesus relives the experience of Israel in the wilderness, rejecting false temptations to demonstrate his messiahship, and so is a true Israelite.

Matthew is noted for his repeated statements that Jesus' life "fulfills" Old Testament statements (1:23; 2:6, 15, 18, 23; 3:3; 4:15–16; 8:17; 11:10; 12:18–20; 13:14, 35; 15:8–9; 21:5; [21:9, 11]; 27:9–10). Matthew introduces most of them with a formulaic expression. They are his "footnotes," pointing out how Jesus' life corresponds with Old Testament statements at significant points. In each case one needs to compare Matthew's citation with the Old Testament text. One discovers in the process what Matthew means by the verb "fulfill." In 2:6 he inserts "by no means" to reverse the Old Testament evaluation. 2:23 cites a passage that is not in the Old Testament. 8:17 applies Isa 53:4 to Jesus' healing miracles, not to his crucifixion (as 1 Pet 2:24 does). 21:5 omits the words "righteous and saving is he" from the Zechariah citation, thus turning the fulfillment into a statement of judgment of Jerusalem. Matthew's interpretations illustrate the reality of Jesus' statement in 13:52: "Every scribe discipled to the kingdom of the heavens is like the steward of an estate who brings out the storeroom things old and new." That is Matthew's hermeneutic.

Matthew tied his community to their past, claiming it for them. Jesus did not come to destroy but to fulfill the Law and

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where the summary of the disciples' message is the same, except for the omission of the word μετανοεῖτε (change your mind, repent). Matthew stresses the identity of the message from John through Jesus to the disciple community.

[8] Thus Matthew's use of the term differs from Paul's. One temptation to resist is the tendency to interpret Matthew in Pauline terms. In 6:1 δικαιοσύνη is translated as "piety;" its content is almsgiving, prayer, and fasting.

the Prophets (Matt 5:17). Preaching Matthew to create community identity means tying our congregations to their past. That past includes the Bible, of course; preaching in the year of Matthew can help to prepare congregations to participate in the five-year stress on Scripture study the 2007 ELCA churchwide assembly adopted. But our past includes more than that. We affirm the three great catholic creeds; we pledge our preaching and teaching to be in accord with the Lutheran Book of Concord. Preaching for congregational identity means intentionally stressing how Lutherans read the Scriptures through an evangelical or gospel lens.

A higher standard for life

The Sermon on the Mount shows what the individual life of the disciple is to be.[9] It also is a description of inner community relations. Matthew stresses that δικαιοσύνη is also doing the will of the Father in the heavens. This is true of Jesus, too, as his prayer in the garden of Gethsemane makes clear (26:42): "My father, if it is not possible to avoid this unless I drink it, may your will come to pass." His prayer is virtually identical with the second petition of the Lord's prayer in Matt 6:10. Doing the father's will is responding to God's call and puts one into the Christian community (12:50). One practices piety (δικαιοσύνη, 6:1, analyzed as almsgiving, prayer, and fasting) before God, not before people to gain their praise. Doing the will of God determines entry into the kingdom of the heavens.

The great confession "Jesus is Lord" is not enough (7:21); only the one who does the heavenly Father's will enters into the royal rule. If people point to their acts of proclamation, exorcisms, or the doing of miracles, Jesus' response is "I never recognized you; go away from me, you who produce that which breaks the Torah" (7:23). Matthew stresses the doing of acts of mercy as the key to Jesus' acceptance of people in the last judgment (25:31–46). Feeding the hungry, giving a drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger into one's home, visiting the sick and the prisoner are the acts that correspond to the father's will (25:35–36). It is not surprising that Matthew stresses final judgment according to one's deeds: "For the Son of Humanity is about to come in the glory of his Father with his messengers and then he will repay each one according to his activity. Contrast that to the parallel in Mark 8:38.[10]

Disciples are those who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness (Matt 5:6), who will be persecuted for its sake (5:10). The righteousness of the disciple community must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20). It takes priority over all other disciple activity. "Seek first the royal rule of God and God's [correlative] righteousness and everything else will be added to you" (6:33). Righteousness is acting as God would have you act. Such righteousness will control the disciple's daily life and concerns. It controls one's acts of piety and takes the Torah with great seriousness (5:17–20).

Matthew reminds us that community formation relates to concerns of both piety and justice. Preaching Matthew must relate the life of a congregation to the challenges it faces in its community. As Jesus related to "tax collectors and sinners" (11:19), so too must disciple communities now. A congregation insulated from its community's problems is not living out Matthean discipleship.

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[9] Overman, *Church and Community,* 73–110, esp. 103–5, "The Sermon as Constitution for Matthew's Church"; See also Graham N. Stanton, "Interpreting the Sermon on the Mount," and "The Origin and Purpose of the Sermon on the Mount," in *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 285–325.

[10] Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Humanity will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

Community life: Maintaining community

There is more to community identity than personal piety, important as that is. Doing the will of the Father means caring for all in the community. That is the primary message of Matthew 18. "It is not the will before your heavenly father that one of the least of these should perish" (18:14, my translation). Community membership is determined by the response people make to the message of the kingdom. Thus Jesus approves the publicans and prostitutes who repented at the message of John the Baptist and condemns the religious leaders who saw that and did not repent (21:31–32). Matthew 18:15–20 spells out how this saving will of the Father manifests itself inside the Christian community. An ever-increasing witness seeks to bring a sinning disciple into the community. This is a process not of sanitation but of witness. If one does not listen when the entire assembly witnesses to him or her, regard that person as "a gentile and a publican" (18:18), that is, as an object of mission.

A saving community with a hope-filled future

Matthew 28:16–20 gives the Christian assembly a task: "make disciples of all the gentiles by baptizing and teaching." Jesus, the Lord of the universe, gives that task to disciples.[11] Disciples is the generic term for followers of Jesus in Matthew, not restricted to the twelve. The community is to baptize "into the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit."[12] Elsewhere in the New Testament baptism is into the name of Jesus or simply into Jesus. Teaching "them to observe all that [Jesus] commanded" should follow baptism, quite the reverse of our practice.

What Jesus commanded is given in the five great sermons in the gospel, each ending with a variation of the same formula, "and it happened when Jesus finished. . . ." The stress on all the nations means that the disciple community is open to all, without distinction as to ethnicity, social status, or gender. To be a saving community means that we are to be a community of forgiveness.

Matthew suggests many themes for shaping a community. Careful reading of his text, especially when contrasting it with Mark and Luke, makes his specific stresses clear. The year of Matthew invites us to intentionally follow Matthew in stressing in preaching our rootedness in the Scriptures and our traditions, the concern for justice and the marginalized, our character as a community of forgiveness, and our need to make disciples through baptism and teaching. Matthew's Gospel provides the themes for that teaching—and reminds us that Jesus is and will be with us as we live the life he describes.

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[11] Matthew 28:16–20 is addressed to disciples, not apostles. Matthew uses the term apostle only in 10:2, when he sends them out to preach the kingdom of the heavens.

[12] Matthew 28:19 is the only passage in the New Testament that uses this "trinitarian" formula. It also occurs in the Didache 7:1. This parallel suggests that Matthew is reflecting the baptismal practice of the church of Antioch on the Orontes. His seven-petition version of the Lord's prayer (6:9–13) is virtually identical with that in Didache 8:2, again a reflection of the practice in Antioch.

You Will Know Them by Their Fruits

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No American has been unaffected by the events of the past seven years, starting with the morning of September 11, 2001. The nation and the church are polarized and seemingly paralyzed by our government's actions since that time, especially with regard to the invasion and occupation of Iraq and the extraordinary treatment of suspected terrorists and "enemy combatants." For my part, I make no bones about my opposition to much of *what* has been done and, to the extent I am aware of things, *how*. To the best of my ability, I try to think about these things first as a Christian, but that impels me at the same time to leave room for the possibility that others with whom I most vigorously disagree might also be attempting to do the same.

In any case, my interaction with Scripture has been deeply affected by my perceptions of attitudes of many Americans and even professed Christians toward torture and warfare, in the name of national and even cultural preservation. This is the backdrop for my reading of the Gospel of Matthew for this essay. I first present and discuss some recent polling data to establish a perspective and then turn to some observations about the framing of the Sermon on the Mount for a response.

"A city upon a hill"

In October 2005, a poll by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press yielded some startling and dismaying results. I was made aware of the poll through an article in the *National Catholic Reporter* by Tom Carney. He focused on responses to the question, "Do you think the use of torture against suspected terrorists in order to gain important information can often be justified, sometimes be justified, rarely be justified, or never be justified?" (Table 1)[1]

About half of the respondents who identified themselves as Christian indicated that such use of torture against suspected terrorists was justified "often" or "sometimes;" fewer than a third said "never." Support for the use of torture was actually somewhat higher than that of the total American public, and clearly higher than those respondents who were identified as "secular." Pew has tracked this issue for several years, with fairly consistent results.[2] This suggests that these opinions are not simply a by-product of immediate reac-

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[1] Tom Carney, "Americans, especially Catholics, approve of torture," *National Catholic Reporter* 42, no. 21 (March 24, 2006): 5. *http://ncronline.org/NCR_Online/archives2/2006a/032406/032406h.htm.*

[2] According to the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press [PRCPP], "Trends in Political Values and Core Attitudes: 1987–2007" (March 22, 2007), p. 25, this question was asked in five polls taken between July 2004 and January 2007 (*http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=312*). Not every report contains the same breakdowns or range of information. (The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here.)

Table 1. Question: "Do you think the use of torture against suspected terrorists in order to gain important information can . . . be justified?"

	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Don't know/ refused
Total Public	15%	31%	17%	32%	5%
Total Catholic	21%	35%	16%	26%	4%
White Protestant	15%	34%	16%	31%	4%
White Evangelical	13%	36%	16%	31%	4%
Secular	10%	25%	16%	41%	4%

Table 2. Question: "Do you think the use of torture against suspected terrorists in order to gain important information can . . . be justified"?

	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Don't know/ refused
Religious leaders	0%	19%	17%	56%	8%
Military	6%	13%	30%	49%	2%

tions to one or another event, although that may not gauge the traumatic effect of the 9/11 tragedy itself.

These results are all the more striking because church bodies on all sides have released statements explicitly condemning torture.[3] The 2005 Pew survey indeed revealed that religious leaders (and members of the military, for that matter) overwhelmingly reject torture (Table 2).[4]

While this is not the place to analyze all the reasons for these attitudes, or the disparity between church leadership and popular attitudes, two more polls have suggested certain factors in the matter. First, a somewhat earlier Pew poll revealed interesting priorities among various groups when considering foreign policy.[5] According to this survey, "following religious principles" and "being compassionate" scored the *lowest* percentages as a "top priority" for each group of Christians. That "compassion" scores lower than "moral principles" for self-identified Christians is disturbing, theologically: Is not compassion Christ's cardinal moral principle? That compassion scores even lower than "decisiveness" for these groups is scandalous. Once again, the "secular" group shows a distinctly different pattern and values compassion as one of four roughly equal top factors—clearly above decisiveness, in particular (Table 3)

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[3] For instance, the National Council of Churches, November 9, 2005 (*http://www.ncccusa.org/torture.html*); a letter by Bishop John H. Ricard, on behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, July 12, 2004 (*http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/torture.shtml*); two statements by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, "For Peace in God's World," adopted as a social statement by the Churchwide Assembly on August 20, 1995 (*http://www.elca.org/socialstatements/peace/*), and reaffirmed in principle by "Living in a Time of Terrorism," adopted by the ELCA Church Council on April 18, 2004 (*http://www.elca.org/socialstatements/terrorism/*); and "An Evangelical Declaration Against Torture" (*http://www.evangelicalsforhumanrights.org/Declaration.pdf*), endorsed by the National Association of Evangelicals (see *NAE Insight*, March/April 2007).

Table 3. How Religion Informs Foreign Policy Preferences

Percent considering each a top priority	White evangelic Prot	White mainline Prot	White Catholic	Secular
Following religious principles	55	27	26	13
Following moral principles	86	70	70	56
Being compassionate	62	48	50	58
Being practical	63	52	64	60
Being decisive	73	63	64	48
Being cautious	69	60	63	61

Table 4. Do you personally feel that [attacks intentionally aimed at civilians] are . . . justified?

	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Iranians	3%	11%	5%	80%
Americans	5%	19%	27%	46%

And, finally, the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) undertook a comparative survey of American and Iranian citizens in 2006. Responses to two questions are of particular interest. One measured attitudes toward "bombing and other attacks intentionally aimed at civilians," and American responses were far more tolerant of such attacks than the Iranians (Table 4).[6]

It is difficult to reckon the cultural and political factors that may skew these comparative results. In a follow-up question, for example, Iranians were far more tolerant of Palestinian attacks on Israeli civilians (53% said "sometimes justified"), than vice versa (5%), a response seemingly not in keeping with the response to the previous, more abstract form of the question. Americans were more tolerant of Israeli attacks (21%) than Palestinian ones, but only slightly (13%). These varying results are not surprising in view of current political realities.

Cultural variability is also likely at work in responses to another survey question, in which individuals "were asked to choose whether they think of themselves as primarily a 'citizen of Iran/America,' a 'Muslim/member of my religion,' a 'member of my ethnic group,' or 'not so much in these ways but primarily as an individual.'"[7] The differences in the responses were striking, even so. A good majority of Iranians responded that they thought of themselves primarily as members of their religion.

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[4] PRCPP, "America's Place in the World" (November 17, 2005), 24 (*http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=263*). The response of military personnel to this issue suggests that popular attitudes are not shaped by utilitarian or pragmatic concerns.

[5] PRCPP, "Foreign Policy Attitudes Now Driven by 9/11 and Iraq" (August 18, 2004), 25 (*http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/222.pdf*).

[6] PIPA, "Public Opinion in Iran and America on Key International Issues" (January 24, 2007), 10 (*http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/jan07/Iran_Jan07_rpt.pdf*.

[7] "Public Opinion in Iran and America," 29.

Table 5. Which of the following statements do you agree with most? I think of myself primarily as . . .

	a citizen	a member of my religion	a member of my ethnic group	an individual
Iranians	27%	62%	4%	4%
Americans	49%	6%	2%	43%

Americans were split almost evenly between thinking of themselves first as citizens of America and as individuals; religion scored a pale 6% (Table 5).

Given American individualism, the strength of that response is perhaps predictable, and the same could be said for American nationalism. But for a people usually considered to be highly religious, the deeply depressed response to religious identity as primary is telling, I suspect, of the force of civil religion in this nation.

The prevalence of American civil religion, observed at least since the time of Alexis de Tocqueville, may go a long way toward explaining the gap between the attitudes toward torture of those who identify themselves as Christians on the one hand and the attitudes of both churches and religious leaders on the other (although a failure of effective leadership and formation should not be precluded). More to the point, American civil religion and individualism seemingly offer little inhibition against a tolerance of torture and of attacks against civilians. The results of these various polls suggest not only that self-identified Christians do not reflect Christian values but that they do not fundamentally think as Christians to begin with. Perhaps it is time to start over, and Matthew's theme of discipleship may be just the place.

A house upon a rock

I was helped greatly in my reflection recently by Stephen Westerholm's effort to reengage Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his *Cost of Discipleship* in a contemporary reading of Matthew's Gospel. Bonhoeffer's message of discipleship and "costly grace," said Westerholm, "took on extraordinary urgency in the Germany of the 1930s, when opposition to the idolatry, racism, and ruthlessness of the Nazis was savagely suppressed."[8] This statement struck me because I have often felt, rightly or wrongly, that this nation is also slipping down the slope of "idolatry, racism, and ruthlessness" and that we American-Christians are as complicit in this slide as the *Deutsche Christen* of the 1930s. It suggests that what we (one should say *I*, here) need to hear is not just one more voice decrying torture or warfare, pushing this or that moral concern, critical as these are, but instead a call to genuine Christian discipleship, understood as encountering the costly grace that Bonhoeffer discerned in the Jesus of Matthew's Gospel. It may be that we generally know what is right but that we refuse—or fear—to follow it; it is also likely that the Christian identity of many Americans is more grounded in "cheap grace" than in discipleship to Jesus Christ.

The following reading of the Gospel of Matthew is offered in this spirit. I will not follow Westerholm very far in his book, which I think to be eminently useful for parish study groups, nor will I follow the particulars of *Cost of Discipleship*. Rather, I focus on how certain recurring phrases and metaphors in Matthew's presentation of Jesus' teaching work to frame a prophetic reading for the Sermon on the Mount: indeed, a prophetic address directed as much or more toward the Christian readers of the gospel themselves than any outside groups, local or imperial, with which those readers might also have been contending. By extension, then, Matthew's Jesus may yet rock the fragile security of our boats—or even draw us out of them to walk toward him upon the turbulent waters of our time.

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[8] Stephen Westerholm, *Understanding Matthew: The Early Christian Worldview of the First Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 8.

Greater than Jonah; greater than Solomon

The Gospel of Matthew deploys several recurring phrases and sets of metaphors in presenting the speech of Jesus, and of John the Baptist as well.[9] Following the standard two-source theory for the Synoptic Gospels, it is evident that Matthew does not coin this language but, having inherited it from Mark and Q, develops and deploys it in a distinctive manner. In some cases, the phraseology is used in similar or practically identical ways, but other cases reveal differing senses or applications depending upon the characters and contexts.

1. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." (Matt 3:2, 4:17)

Introducing their public activity, first John and then Jesus make identical proclamations in Matthew—"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This verbatim repetition is surely significant in more than a formal sense.[10] The analogous declaration occurs but once in Mark, as Jesus' very first words in that Gospel: "the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (Mk 1:15). Matthew uses the same Greek verb, ἤγγικεν ("has come near"), and characteristically substitutes "kingdom of heaven" for "kingdom of God."

Mark, however, leaves it to the narrator to characterize John as "proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mk 1:4) and does not use the phrase "kingdom of God/heaven" in connection with John at all. In contrast, Matthew seemingly backfills and puts this statement on John's lips, as well.

Even without the redaction-critical comparison to Mark, Matthew's narrative therefore associates, or invites the reader to associate, the preaching of these two characters. John, coming first in the narrative, is clearly depicted as a prophetic preacher; when Jesus appears, making an identical initial proclamation, the reader is prepared to hear him likewise, that is, prophetically. For both John and Jesus, these, their first public declarations, lead into more particular addresses—John to the Pharisees and Sadducees, "you brood of vipers" (3:7–12), and Jesus, after a short interval, to the disciples on the mountain, "blessed are the poor in spirit" (5:3).

A predisposition to a prophetic reading of Matthew's Beatitudes (as well as the rest of the Sermon on the Mount) in turn asks us to read them along similar lines to the more sharply worded version in Luke ("blessed are you poor," Lk 6:20, along with its corresponding "woe" upon the rich, 6:24). Without this prophetic disposition, "poor in spirit" seems to contrast with Luke's version, as somehow "spiritualized" or "sapiential."[11]

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[9] For example, besides those to be taken up in this article: (1) take up cross; finding and losing life, Matt 10:38–39 and 16:24–26; (2) binding and loosing on earth/heaven, 16:19 and 18:18; (3) first will be last, and last first, 19:30 and 20:16; (4) greatest will be servant, 20:26–27 and 23:11–12.

[10] Ben Witherington, *Matthew* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2006), 77, cites David R. Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1988), 86, as observing that these form an *inclusio* (although Witherington does not develop its significance). Curiously, Bauer actually cites another scholar as making this claim but himself *discounts* the *inclusio* in favor of a "salvation-historical link" between John and Jesus in a "time of fulfillment."

However, prophetic use of sapiential forms like the beatitude is not uncommon and demonstrates their multifaceted potential in the hands of a master. So Matthew's first beatitude need not necessarily represent a weakening or reduction of the notion of poverty as such—here the verbal contrast with Luke skews our reading; instead, it may constitute a blessing upon the *humble* over against the proud and arrogant, who are not in spirit like the poor, regardless of their economic status.[12] Arrogance and humility are surely as much prophetic themes as wealth and poverty. "Poor in spirit" shares some of the dialectical force in Jesus' more obviously paradoxical claims, "the first shall be last" and "the greatest shall be least."

The special genius of the phrasing "poor in spirit" is that it is no longer bound to a particular social or economic class. The disciples around Jesus on the Mount, along with the "crowds" on the periphery, cannot hear these words simply as a validation of their own class over against wealthier and powerful elites, although that level of meaning is not completely absent. But Jesus primarily addresses relationships *within* their class, the social scramble for the crumbs from the master's table, so to speak, crumbs of food or crumbs of honor.

Such a prophetic reading of the first beatitude in particular causes Jesus' initial call, "repent," to reverberate again in one's ears. I would be prepared to attempt to read the rest of the Beatitudes and the Sermon similarly, space permitting. For throughout, it is indeed a "countercultural wisdom," as Ben Witherington puts it, that Jesus announces, both in its vision and in its demands for commensurately countercultural response.[13] Only the poor in spirit are prepared to see the vision, let alone respond—that is, repent. Without such a poverty, it is as Isaiah heard, and Jesus reiterates (Matt 13:12–17):

Keep listening, but do not comprehend;
    keep looking, but do not understand.
Make the mind of this people dull,
    and stop their ears,
    and shut their eyes,

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[11] For example, Witherington's recent commentary, p. 113, insists that the Sermon on the Mount is "sapiential material and should be evaluated in the context of other early Jewish wisdom literature." This despite his finding (a) that Jesus' wisdom is "counter-order" and "revelatory wisdom," pp. 114f., (b) that the background of Matthew's structuring of the Beatitudes is intended to show a fulfillment of the (prophetic!) servant role of Isaiah 61, pp. 119f., and (c) that the Beatitudes have a strong eschatological frame of reference, pp. 121ff. If one were not seemingly forced to choose *either* "sapiential" *or* "prophetic"—a false dichotomy I would reject—one might expect Witherington to see the strongly prophetic character of these observations.

[12] Mark Powell, *God with Us: A Pastoral Theology of Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), describes the "poor in spirit" as "those who have no reason for hope in this world, period," p. 124. This view is likewise more pointed than a spiritualized or wisdom-oriented reading, if more generalized than mine.

[13] Powell, pp. 128f., resists identifying the first four beatitudes with particular groups or "entrance requirements for the kingdom" but finds that they "describe the nature of God's rule" itself. Useful as this is, it does not incorporate the remaining five, more directive beatitudes: as a *set*, they also call forth a somewhat more concrete response.

so that they may not look with their eyes,
    and listen with their ears,
and comprehend with their minds,
    and turn and be healed. (Isa 6:9b–10)

This prophetically critical edge in Matthew's presentation, along with the issue of outsiders and insiders, comes up again in the next set of recurrent metaphorical phraseology, *good tree/good fruit.*

2. *"The tree is known by its fruit." (Matt 3:7–10, 7:15–20, 12:33–35)*

At three places in Matthew, we find speech involving trees and fruit, first in the preaching of John the Baptist:

> But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! . . . Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (Matt 3:7–10)

A second instance occurs near the end of the Sermon on the Mount:

> Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits. (7:15–20)

And finally, Jesus concludes his retort to Pharisees who ascribed his healings to Beelzebul (12:24–37) with closely related language:

> Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good things, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person brings good things out of a good treasure, and the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure. (12:33–35)

Once again, this language is not unique to Matthew. John's speech in Matthew is practically identical to Luke 3:7–9 (taken from Q, that is), save that in Matthew, significantly, the words are addressed to "Pharisees and Sadducees," while Luke has John speaking to "the crowds." The case of the second two passages is more complicated. The *good tree/good fruit* theme also appears in Luke's "Sermon on the Plain" (Lk 6:20–49) and so may well have appeared in a prior compilation (the "*ur*-sermon") in the Q document that served as a template for Jesus' "sermons" in both gospels. But the *good tree/good fruit* complex occurs just these two times in Luke (3:7–9, as above, and 6:43–45); in Matthew there is a third, distinctive instance.

Curiously, this third instance, Matt 12:33–35, has a greater verbal similarity to Luke 6:43–45 than does the material in the Sermon on the Mount. Redaction-critically, it seems that Matthew has transposed the Q language of Lk 6:43–45 into an elaboration of *Mark's* story of the Beelzebul controversy, with John the Baptist's "you brood of vipers!" thrown in for good measure! So

Matthew has reworked the language in his own way: the phrase "each tree is known by its fruit" (Lk 6:44a) occurs not quite verbatim in Matt 12:33b, but Matthew's own distinctive statement, "you will know them by their fruits," is repeated in Matt 7:16a and 20, bracketing the *good tree/good fruit* sayings there.

Since the Pharisees refuse to recognize the goodness of the tree in light of the fruit, their own goodness is called into question.

More significant is that Matthew has reframed and variously applied this material. Matthew 7:15–23 is directed to "false prophets." Prophets are absent in Luke 6, where the *good tree/good fruit* material occurs in the middle of a seemingly loose sequence of sayings that is positively *sapiential*, following Jesus' instructions neither to judge nor condemn but to forgive and give (6:37f.), and preceding a brief, generalized complaint, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" (6:46), and the concluding story of two men who built houses upon different foundations (6:47–49).

In contrast, Matthew presents a distinct focus for the material as Jesus draws the Sermon on the Mount to a conclusion. It centers upon the warning against false prophets (7:15). The sequence appears to begin with the sayings about the narrow gate and the hard road (7:13–14) found in a different context in Luke, and which here anticipate the warning against false, *Christian* prophets that follows. The explicit self-identification of the prophets as Christian is delayed, both literarily and eschatologically, from 7:15 to 7:21–22 in the liturgically wheedling "Lord, Lord":

> Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?"

The *good tree/good fruit* sayings (7:16–20), meanwhile, have the function of providing a perspective from which to identify such deceptive figures ("wolves in sheep's clothing") even before "that day" arrives.[14] So Matthew, in contrast to Luke's generic version of the rhetorical question, "why do you [all] call me, 'Lord, Lord'?" (Lk 6:46), presents us a concrete realization of, and a warning *against*, actual figures anticipated to be found in the community of Jesus' followers: "not everyone [such as these] who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom" (7:21a). The focus upon these increasingly hapless false prophets only narrows with the second instance of the "Lord, Lord" address and their fruitless appeal to various prophetic acts, culminating in Jesus' eschatological judgment, "I never knew you" (7:22–23).

It is possible that the concluding similes of the wise and foolish builders (7:24–

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[14] I have long found it striking that the matter of authenticating "prophets," already an issue in several passages of the Hebrew Bible (Deut 13:1–5, 18:15–22, e.g.), is found in the earliest extant Christian writing (1 Thess 5:19–22) and also, at length, in a work such as the Didache (chaps. 11 and 13).

27) continue the screed against these prophets, but the language broadens out ("Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them," 7:24a) as a generalized call to a wise obedience, concluding the Sermon. The closing appeal to wisdom here need not rule out a prophetic reading of the sermon, as the sapiential ending of Hosea (14:9), for example, might indicate.

In the Sermon on the Mount, the *good tree/good fruit* sayings were aimed internally, at claimants to special standing within the Matthean community. The use of this language in Matthew 12 is again addressed to outsiders, as it had been in 3:7–10. Here we face some Pharisees, who are contesting the character of Jesus' own actions: "It is only by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons, that this fellow casts out the demons" (12:24). In effect, they are calling Jesus a "false prophet"; in reply, Matthew has Jesus claim that he passes the *good fruit* test (12:25–30) and is therefore a *good tree* —hence the odd wording, "Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit" (12:33). Consequently, since the Pharisees refuse to recognize the goodness of the tree in light of the fruit, their own goodness is called into question:

> You brood of vipers! How can you speak good things, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person brings good things out of a good treasure, and the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure. I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. (Matt 12:34–37)

This dispute, of course, can no longer be adjudicated fairly, whether it was grounded in Jesus' time or in Matthew's community or somewhere in between.[15] If nothing else, Jesus himself had ruled that exorcisms alone prove nothing back in Matt 7:22! And given the context of Matthew 12, in which Jesus claims to be "lord of the Sabbath" (12:8) and then performs a healing on the Sabbath (12:9–14), it is evident that the Pharisees' claim about the demonic character of Jesus' exorcisms (12:24) was based on their prior rejection of such other "fruits" as good. The evaluation of good fruit must reflect a fairly diverse basketful.

Despite such ambiguities, the *good fruit/good tree* test itself is worth serious attention. For one thing, it may be applied within the community, a self-test, as it were, of authentic discipleship, and then also outside the community, as by John the Baptist (Matt 3:8–10) and Jesus in Matthew 12. And even those outside the community, judged fairly, have a reasonable chance of passing such a test! Second, Jesus looks to consequences (fruit) for the justification of actions and values (trees), offering an ethic that is neither simply teleological nor utterly subject to the more absolutist standards attributed to Jesus' opponents.

This attribution is itself an unfair denigration of the historical Pharisees, we must readily acknowledge, and participates in a form of hostile, antithetical rhetoric (used not only against Jews and Judaism) that has not proven helpful across the centuries.[16] Most likely this is the by-product of sectarian strife and exaggerated speech patterns in the early decades of the Jesus movement, perhaps originating with Jesus himself but taking on a harsh, continuing life of its own. Nevertheless, this stereotypical Matthean "Pharisaism" is endemic to innumerable expressions of Christianity, and presumably to most religions. Certain ideas or practices are opposed (or supported) on "principle," while the globe warms, civilians die, and brutality metastasizes. The *good fruit/good tree* test remains a valuable source of perspective against open-and-shut religious thinking across the theological spectrum and can subvert (as, sadly, it has been subverted by) the exclusivist rhetoric in which it is set in the Gospels. *Good fruit/good tree* can certainly speak with acute force as a sign for "this generation," for those with eyes to see. A good part of its validity has to do with whether, with Matthew, one is as willing to assess the fruit of one's own community as one is eager to assess that of the Other. Again we see proverbial wisdom, of a fairly conventional sort, being employed prophetically.

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[15] Both Mark (3:22–30) and Q (Lk 11:14–23) seem to have had a version of this dispute—Matthew's narrative setting resembles Mark's, especially by having the Pharisees as the contesting party; but Matthew also uses phraseology found only in Luke (compare Matt 12:28 and Lk 11:20) and adds subsequent material (the sharply refused request for a sign, Matt 12:38–42/Lk 11:27–32, and the wandering demon, Matt 12:43–49/Lk 11:24–26) in roughly the same wording and order. (Mark 8:11–12 has a milder version of the refused request for a sign in a different context; Matthew also picks this up in 16:1–4 and sharpens it with invective borrowed from chap. 12 and yet more material, apparently adapted from Q—cf. Lk 12:54–46. William of Ockham might reasonably ask if the Q hypothesis really simplifies anything here.)

A third value of the *good fruit/good tree* test is a fundamental assumption of the second: There *will* be fruit to evaluate. Bonhoeffer's "cheap grace" suggests an ornamental tree, pleasing to behold but not much else. Our society—like Matthew's, it seems— is full of "Lord, Lord," as a Gnostic-like incantation to open the gates of heaven. Yet doing "the will" of the One in heaven (Matt 7:21b) is another matter, both less and also far more than "prophecy" and "deeds of power." Discipleship is a matter of constantly seeking to figure all this out, again and again reorienting our values from the flashy or the expedient, the self-serving or the nationalistic, as the perpetually unsettling demands of Jesus require. The fruit, I suspect, is best characterized by an active love of neighbor and also, I have to say it, by a love of enemy (Matt 5:43–48). Such love is needed to make words of prophecy and deeds of power—in fact, all words and all deeds—*fruitful*, as the Apostle Paul once intimated in 1 Corinthians.

What is old and what is new

Would that Jesus had left us more than epigrams, proverbs, and parables! We are so removed from his oral and traditional cultural heritage that much of what he says can seem slight, and is easily sentimentalized. But perhaps our sound-byte [sic] culture is coming full circle, and these brief expressions can regain the fluid potency once known in traditional cultures. I have tried to draw out some of the significance and signification that Matthew created by variously contextualizing certain brief sayings, and found that one led to another: "repent" to "blessed are the poor in spirit," and "you will know them by their fruits" to "not everyone who calls me, 'Lord, Lord.'" Matthew's particular usages reflect the inherent adaptability of the material and need not foreclose its range of meaning so much as to mark it out.

In traditional communication, such repetition not only is useful but also stands as a clue to significance. An easily overlooked aspect of the literary sophistication that shaped the Gospel, I believe, is that Matthew itself employs these traditional techniques. So the repetition of such other phrases as "those who find their life will lose it," "the first will be last, and the last will be first," "the greatest among you will be your servant," and so forth are not markers of a lack of imagination or originality on the part of a wooden redactor. Rather, they call us to pay closer attention and to find that they are still patient of multiple applications and uses for those with eyes to see, both commonplace and incisively prophetic.

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[16] Of the many sources that might be cited, see for example Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2006), 29–33, on the Sabbath, and 119–124, more generally.

Blues singer Billie Holiday first recorded a song about lynchings of African Americans, "Strange Fruit," in 1939:

Southern trees bear strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze,
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.
. . .
Here is fruit for the crows to pluck,
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop,
Here is a strange and bitter crop.

Unlikely as any direct connection to the *good tree/good fruit* metaphor of the gospels may be, the lyrics may help to tie the words of Matthew into our present situation. Abu Ghraib and extraordinary renditions, stress positions and waterboarding are "strange and bitter" fruit indeed for a self-identified democracy, let alone for self-identified Christians. And yet the survey results we have seen starkly indicate our widespread complicity in that harvest. Matthew and Jesus would ask us about not only the fruit but what these things say about the trees. It is not far, chronologically or morally, from the lynchings of yesteryear to today's Guantanamo. Who and what are we, really, beneath our noble labels? "You will know them by their fruit."

The call to discipleship within the brief, pungent expressions of the Sermon on the Mount is a call, again and again, to a deeper engagement with the realm of the God who utterly subverts our world and in the subversion restores it. The unsettled and unsettling grace in the words of Jesus may help us open a costly path beyond the viciousness of our polarities and the deep freeze of our paralysis toward a new creation, if only we will find the poverty in spirit to see, to turn, and so, be healed.

Book Reviews

The Birth of Christianity. The First Twenty Years. Vol. 1: ***After Jesus.*** By Paul Barnett. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005. x and 230 pages. Paper. $15.00.

Paul Barnett, former Anglican Bishop of North Sydney, Australia, a teaching fellow at Regent College in Vancouver, BC, and Moore Theological College in Sydney, uses every available source to illuminate the two decades between 30 and 50 C.E. Although he agrees with many scholars that the earliest writings of the New Testament are Paul's letters, especially to the Thessalonians (c. 50 C.E.), he holds that many later sources also illuminate this period.

Most critical scholars would be astonished that so much could be asserted about this early period and that there is reliable and manifold information available for this time of the new movement. Barnett considers writings, usually given a late date of authorship, earlier and therefore not far removed from the period under discussion. He accepts such early dates without always arguing fully for them.

Barnett writes as a "creedal Christian" (p. 11) but committed to the academic rigor that he learned at the University of Sydney. He rejects Tacitus and Josephus as tendentious writers who cannot be relied upon as sources for early Christianity. The best sources are the letters of Paul (1 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans) and Acts. Galatians is by far the most historically detailed letter of Paul. It throws light on the period under discussion. The "we"-passages indicate that Luke participated in Paul's mission. But Luke is not interested in the chronology for these two decades, Barnett says, and therefore has to be used with caution. Luke wrongly dates the birth of Jesus and Theudas's uprising. There are as well some differences between Paul and Acts.

He remains "struck by the closeness in time between the historical Jesus and the earliest evidence about him" (p. 21). He links secular history (Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius; Aretas) with Christian history, dating Paul's conversion shortly after Jesus' death (33–34 C.E.). 1 Thessalonians enables conclusions about Paul's preaching (1:9–10; 5:9–10 and other references); Paul presupposes that the Thessalonians already know items to which he refers. Paul received the information contained in his preaching in Damascus although the preformed traditions must go back to Jerusalem. Paul's Christology, indicated by the terms "Son of God," "Lord," and "Christ," was already formed and did not undergo changes between 1 Thessalonians and 2 Corinthians. This Christology understands Jesus as the Messiah.

Barnett uses Acts 1–9 as a window into the period. The Christian church was one community with two subgroups (Hellenists and Hebrews), with Peter the leader. The division into two groups in Jerusalem was brought about by the influx of pro-Temple priests and the election of Hellenist almoners, led by Stephen (anti-Temple), whose influence must have been considerable. The Christology that Jesus was "the Christ," "the Son of God," and "the Lord" brought about the birth of Christianity; this apostolic teaching was propagated to the Samaritans and the Ethiopian as well as to the coastal cities (p. 70) and Damascus. Paul's persecution of Christians in Jerusalem resulted in the spread of Christianity to Antioch; a slightly later second wave won mainly Greeks and God-fearers to the Christian faith.

Barnett investigates the pre-Pauline traditions incorporated in Paul's letters and traces them back to Peter's preaching. Although he recognizes the significance of orality in the early period, he believes that written traditions were prevalent during this early period, already perhaps during Jesus' ministry. Paul's references to Jesus' teachings point to written sources, as do the Jesus traditions in James and 1 Peter. He emphasizes that the Jesus we find in Q is not different from the Jesus we meet in other parts of the New Testament.

Barnett calls Mark and John "primary gospels" because they do not incorporate other written sources, although he speaks of Markan blocks that might have been earlier than Mark (he believes that Mark 13 was written in the 40s). As far as the Gospel of John is concerned, Barnett places it in the 60s in Palestine to win Jews while there was still hope. This goes against the general opinion of the lateness of John.

In three appendices, Barnett discusses the "History and Geography in Acts," affirming its reliability; "Dating Galatians," accepting the "south" hypothesis and dating it around 48 C.E.; "Reflections on J. D. Crossan's Birth of Christianity," calling it "an idealization based on his vision for social justice." There is a bibliography and various indexes.

The book is quite convincing—provided you accept the early dating of documents and the reliability of most sources.

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Daring, Trusting Spirit: Bonhoeffer's Friend Eberhard Bethge. By John W. de Gruchy. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005. xviii and 221 pages. Paper. $20.00.

Of all life's blessings, friendship is among the greatest. Jesus described the apex of friendship: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). In one sense, this is what Bonhoeffer himself did in relationship to his own beloved German people, persecuted church, and Jewish neighbors.

In another very real sense, this is also what Eberhard Bethge did in relationship to the legacy of his closest friend, Dietrich, as Bethge year after year poured out his life on his behalf. After Bonhoeffer's execution at the hands of Nazi officials on April 9, 1945, at Flossenburg concentration camp, Bethge devoted the remainder of his life to collecting, editing, and writing about the contributions of Bonhoeffer to the church struggle and to the theological tradition. Among the landmark achievements were the writing of one of the twentieth century's most noteworthy biographies and, finally, the publication of the critical edition of Bonhoeffer's works.

Among the host of books about Bonhoeffer, this is the first to focus primarily on Bethge. John de Gruchy, himself a friend of Eberhard and Renate Bethge, describes not only the years that Dietrich and Eberhard shared together—beginning with their emergent friendship at the underground Confessing Church seminary at Finkenwalde up through their extraordinary correspondence published as *Letters and Papers from Prison*—but especially focuses on the years after Bonhoeffer's death. As Bonhoeffer's intimate friend and confidant, Bethge naturally became the definitive interpreter of the Bonhoeffer legacy. In many ways, the voice of Bonhoeffer has become inseparable from the voice of Bethge. It is a tribute to Bethge that he strove to maintain fidelity to Bonhoeffer's views without interpolating his own. The degree that he did so is measured by the esteem with which Bethge's work is held in the scholarly community.

However, de Gruchy also emphasizes the formidable contributions made by Bethge himself to contemporary theology. Of particular significance were Bethge's years at Rengstorf where he and Renate (Bonhoeffer's niece) ran a pastoral college that served as an important site for the continuing education for pastors, study, and research. Hospitality was at the heart of this ministry. From this location, Bethge was able to raise his voice for a new confessing church in South Africa in opposition to the evil of apartheid. Through his global connections, especially to South Africa and the United States, Bethge was able to mediate right remembering of the past and work for reconciliation in Jewish-Christian relations.

In his poem "The Friend," Bonhoeffer wrote from prison words of profound appreciation for Bethge: "Finest and rarest blossom, at a happy moment springing from the freedom of a lightsome, daring, trusting spirit, is a friend to a friend." No longer was Bethge, to use his own self-description, "only a country boy." He had become partner in one of the most public and revered friendships of the twentieth century. This edifying book is enhanced by eight pages of photographs that document Bethge's life.

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Alone in the World? Human Uniqueness in Science and Theology. By J. Wentzel van Huyssteen. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006. xviii and 347 pages. Cloth. $40.00.

In this brilliant piece of interdisciplinary scholarship, van Huyssteen weaves together insights from evolutionary epistemology, theology, and paleoanthropology in addressing the complex subject of human uniqueness. As in his prior works, he forcefully argues that rationality is a property of *persons* and should be conceived as a skill that applies "transversally" across the porous boundaries of disciplines. On this view of rationality, interdisciplinarity refers to engagement between particular persons embedded in specific contexts whose efforts to solve clearly defined, shared problems lead them into dialogue across the boundaries of their problem-solving traditions.

Van Huyssteen's thesis in this work is that a theological understanding of human uniqueness might inform and be informed by the discussion of human origins and uniqueness in paleoanthropology and that productive dialogue between the disciplines might take place in a dialogical space opened by evolutionary epistemology. A central aspect of this thesis lies in the contention that an adequate understanding of human uniqueness will account both for its evolutionary origin and its propensity for religious expression.

Step one toward dialogue between theology and science on the question of human uniqueness is to identify the contours of the problem within each disciplinary context. Van Huyssteen maintains that in each discipline, ongoing discussion revolves around a "canonical core." Scientific discourse moves around Darwin's notion that the evolution of human cognition is key to understanding human uniqueness. Van Huyssteen believes the epistemic implications of Darwin's understanding opens space for dialogue between theological anthropology and paleoanthropology by linking (while distinguishing) biology and culture (including religion).

From this methodological point, van Huyssteen measures current theological discussion of human uniqueness against biblical passages comprising the canonical core of the doctrine of the *imago Dei*. In his view, the core texts focus on embodied ways that humans relate God to other creatures through faithful stewardship. Therefore, theologians who receive van Huyssteen's favorable review set the human longing (and capacity) for meaning through discourse with God (via ritual and other symbolic, imaginative behavior) in a context of overarching continuity between humans and the rest of creation. This holistic vision of the human as an animal who images God in its various concrete relations in and with the world not only remains true to the canonical core but also engages paleoanthropology more readily than theological conceptions van Huyssteen regards as abstract and speculative. The critique of theological speculation van Huyssteen iterates throughout this text is effective; however, I wonder whether he correctly characterizes the particular theologians he reviews. It may be more accurate to say, for instance, that LeRon Shults relies on trinitarian and eschatological conceptuality as a means for marking out conditions for relating redemptively to the biblical God, i.e., as an expression of the gospel, rather than as "radical metaphysics" that risk Christian theology's interdisciplinary character (p. 142).

Perhaps the most compelling aspect of van Huyssteen's treatise is his argument for the "naturalness of religion" based on the interpretation of several prehistoric cave images as exemplifying "the profound role of shamanism and altered states of consciousness in the Upper Paleolithic" (p. 251). At the heart of this complex contention is the notion that the evolution of symbolic, cognitively fluid minds is directly linked with the emergence and integrity of religious awareness and behavior. The intimate connection between the evolution of human cognitive ability and its employment in religious expression arguably justifies the claim that any adequate account of human uniqueness will regard religion as a natural aspect of human life. This thesis, and the multifaceted arguments articulated in support of it, should be of great interest to anyone seeking a legitimate public voice for theology.

James R. Wilson
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A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity. By Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. Macdonald, with Janet H. Tulloch. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005. vi and 345 pages. Cloth, $35.00; paper, $20.00.

This book, authored by two outstanding Catholic biblical scholars, deserves wide reading. There has long been interest in the house church as an agency for mission in early Christianity, but this is the first to ask what significance the house church had for women. Now we have an in-depth scholarly work that everyone interested in women in the early church and early church history in general must read.

The activities of women in the early church received less attention than it deserved in scholarship prior to about 1975. Now we get a full presentation of women's life in the early church. Chapters discuss women's activity as wives, their role as mothers, growing into womanhood in house-church communities, Christian women slaves, Ephesians 5 and the politics of marriage, women as leaders in households and in Christian assemblies, their role in family funerary banquets, as patrons in the life of house churches, and as active in missionary activity. The authors document heavily from Hellenistic-Roman texts, the New Testament and patristic literature, archaeological realia, and modern scholarship.

The results are highly illuminating. For example, the chapter describing the vulnerability of female slaves (presumably also in Christian households) is unique in discussing female slaves in the light of the command to obedience in the household codes. The chapter on women patrons in the world of the NT provides data on non-Christian women patrons, such as Eumachia at Pompeii and Plancia Magna of Perga, who make clear that Christian women such as Phoebe (Rom 16:1–2), Chloe (1 Cor 1:11), and others served as patrons to Paul or other early Christians. The most exciting chapter is the last one, which descries the household as the place where women become "agents of expansion."

This book deserves wide study—and not just by women. Male leaders in the church, lay and clergy, should know this book and evaluate its significance for the life of the parish and their church body. It is an outstanding contribution to our understanding of women in the early church—and by extension in the contemporary church.

Edgar Krentz
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Cutting Too Close for Comfort: Paul's Letter to the Galatians in Its Anatolian Cultic Context. By Susan Elliott. London: T&T Clark, 2003. xv and 392 pages. Cloth. $170.00.

Elliott, a long-time colleague in New Testament studies, has expanded her Loyola University (Chicago) dissertation and subsequent articles into a substantial book regarding the audience of Paul's letter to the Galatians.

She maintains that scholars have failed to read the letter in terms of its Anatolian context. When identifying the recipients as Jews or Jewish converts, readers are unable to deal satisfactorily with Paul's discussion of the law (3:15–4:11), circumcision (5:1–12) and the complex allegory of Hagar and Sarah (4:21–31). Following a succinct introduction to the academic issues, Elliott describes known Anatolian religious practices. She first describes the divine function of Anatolian Law and concomitant juridical power. Then she moves to the major data for her thesis: the mother goddess Cybele and her consort/slave Attis. Of particular importance is her description of the *galli*, following Attis, who castrate themselves in servitude to the Mother of the Gods.

Up to this point Elliott has documented her work very well from both primary and secondary resources. For the rest of her study such documentation begins to disappear. She wishes to read Galatians in light of the Anatolian context she has just described. As she indicates in her introduction, this is new territory for a NT scholar, so her thesis will need to stand on its own merit. She believes Paul's problem with the law refers not to Jewish Law but to the commands and power of the mother goddess (Hagar in the allegory of 4:21–31). Addressing the cult of the mother goddess and using his background as a Jew, Paul explains to the recipients the power of the gospel. Elliott speaks of this as the

Triple Analogy (pp. 262, 274–75). The life of the letter's recipients may be directed by the juridical power of the mother goddess just as the life of the Jews was directed by the law. But in the new faith that Paul proclaims, life is given by the Spirit, not the law. A Triple Analogy. Or the self-centered life of the flesh will be controlled by castration in the goddess cult, by circumcision in Judaism, but by the sacrifice of Jesus in the gospel. A Triple Analogy (p. 279). So Paul's opposition to circumcision in Galatians is actually an attack on the castration cult, not Judaism as usually assumed by scholars (see 5:12).

Elliott's description of the mother goddess culture is fascinating. I suspect that few NT scholars will accept her reading of Galatians, however. Not many believe Paul was writing to the north Galatians. Those who do would assume that the historical context is Celtic (the term Galatians references Celts, as in Paul's scorn in 3:1), not the mother goddess. Nevertheless, the mother goddess cult did exist in north Galatia. Elliott is surely correct that the north Galatians would have known the mother goddess. So Paul could use references to the mother goddess and castration to combat any kind of life directed by law and any kind of mutilation used to control self-centeredness (the flesh).

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Towards a Relevant Christology in India Today: An Appraisal of the Christologies of John Hick, Juergen Moltmann and Jon Sobrino. By Hubert Manohar Watson. Frankfurt am Main and New York: Peter Lang, 2002. xi and 310 pages. Paper. $62.95.

How can a genuinely Indian Christology be articulated in the religiously pluralistic and economically challenging context of India? How do the people of India respond to Jesus' question "Who do you say I am?" in their life situation? These are the main questions explored in this book, a revised version of the doctoral dissertation of Watson, who teaches at the Karnataka Theological College, Mangalore, India.

The book analyzes the relevance of different contemporary approaches to Christology from an Indian perspective (p. 7). He makes a conscious attempt to introduce the problem in the prevailing context in which the Indian Christians live and the contextual significance of such an endeavor. The third chapter discusses the development of Indian Christology primarily in the twentieth century.

Watson contends that "In order to make faith in Christ more relevant and meaningful [for India], Christology should be done in the Indian context using Indian culture, Indian way of life, and Indian thought-forms" (p. 52). "Mere import or translation of the Christologies . . . done in Western contexts have only little relevance in India. Since christological constructions respond to particular contexts with their particular questions in their particular language, not all of these constructions effectively respond to Indian needs" (p. 260).

In an apparent contradiction of his own argument, however, the author selects three non-Indian Western theologians—John Hick, Juergen Moltmann, and Jon Sobrino—as major contributors to his work. Watson's rationale for such selections is that Westerners have contributed a great deal in articulating Christian dogmas (p. 7). Although one can never underestimate the contributions of these great theologians, it would be more relevant if Indian theologians, who are already in the struggle of developing theology in India, were selected.

For instance, instead of Hick, who faces the author's strong disapproval for his theological approach, a preference for an Indian counterpart such as Stanley Samartha would have enriched his christological perspectives in the context of religious pluralism. Similarly, the theology of the cross by Moltmann could have been represented through the work of Indian theologian M. M. Thomas, to whom the author briefly refers. No doubt Moltmann's theology on suffering can have a huge impact on the suffering masses in India of all faith orientations, but focusing on the cross as a common symbol for all faiths could be problematic in that pluralistic context. Instead of a symbol, one needs to consider drawing "symbols" together in dialogue for their common struggle against the oppressive structures that enslave them.

Regarding the use of liberation theology and its Marxist social analysis for India, the warning of theologians such as A. P. Nirmal cannot be ignored. He argues that, given the context of the caste system, which is the primary cause for economic hardship and exploitative structure in India, Marxist analysis of the society is not an adequate option, although it is not totally irrelevant.

This book inspires readers to open up to the challenges of religious plurality around them in their faith and witness. It is not the doctrinal rightness that matters but rather to confront faith through practical engagement with others in solving common sociopolitical and economic issues. In short, despite several questions, this book is an important addition to the literature of Indian Christian theology, and it enables students to become familiar with various debates in Christology in the contemporary world.

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God in the Raging Waters. By Paul Blom. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007. Lutheran Voices Series. 93 pages. Paper. $10.99.

So what does a bishop do when in short succession two of the greatest American natural disasters of modern times—Hurricanes Katrina and Rita—devastate great swaths of his/her synod? A good one, like Bishop Paul Blom of the ELCA's Texas-Louisiana Synod, does what bishops always do—goes visiting. *God in the Raging Waters* is Bishop Blom's "travelogue" in which he chronicles multiple episcopal visitations—his own and those of neighboring colleague bishop Ronald Warren.

Blom's central claim in the book is straightforward and oft-repeated throughout: "When disaster strikes in any form—flood, famine, drought, fire, war, plague—God comes calling. God comes in the form of those who respond to a divine nudge to do something in response to the disaster." Story upon story is told about efforts great and small, halting and heroic, that have contributed to rebuilding homes, work places, schools, and, most important, people's lives.

Since he has been a good friend for more than a dozen years, I can vouch that Blom writes like he speaks—calmly and often understatedly, but clearly and even at times elegantly. *Raging Waters* is neither self-aggrandizing nor Pollyannaish in praising Lutheran Disaster Relief and the many other faith-based humanitarian organizations that have supplemented and often surpassed governmental relief efforts. He acknowledges that imperfect responses were made in some cases and that even the strongest congregational cords can fray in the wake of devastating flood waters.

It is fitting that the final chapter is titled "Resurrection and New Life." From start to final period, Blom's book is an Easter story of inspiration, courage within the common people, and faithful response on the part of those who amid raging filthy waters remember the calm clean baptismal waters. While not its intended purpose, *Raging Waters* is also a rejoinder to those who see bishops as bureaucrats or synods and churchwide agencies as unnecessary regulatory entities. In times of trial, these expressions of church bind us together and facilitate rapid response.

Michael L. Cooper-White
Gettysburg Lutheran Seminary

Living Lutheran: Renewing Your Congregation. By David Daubert. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007. Lutheran Voices Series. 96 pages. Paper. $10.99.

That David Daubert's is a "Lutheran voice" is indisputable; that he resonates with the unchurched likewise so. Having grown up on the fringe of the church, the author feels in his bones what it's like to be a spiritual seeker. He exudes a yearning to help others heed God's great missionary mandate. Having found faith in full measure, this impassioned renewer of the church writes "in an engaging conversational style," as noted by cover endorser William Avery. If there is a minor flaw, the subtitle's implication that we can renew congregations belies Daubert's cruciform clarity that transformation comes only by Spirit-agency.

The book rehearses the oft-assessed demise of Christendom, noting that the church has moved from center to periphery in our postmodern context. Faithful disciples inevitably will find themselves countercultural creatures. What will sustain us on the journey, recognizes Daubert, is a clear sense of direction or purpose and a guiding set of principles that remind a faith community of both mooring and horizon. Going beyond theory, Daubert describes in lively and personal vignettes how to practice midwifery for both purpose statement and principles.

Among the more lively passages in this parish renewal primer is the story of when Orpah, considered a hillbilly by some of the more prim and proper at Hilltop Church, accepted Pastor Daubert's invitation to come to worship. "Not everyone will cuss out the greeter to get through the frontlines of the church's defense, but Orpah wasn't going to take no for an answer" (p. 60). May the Orpahs abound!

In a book both personal and poignant, Daubert does not hesitate to share his own faith journey and that of his family. Traveling simultaneously as both churchwide staffer and parish pastor, David's is a journey worth following. Daubert's first book, *Living Lutheran*, should not be his last.

Michael L. Cooper-White

***God's Being Is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*.** By Eberhard Jüngel. Translated by John Webster. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001. 142 pages. $31.95.

This volume is a retranslation of Tübingen theologian Eberhard Jüngel's little classic of Barth-interpretation by Oxford professor John Webster, foremost spokesperson for Jüngel in the English-speaking world. Originally published in the early 1960s, the book continues to be relevant today because it is a pivotal text from German Protestantism that presented the notion of God as suffering and even, in the history of the second person of the Trinity, capable of dying, a view that continues to influence both contemporary theology and piety.

In the introduction, Webster notes that Jüngel's treatise can be understood as a "sustained essay" in what might be termed "philosophical dogmatics" (p. x). The point of Jüngel's work is to argue that fidelity to Barth's view of God entails the position that a real relation between God's being-for-self *and* for us entails a radical historicity of God by means of God's identification with Jesus Christ. Hence, we cannot posit or assume an abstract, static deity anterior to God's action in Jesus Christ.

The external occasion for Jüngel's work here was to move beyond a debate between the radical Bultmannian Herbert Braun, who stressed Christian existence free of an objectivist ontology of the divine, and Helmut Gollwitzer, who argued for a critical realism with regard to God's being. Jüngel's point, in Webster's words, is that if "God's immanent being is inseparable from his economic being, then theology is not required to choose between an objective and a subjective orientation, or between dogmatics and hermeneutics. God is the event of his radical historical presence in Jesus Christ" (p. xii).

From this perspective, Jüngel's work offers helpful outlooks on language, history, and ontology. Seeking to safeguard the autonomy of revelation, Jüngel as a Barthian sees language as offering interpretations, not illustrations, of revelation. Since God's external acts and inner life are one, God "corresponds" to himself (pp. 36, 103, 111). Furthermore, God's unity is best seen as established in trinitarian perichoresis, the mutual interpenetration of the persons of the trinity. God is God's act—not a reality behind or anterior to the economic action of God. In historical events in which God acts to save, God's inner trinitarian being is "reiterated" (p. 110).

While Jüngel is not as widely known to a North American audience as he deserves to be, this book helps further establish his credentials. This work obviously will appeal to Barth experts and those interested in trinitarian theology. Thoughtful pastors and other theologically trained parish leaders will find it helpful as well.

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But Is It All True? The Bible and the Question of Truth. Edited by Alan G. Padgett and Patrick R. Keifert. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006. 169 pages. Paper. $16.00.

The contributors to this collection of essays agree on the answer to the title question. Yes, the Bible is true, but what do people of faith mean when they say that the Bible is true? Moving quickly beyond questions of historical accuracy and diluting the Bible into a series of true propositions, the authors offer perspectives on the definition and meaning of truth as well as what it means for a book such as the Bible to claim truth in a postmodern culture that blurs the lines between fact, fiction, news, and entertainment.

Prior to the inception of this book, the editors, along with the late Donald Juhl and other conversation partners, studied the use of the Bible in theological education and explored biblical truth as being communicated through rhetorical rationality. In this approach one considers the historical situation and moral environment of the authors and assumed readers of the Bible as well as the actual text. Truth is conveyed through this examination.

Contributors to this volume, philosophers and theologians, reflect on the topic of biblical truth from this perspective of rhetorical rationality. Dennis T. Olson examines truth from a Pentateuchal perspective, noting that a hermeneutic of suspicion and questioning of truth begins in the Garden of Eden. From Genesis on, those in the Bible question what is true and what is not. Furthermore, truth in the Pentateuch is as much a relational term, describing trust between two parties, as it is tool for evaluating information. Because of this relational aspect of truth, the accepted truth about God developed over time through experience and community. Abraham, Jacob, and Moses all had interactions with God that led them to deeper trust in God and a fuller understanding of both the truth of God's existence and the truth God conveyed to them about their lives and the world around them. Throughout the Pentateuch truth also was informed by experiences from outside the religious tradition of Yahweh. All of these experiences and viewpoints created an understanding of truth mediated by the fact that no human had complete vision of God and God's promises but only a partial glimpse. Truth and trust are intricately intertwined not only within the pages of the Bible but in the life of the reader.

Responding to Nicholas Wolterstoff's speech-act theory, whereby the biblical text not only conveys information from God to the reader but propels the reader into action, Mark I. Wallace suggests that "biblical truth is the ethical performance of what the Spirit's interior testimony is prompting the reader to do in the light of her encounter with the scriptural texts." Adapting Augustine's love ethic, Wallace further suggests that biblical truth cannot remain within the pages of scripture but is the acting out of the biblical injunctions to love God and one's neighbor. As one's actions are perceived as being in line with these commands, so is biblical truth understood and conveyed.

The book envisions a readership of theological educators, but it is helpful reading for all who are involved in the study, preaching, and teaching of scripture. The reader will benefit from the diverse perspectives of the contributors and be challenged to come to a deeper understanding of what it means to say that the Bible is true.

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Understanding Islam: An Introduction. By C. T. R. Hewer. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006. xiv and 255 pages. Cloth. $35.00.

This is an interesting explication of Islam that manages to be not only detailed but also easily accessible, making it worthwhile reading for both the novice and the intermediate student of Islam. The book is aimed toward a primarily Christian, Western audience, which accounts for its two primary emphases.

First, the author attempts to correct some common misunderstandings of Islam and to offer a more nuanced and sympathetic portrayal than one often receives from the media and other popular sources. Second, he makes repeated helpful connections to Christian beliefs and practices, which facilitate for Christians thoughtful consideration of the similarities and differences between their faith and the faith of their fellow sons and daughters of Abraham.

One example will suffice. A point of contention between Christianity and Islam is the doctrine of the Trinity, with Islam refusing to recognize any form of plurality in God. After explaining the historical reasons for such a refusal, Hewer analyzes the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and suggests several ways in which Christians may actually find themselves closer to the Islamic position than is traditionally assumed.

Hewer organizes the book in ten chapters, each of which draws upon and expands the study of the previous chapters. However, he states in the introduction that it is possible, after reading the first three, which form the basis on which all subsequent chapters are built, to skip around according to one's interest. In any case, each chapter addresses both the historical and the contemporary contexts, examining what often are considered anomalies between practice and theory. So, for example, the question of suicide and suicide bombers is discussed, as well as the relationship between Muslims and Jews.

In summary, this is an excellent study of Islam and also a superior resource for any pastor or teacher who needs a one-volume reference on Islam on her shelf.

Kristin Johnston Largen
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Briefly Noted

House Church and Mission: The Importance of Household Structures in Early Christianity. By Roger W. Gehring (Peabody, $29.95). G. concentrates on the role of the house churches in the spread of the gospel. After surveying scholarship on the house church, he discusses the role houses played in the pre-Easter period, then traces it from the early church in Jerusalem through the Pauline mission, the post-Pauline letters to the Colossians and Ephesians, the Pastoral Epistles and 2 and 3 John. Finally, in the most significant chapter in the book, he discusses "The Ecclcesiological and Missional Function and Significance of House Churches" (pp. 288–312). G. gives high marks to Acts for historical accuracy about house churches. They provided a network useful for proclamation. They were the locus from which the mission left and served as missionary support bases. They were more than gathering places for the community, as they provided a cadre of people to serve as colleagues to Paul and others in missionary activity. Thus G. documents the significance of the house church. He does not discuss the fact that many houses were also the workshops of the people living there, and workshops often were places of discussion and education. G. wrote this as a doctoral dissertation at Tübingen University in 1998 and published it in 2000. The English version is welcome indeed, since this book adds a dimension to our understanding of how the early church witnessed and grew. It deserves wide reading. *Edgar Krentz*

Fortress Press has reprinted Jennifer A. Glancy's ***Slavery in Early Christianity***, originally published by Oxford University Press in 2000, in paperback ($22). G. describes the brutal life of slaves, with special attention to the sexual debasement of female slaves. She shows how the slave culture affects early Christian social practices and institutions. Her focus on slaves' bodies makes this a valuable resource for understanding the early church. Fortress does us all a service by making this reprint available at low cost. *EK*

Arthur E. Baue, a distinguished surgeon and professor of medicine at Washington University and Yale University medical schools, gives us a practical guide to the health care system and to personal ways to maintain health in ***Doctor, Can I Ask You a Question? Your Health Care Questions Answered*** (Xlibris, $24.99). An active Christian, he writes out of concern for people everywhere. He writes clearly, with medical authority, and so has produced a book that deserves wide use. You can order the book at *www.Xlibris.com. EK*

Leif Carlsson illuminates the conceptual world of 2 Cor 12:1–8 in ***Round Trips to Heaven: Otherworldly Travelers in Early Judaism and Christianity*** (Lund University Department of History and Anthropology of Religions, SEK 334) by carefully examining the relevant texts in 1 Enoch 14:8–16:3; 2 Enoch 3:1–35:3; Apocalypse of Abraham 15:1–29:21; Apocalypse of Zephaniah 5:1–12:8; Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah 6:1–11:43; the Life of Adam and Eve 35:1–42:2; and Third Baruch (he includes a Greek text and translation on pp. 356–72). These heavenly journeys have two functions: identity formation and death-informing. Paul's heavenly trip clearly was identity-forming but not death-informing. C. concentrates on parallels in early Judaism. He does not consider possibilities from the Greco-Roman side, e.g., in some Platonic myths, in Hermetic texts, or the so-called Mithras Liturgy. His work is valuable for what it covers but does not examine the entire range of possibilities. *EK*

Christian relations to Judaism became an open problem with the end of World War II, especially for Lutherans. In ***Presumed Guilty: How the Jews Were Blamed for the Death of Jesus*** (Fortress, $16) Peter J. Tomson, Professor of New Testament and Patristics at the University of Brussels, describes the New Testament narratives of Jesus' trial and execution as pro-Roman in tone; it was the priestly leaders, the Sadducees, who condemned Jesus and took him to Pilate. Matthew and John stress an anti-Jewish tone, which had terrible effects in subsequent history. Written for a general audience but based on an in-depth earlier study, this work deserves wide use. It belongs in parish libraries. *EK*

Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words, edited by William D. Mounce with the assistance of D. Matthew Smith and Mile V. Van Pelt (Zondervan, $29.99), is a tool that can be useful in preaching and teaching ministry. The expository articles, based on the NIV translation, give basic information about word meanings. Hebrew-English and Greek-English dictionaries supplement the English definitions. The dictionary would be a useful addition to a parish library. Users should read the introductory essay, "How to Do Word Studies," to make best use of this tool. A pastor would do even better with a concordance and the Bauer-Danker lexicon of the Greek New Testament. Useful, but not absolutely necessary. *EK*

Funk on Parables: Collected Essays (Polebridge, $22) reprints thirteen essays on parables from 1966–2003. Bernard Brandon Scott's Introduction (pp. 1–24) describes Robert Funk's growth and change. Anyone interested in either Funk or parable interpretation will want to read this collection. *EK*

The seventeen essays in ***Intertextual Studies in Ben Sira and Tobit,*** edited by Jeremy Corley and Vincent Skemp (Catholic Biblical Association, $13) honor well biblical scholar Alexander A. Di Lella, O.F.M., who published significant books and many articles on Daniel and especially the wisdom theology of Ben Sira. The five essays on Tobit and eleven on Ben Sira interpret both theologically and point out items significant for New Testament interpretation. Lutherans generally pay too little attention to the apocryphal literature, even though Luther included the books in his complete German translation. This volume might persuade them to read them more often and more carefully. *EK*

The second edition of ***Four Gospels, One Jesus? A Symbolic Reading*** by Richard A. Burridge (Eerdmans, $16) incorporates material on reception history, on the use of the Revised Common Lectionary to proclaim and teach Jesus, and recent scholarship on the historical Jesus. Pastors will find this book practical, informative, and useful and may wish to add it their parish library. It's a good book made better. *EK*

Brendan Lehane's ***Early Celtic Christianity,*** originally issued in 1968, is now available in a reprint (Continuum, $16.95). Lehane desceribes in popular fashion the story of early Christianity in Ireland. An interesting, if somewhat dated, read. *EK*

Preaching Helps

Third Sunday after Pentecost—Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, Series A

Preaching Saints

The questions I am asked about preaching often follow a common theme—telling personal stories, using media, teaching the Bible in sermons. Recently I have been asked about saints; specifically, when a saint's day falls on a Sunday, what does one preach? This set of Preaching Helps includes a discussion of the festival of Peter and Paul, Apostles (June 29), which falls on a Sunday this year. Will you preach on the readings appointed for this feast or those appointed as Proper 13?

In the congregations I served, opportunities to preach the gospel in and through the lives of saints were infrequent, so I regularly exercised this option when it presented itself. In one congregation, St. Luke's Day provided a wonderful opportunity to introduce the laying on of hands and anointing; in another, the feast of Mary Magdalene, the apostle to the apostles, afforded a powerful proclamation on the ministry of women.

In the introduction to the *New Proclamation Commentary on Feasts*, Gordon W. Lathrop offers the opposite perspective. "Keep Sunday as the most important festival," Lathrop writes, "the day of truth-telling, open assembly. Use the lectionary in the light of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of the Spirit."[1] "If a lesser festival or commemoration falls on a Sunday," Lathrop suggests, "remember the priority of Sunday. Do not replace the lectionary readings of Sunday or make this primary Sunday festival into a festival of the saint. But do consider welcoming the witness of the saint, in some way, into the preaching of the day and the name of the saint into the final thanksgiving of the intercessions."[2]

With deep respect to Dr. Lathrop, I am inclined to preach on Peter and Paul come June.

Whatever approach you choose, it is helpful to consider your faith community and select saints who have a special resonance, such as the name day of a parish, a cultural affinity, a local interest, or a local need, rather than trying to cover them all. The goal is to portray the saints as "models of the saved, examples of people who trusted in God and whose deaths can be seen as transparent to the one death that saves us all."[3]

Thomas Mammoser, author of these Preaching Helps, loves saints, particularly those of the early church. After graduating from Trinity Lutheran Seminary in 1984, Tom did additional graduate work in Patristics at the University of Virginia before returning to parish work. So, in addition to the discussions of Peter and Paul, you will find quotes from and references to patristic saints such as Augustine, Chrysostom, Tertullian, and Cyprian. Tom is pastor of Peace Lutheran Church in Gaylord, Michigan, where he has served for more than ten years. Peace is a congregation of about 400 members and the only ELCA congregation in the county. His first congregations were near Rogers City, Michigan. Tom and his wife, Sandy, have been married for 27 years and are the parents of Claire, who is 11. Tom's first degree (1980) was in Music Composition and History from Bowling Green State University.

As an introduction to these preaching helps, Tom writes: "Through the months of June and July, we begin in the Gospel of Matthew with the Sermon on the Mount, continue with the 'Missionary' discourse, and conclude with the kingdom parables of Matthew 13—three of Matthew's five discourses. The epistles come from the heart of Romans treating the righteousness of God and the consequences of our justification. And along the way we encounter a rich variety of prophetic and historical texts from the Hebrew Scriptures. I do not have the confidence of the disciples who, when Jesus asked them, 'Have you understood all this?' could answer simply, 'Yes' (Matt 13:51). Nevertheless, I have pulled out of my treasure some things that are new and some that are old, sometimes so old that I no longer remember where or how I came across the ideas. I hope these small offerings will inspire you and bless those to whom you preach."

It has become a tradition in our house that I edit a set of Preaching Helps on New Year's Day. So, although these reflections will not reach you until April, know that I am remembering you in my prayers as we mark a new year. May God grant health and blessing to you and those you love. And may God surround you with saints to strengthen, accompany, and guide you as you preach the lectionary in the light of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of the Spirit.

In Christ,

Craig A. Satterlee, Editor of Preaching Helps
http://craigasatterlee.com

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1. In *New Proclamation Commentary on Feasts, Holy Days, and Other Celebrations*, ed. David B. Lott (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 12.
2. *Ibid.*, 14.
3. *Ibid.*, 13.

Third Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 9) June 1, 2008

Deuteronomy 11:18–21, 26–28
Psalm 46
Romans 1:16–17; 3:22b–28 [29–31]
Matthew 7:21–29

The text from Matthew is the very end of the Sermon on the Mount, yet we haven't heard a text from this first discourse in Matthew's Gospel since Ash Wednesday, with its Lenten call to take up the traditional Jewish forms of piety: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. Prior to that, because of the early date of Easter this year, the feast of the Transfiguration prevented us even getting to the Beatitudes. So here we have the conclusion to a sermon that only a few will have heard through the church's lectionary, perhaps for several years.

Given the lack of biblical literacy in many of our congregations, the people may need a simple review of what the Sermon says before its conclusion makes any sense.

This text is much more than a warning against failing to practice what we preach, although it is also that. Jesus declares that saying "Lord, Lord" will not be enough to bring us to salvation. We must also be doing the will of his Father in heaven, a will that is expressed in the law. Deuteronomy tells us that those who obey the commandments of the Lord will be blessed, and those who do not will be cursed. Matthew would agree. In Deuteronomy those who turn from the commandments of the Lord are said to be following other gods—language that reminds us of Luther's interpretation of the first commandment in the Large Catechism.

These words are addressed to active followers of Christ, those who are in church week after week, not only saying the right things but also doing the right things. They have been effective disciples; their faith worked! They have prophesied, cast out demons, and done many deeds of power in the name of the Lord. And yet the Lord declares that he never knew them. For the professional church workers who likely read this journal, it's a terrifying prospect. Preachers need to consider the impact these words must have on those who already feel like failed disciples, who are fully aware of their sins and their inability to live up to even their own expectations, much less do deeds of power.

Like Chaucer's good parson, who "taught the holy lore of Christ and his apostles twelve, but first he followed it himself," Jesus says that the only ones who are safe in the storm are those who "do" the words of the sermon. A Christian life has to be practiced, expressed in deeds as well as in words. True faith translates piety into practice, until this faith becomes a part of our character, as the text from Deuteronomy envisions.

And yet, given what Jesus said previously, not even these can count on being secure. This contrast between building a house on rock or sand might remind the contemporaries of Jesus of the temple in Jerusalem, a house built on rock by the Herods, and the seacoast, including the various temples of the Romans, not to mention Pilate's home in Caesarea. Later in the Gospel (Matt 16:18) Jesus will promise to build his church on the foundation of Peter's (the rock's) confession of faith.

Given that these texts come at the beginning of June, it may be useful to ask what plans the congregation has made to build upon the foundation that has been laid for them. Among all our plans for the summer, have we included time to talk about "these words" with each other and teach them to our children? The biggest problem with biblical literacy is that many of our parishioners stopped studying the Bible when they were confirmed. About what other subject would we think we have learned everything we needed to know at age 14? How long would our marriages last if the only things we knew about adult relationships with the other sex were what we already understood before we got to high school?

The other question, of course, is how all of this squares with the text from Romans with its emphasis on faith. Dietrich Bonhoeffer points the way in his discussion of the text in *The Cost of Discipleship*. He says that contrast between those who "say" and those who "do"

> does not mean the ordinary contrast between word and deed, but two different relations between man and God. . . . The first is the one who justifies himself through his confession, and the second, the doer, the obedient man who builds his life on the grace of God. Here a man's speaking denotes self-righteousness, his doing is a token of grace, to which there can be no other response save that of humble and obedient service.[1]

This, it seems to me, is exactly Paul's point. The danger of relying on our confession of faith is exactly that. It is *our* confession of faith and, as such, really nothing more than another pious work. It becomes just another false foundation upon which to build, another false god in which we mistakenly put our trust. Those who do the will of the Father do it so unconsciously that it is a secret even to them (Matt 6:4, 6, 18). Those who inherit the kingdom are just as surprised as those who do not (Matt 25:31–46). Their obedience to the commands of the Father and the words of Jesus are the response of humble servants who look not at themselves or their spiritual condition but to the Lord, whom they seek to follow. TM

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 10)
June 8, 208

Hosea 5:15–6:6
Psalm 33:1–12
Romans 4:13–25
Matthew 9:9–13, 18–26

This is one of those times when the reading from the Hebrew Scriptures speaks so much more poignantly than the others. The Lord had instructed Hosea to marry a "wife of whoredom" (Hos 1:2) as a symbol of the Lord's commitment to Israel despite her unfaithfulness. This marital imagery for the relationship between God and the people is used by several of the OT prophets (Isa 61:10; Jer 31:32; Ezekiel 16), Jesus himself (John 3:29–30), and a NT prophet (Revelation 21). At first, Hosea prophesies that the Lord will lead Israel back to the wilderness (Hos 2:14–23) on a kind of second honeymoon. There they will rekindle their love for each other, and Israel will respond to the Lord as she did in her youth, the first time the people and their God wandered alone in the desert.

Our text presents a much darker possibility. The Lord's other (second?) strategy for winning back the affections of his wife is a legal separation. God will abandon Israel in the hope that absence will make her heart grow fonder. God says, "I will return again to my place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face. In their distress they will beg my favor. . . ." Hosea proclaims the God who is not with us, who does not answer our prayers or come to our assistance.

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[1] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller, with revisions by Irmgard Booth (New York: Simon and Schuster/Touchstone, [1937] 1995), 193–94.

The Lord hopes that our restless hearts, having tried all the other gods without finding what we seek, ultimately will lead us back to our true spouse. Readers may wish to investigate the provocative thesis of Ephraim Radner in his book *The End of the Church: A Pneumatology of Christian Division in the West.*[2] Radner describes the church as "pneumatically abandoned" as a consequence of our ecclesial division.

The lectionary notes in the new study edition from Augsburg Fortress suggest that verses 6:1–3 "is the voice of God's people repenting,"[3] but I wonder. If that is the case, why does God resume his disappointed tone in v. 4? Israel's response sounds more like a false confidence, not a real reckoning with the depth of God's anger or hiddenness. She says that this will all pass quickly; in just two or three (metaphorical) days the Lord will relent and heal the people.

Is this the confession of guilt the Lord was seeking, or merely the people presuming on God's mercy? Perhaps these lines should be read satirically, as if the prophet is mocking their repentance. They seem to think that the Lord will come back *to them*, that the Lord's appearing is "as sure as the dawn" and "the spring rains that water the earth." But the gods of the Canaanites are the ones who are worshipped as being as predictable as the rhythms of nature. There is no need for real repentance when we are confident that the Lord will eventually give in to us. However, the God of Israel is a sovereign Lord as well as a jealous husband, and the dawn they see on the horizon is nothing else than the light of God's approaching judgment. Until the time that the people learn to return God's steadfast love (חסד, chesed), the marital separation stands.

Matthew presents a new divine strategy. Jesus, quoting Hosea, is still looking for mercy (ἔλεος, the word the LXX uses to translate חסד). When the Pharisees criticize Jesus for eating with tax collectors and sinners, he doesn't tell them that their objections are off target. These people are tax collectors and sinners. The woman with the hemorrhage and the leader of the synagogue both have sought the Lord in their distress, just as Hosea had prophesied. What the Pharisees fail to understand is that, after years of exile and absence, the Lord is also seeking out his faithless spouse, both tax collectors and Pharisees! The God "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" is creating something new.

The Lord is about to fulfill the promise made to Abraham so many centuries ago, that Abraham would become the father of many nations. This will come about through the righteousness of faith rather than through the law. Abraham's faith, however, is not the easy presumption upon God's goodwill against which Hosea prophesied. Abraham never lived to see any of God's promises fulfilled, and his faith was a constant struggle. The only part of Canaan he ever owned was his burial plot, he had few descendants, and they had not yet become a blessing to the world. Still, Abraham hoped against hope that, although he was already as good as dead, God would be faithful.

In a recent article, Bishop James Mauney discusses the surprising number of times Luther uses the word "cling" in conjunction with "faith."[4] This is precisely the way I would describe Abraham's faith. He held fast to the promise of God despite all the "evidence" that might cause him to waver.

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2. Ephraim Radner, *The End of the Church: A Pneumatology of Christian Division in the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998).

3. *Lectionary for Worship: Year A* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007), 227.

4. James F. Mauney, "Four Surprises," *Lutheran Forum* 41:4 (Winter, 2007), 35.

The recent revelations about Mother Teresa's spiritual struggles make her life an apt illustration of Abraham's faith as well. For her entire adult life she served the poorest of us, all the while lacking the spiritual comfort of God's presence. Nevertheless, constantly clinging to the promise of God, she continued to trust that God was blessing others through her work and that her faith in God was not misplaced.[5] TM

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 11)

June 15, 2008

Exodus 19:2–8a
Psalm 116:1–2, 12–19
Romans 5:1–8
Matthew 9:35–10:8 [9–23]

God's undeserved mercy and grace is the golden thread woven through all three of these pericopes: Israel's election, Christ's death for ungodly sinners, and the commissioning of the twelve apostles.

Israel stands at the foot of Mt. Sinai, preparing to receive the covenant of the law. But first, God puts the covenant into context in what could be read as a commentary on the prologue to the Ten Commandments: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Ex 20:2). The image of being borne up on eagles' wings appears again in the Song of Moses (*Attende, caelum,* Deut 32:11–12) in the very same context, the rescue from Egypt and the Lord's protection in the desert. In the book of Revelation (12:14) the woman, a symbol of Israel and the church, is given eagle's wings to escape into the wilderness from the serpent after it had been cast down from heaven by Michael and the angels, another image of a miraculous escape from death and evil. The Lord speaks of the nation as a "treasured possession." In effect, this is the marriage ceremony between God and Israel. The Lord says to the people: "I have chosen you for myself," and then asks, "Will you live with me in the covenant?" In response to the Lord's offer, the people take a solemn vow. God might have chosen any nation on earth, but God chose Israel as a sheer act of grace.

Patristic exegetes delighted in pointing out how "disqualified" the apostles were for ministry. John Chrysostom explains, for example, that while Mark lists the disciples in order of their dignity (Mk 3:16–19), Matthew does not follow Mark in this regard. Matthew's list puts Andrew ahead of James and John solely because of his relation to Simon Peter, and he puts Thomas ahead of himself. He identifies Judas by his hometown and as the one who betrayed Jesus only to distinguish him from the other Jude (Lk 6:16). Otherwise, he might more properly have called him "the unholy, the all unholy one." In the list are four lowly fisherman, two publicans, and a traitor.[6] And yet these are the chosen ones. Jesus might have chosen any persons to be his apostles. Indeed, he might have chosen many others from the crowds that followed him and heard his teaching (Matt 5:1, 7:28, 9:33). But he selected these twelve, as a sheer act of grace.

In 10:1 they are called disciples (μαθητας, students), but when Jesus gives them authority they become apostles (αποστολοι, ambassadors). They are commissioned and sent to do precisely the work that Jesus has been doing: casting out unclean spirits and curing disease and sickness. For now they were made physicians of bodies; only later will they be entrusted with the cure of souls, because, as of yet, the Spirit had not yet been given. Jesus had not yet been glorified (Jn 7:39). Jesus sent them out on their mission only after they had seen him do the very same things.[7] So they were not only authorized but also apprenticed by Jesus in a sort of training school for ministry. (Interesting parallels to the optional, second half of this reading may be found in *The Didache*, sections 11 and 12; see note 9.)

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[5] Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the "Saint of Calcutta,"* ed. Brian Kolodiejchuck (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

[6] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, 32:5. In *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed Philip Schaff (Series 1, Vol. 10), 213–14.

This same text from Romans was a part of the epistle for the Third Sunday of Lent. At that time, the emphasis may have fallen on our reconciliation with God through the death of Christ. Now, in keeping with the other pericopes, perhaps we should emphasize our spiritual condition, that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. Jesus' death for us sinners is the example beyond all others of a sheer act of grace.

Having established what justification is in chapters 3–4, in chapter 5 Paul begins to spin out the implications of being justified. The first is that we have reason to boast not in ourselves (Rom 3:27) but in our hope of sharing God's glory and also in our sufferings, because suffering leads to a hope that does not disappoint. The whole idea of boasting in our suffering could be an interesting launching point for a homily and another link to Matthew's Gospel. How do we minister to hurting people with the love that has been poured into our hearts other than by sharing their pain? I think of John Paul II as he allowed the world to watch while his body weakened and his health failed. In the way he died, he bore witness to the dignity of every human life, even life that suffers. Some of his meditations on suffering can be found in his book titled—very appropriately for this text—*Crossing the Threshold of Hope*.[8] TM

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 12)
June 22, 2008

Jeremiah 20:7–13
Psalm 86:1–10, 16–17
Romans 6:1b–11
Matthew 10:24–39

When I was an intern, there was a young woman in the congregation who had been arrested after being stopped for speeding. She had a number of other traffic violations for which she had failed to appear and an incredible pile of parking tickets, none of which she could afford to pay. My supervising pastor and I went to support her at her hearing, only to have her released into our custody. The judge gave her a long speech about how much time we had taken away from our important jobs to be there for her, and how she had better appreciate it, keep going to church, and learn some responsibility. I thought at the time that the connection the judge made between going to church and a good driving record was remarkable. Now, I've driven with enough parishioners over the years to know that he had certainly gotten it wrong. But even more surprising was his assumption that attending church would make this young woman a good citizen—a useful, contributing member of society.

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[7] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew,* 32:4.

[8] John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, ed. Vittorio Messori, trans. Jenny McPhee and Martha McPhee (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 60–68.

As this Gospel text makes clear, the assumption used to be the exact opposite. Jesus warned his disciples that they would be maligned and forced to face those who can kill the body but not the soul. He anticipated this opposition and tried to prepare his followers for it. The world would hate Christians, the God they worshipped, and the principles for which they stood.

Romans considered Christians superstitious atheists: superstitious because their religion was unfamiliar to the Romans and because Christians kept to themselves; atheists because they denied the existence of the gods and had the bad grace to refuse participation in their civic rituals. Moreover, early on there were all sorts of terrible rumors circulating about Christians and their secret meetings: that they ate a body and drank blood, worshipped a crucified criminal, and participated in orgiastic rituals (the agape or love feast). Christians were considered a threat, a danger to society, a counterculture that had nothing to do with decent, respectable people.

So perhaps we should be asking ourselves, Why doesn't the world hate us now, or at the very least distrust us? What has changed, that we no longer meet with the opposition that nearly every book of the NT warns will come to those who follow Christ? To the contrary, watching the recent political campaigns as candidates stumble all over themselves to declare their religiosity, or considering the myriad advocacy statements from our leadership, we think the church has a voice that should carry some weight in civil society. All of this assumes that the church is a respected institution from which citizens want to hear.

Has the world changed, or have we? Has our world become so thoroughly Christian that we should feel at home here, or have we Christians simply baptized the reigning culture and called it Christian? While the truth may be somewhere between those two options, we have grown very comfortable. One of the healthiest things that could happen to modern Christianity, at least in the Western world, is for it to recover its sense of being an outsider, of living differently from the prevailing norm.

Consider Jeremiah's experience. Called to be a prophet to bring a message of repentance to his people, he thought that being called to such a mission implied that the people would listen. In fact, what Jeremiah experienced was sarcasm and ridicule, which hurt him doubly because it became clear to him that not only was he being rejected, but so was the Lord and the covenant. It was a shock to Jeremiah that his message only brought slander and abuse. He became a laughingstock and the butt of the people's jokes; he was imprisoned and tortured for his message. In words that border on blasphemy he accuses God of seducing or deceiving him. He felt that God had used him and tossed him aside.

Jeremiah's experience is the ordeal of many of those who come to Christ looking for peace but finding a sword. Nowhere did God tell Jeremiah that his ministry would be easy, only that God had a message for him to deliver. Where do so many of us get the idea that being a disciple should make life easier or that our message will be welcome?

Jesus begins this section of Matthew by saying that "it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher and the slave like the master." He goes on to explain that disciples should not expect an easy time in following a rejected and crucified messiah. Fortunately, Paul points out another way in which we are "like the master." We have, through baptism, been joined with him in a death like his. Our imitation of Christ extends past the suffering and rejection a disciple should expect to the victory over sin, death, and the devil that is given by grace to the baptized.

One of my seminary professors, Walt Bouman, encapsulated much of what he taught into pithy little sayings that have a way of sticking with you. One that deals directly with the topic of today's passage from Paul's letter to the Romans went like this: "God and I have a very equitable arrangement. God loves to forgive, and I love to sin. So I keep on doing what I do, so that God can keep on doing what God does." I don't know whether it was original with him, but it doesn't matter. He said this in jest, of course, to point out how silly it was to believe that, since God's grace comes to us underserved, it doesn't matter how we live. "Should we continue in sin that grace should abound?" could be read as "Should I deliberately sin so that God's love may be even more underserved?" It's a rhetorical question, of course, with an equally rhetorical answer: "By no means! May it never happen!"

Behind the whole discussion is the assumption that, since we have died to sin and are alive to God in Christ, we cannot go on living in sin. We were buried with Christ in baptism, not just so that we may live with him (although the text says this later) but so that we might walk—"walk" is an ethical term that has to do with how we live—in newness of life.

Here is our connection to the other pericopes. Paul is explicating what the obedience of faith (Rom 1:5) means. Empowered by the Spirit of holiness, we are dead to our old lives of sin. We live differently than the rest of the world, in ways that they may even see as dangerous and subversive. TM

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 13) June 29, 2008

Jeremiah 28:5–9
Psalm 13
Romans 6:12–23
Matthew 10:40–42

The lesson from Matthew is not really about hospitality; it is still a part of the missionary discourse. Jesus had sent his disciples out with authority to preach and heal. He told them to rely on the hospitality of those to whom they were sent and warned them that not everybody would receive them gladly. He even had a warning about the consequences for those towns that refuse to receive the apostles. This text is the flip side of that curse. Those who receive Jesus' apostles as prophets, righteous persons, or simply as his disciples will receive their reward. Those who welcome a prophet receive a word of the Lord from the prophet's lips. Those who welcome a righteous person who knows and can teach the way of the Lord receive instruction. And those who receive disciples, by refreshing them on their journey, will be counted as fellow disciples.

But there is more. Jesus says that the community must welcome the prophet *in the name of a prophet*, the righteous person *in the name of a righteous person*, and the disciple *in the name of a disciple*. It is entirely possible to make someone welcome but not receive them as what they have been sent to be. The story of the two prophets Jeremiah and Hananiah is a good example. Jeremiah had told Judah that the exile of the people from their land was going to be a long and difficult one; they should get used to living in Babylon, build homes there, and even pray for the welfare of that nation. Of course, this isn't what they wanted to hear, so the people shopped around for a prophecy more to their liking and found Hananiah, who told them that it would all be over in just two years. At that time the Lord would restore the nation, their king, and the temple. All Jeremiah can do is say, "I wish it were true, but let's wait and see which one of us is the real prophet of the Lord." Of course, we know the result; that's why there is a book of Jeremiah today and not a book of Hananiah. For every Jeremiah with a difficult word there is a Hananiah who will tell us what we want to hear. And most often the latter is the one who gets the crowd.

Hananiah is a temple prophet, a religious leader. One of the lesser-known stories in Scripture is the story of Micaiah and his conflict with the court prophets, political advisors (1 Kings 22:1–28). (False prophets, it seems, almost always make their living delivering oracles. *The Didache*, an early text that has many parallels to Matthew's Gospel, tells the early Christian community that a false prophet can be recognized in two ways: a failure to live by one's own teaching, and a request for money.[9]) Micaiah's story is an interesting one that, probably because of its length, never appears in any lectionary series. There are many parallels to the conflict between Jeremiah and Hananiah: a king searching for the word he wants to hear, one prophet standing against the crowd, the wait-and-see attitude of Micaiah toward the false prophets. This other scriptural story would be a very apt illustration for the story prescribed in our lectionary.

We like to think that our wills are our own, that we are under our own control. But Paul tells us that this is nothing but a bit of hubris, a self-asserting pride that simply isn't true. We can see this even in the way we use our language. We call it "driving under the influence." We say that he was a "slave to his lust" or that she "couldn't help herself." That's absolutely right; none of us can help ourselves. There is no such thing as neutrality in the contest between the kingdom of God and the dominion of sin. We are slaves either of sin or of God. The language is reminiscent of Matthew's two ways and the warning against trying to serve two masters (Matt 6:24; 7:13–14). In baptism God took possession of us; God became our master and we became God's slaves. We have been freed, not to live as we want, because such an independent will is not only quite impossible, but living as we want is the very definition of living according to the flesh. We have been freed from sin to live as *God* wants, which releases us both from our own control and from the power of death. St. Augustine summarizes the relationship between grace and the captivity of our wills by God when he prays following his conversion, "Give me the grace to do as you command, and command me to do what you will!"[10] TM

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[9] *Didache* 11:7–12. The text may be found in many places, including Volume 1 of The Library of Christian Classics, *Early Christian Fathers*, ed. Cyril Richardson, 176, or the commentary in the Hermeneia series by Kurt Niederwimmer, 178. Online translations may be found at *www.earlychristianwritings.com.*

[10] Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* 10:29, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin, 1961), 233.

Peter and Paul, Apostles
June 29, 2008

Acts 12:1–11
Psalm 87:1–3, 5–7
2 Timothy 4:6–8, 17–18
John 21:15–19

Even the one feast day that happens to fall on a Sunday in this two-month period reflects the central dialectic of these two months: Jew and Gentile, law and grace, works and faith. The texts for the feast, however, do not reflect this dichotomy (as in Gal 1:18–2:14 or Acts 15:1–29) but instead are about martyrdom. Of course, the deaths of Peter and Paul are not described in Scripture, but Jesus prophesies Peter's death in the Gospel, and Paul suspects that the time of his "departure" has arrived in the epistle.

The Feast of Saints Peter and Paul is one of the oldest in the Christian calendar, observed at least since the year 258. It has been of such importance ever since that it traditionally marked the end of the first quarter of the season of Pentecost.[11] The two men led lives that were entirely different, yet they are commemorated on the same day.

Peter was a fisherman and shepherd, an unsophisticated man from the rural places of Galilee. Paul was a city man, a Roman citizen who spoke Greek and was well acquainted with the cultural life of the empire.

Peter followed Jesus from nearly the beginning of his ministry and was not only a part of Jesus' inner circle but recognized even before Jesus died as the spokesman for the disciples. Paul never knew Christ until the day the resurrected Jesus knocked him off his horse with a blast of blinding light. Both of them, when they were called as apostles, had their names changed: Saul became Paul, and Simon became Peter. Both of them had visions that would lead them to change their minds completely about who were among the chosen people (Acts 9 and 10).

Peter was the traditionalist, preferring that those who would worship Christ as Israel's messiah first become Jews, a part of the chosen people. Paul was the innovator, who recognized that the Lord had called the Gentiles and given them the Holy Spirit without the Jewish law, and regarded Christianity as the fulfillment of God's promise that he would bless all people through the faith of Abraham. Accordingly, Peter is remembered as the great apostle to the Jews and Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles. Between the two of them they epitomized the whole of the Christian mission.

But their different visions of the church and mission strategies led to conflict between the two of them, a conflict that was resolved only when they submitted their cases to the apostles in Jerusalem, and it was agreed that only the provisions of the covenant binding on resident aliens in the land would be imposed on Gentiles (Acts 15:19–20; Lev 17:8–18:30). James was the one, however, who brokered the agreement.

Paul faced constant controversy and opposition from the congregations he founded. They questioned his credentials as an apostle, the authenticity of his gospel, his abilities as a preacher and pastor. Peter was universally respected within the church but had many opponents who came from outside the church, the Jewish and the Roman officials who imprisoned him and tried to get him to stop preaching about Christ.

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[11] 11. Philip H. Pfatteicher, *Festivals and Commemorations: Handbook to the Calendar in Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980), 265.

Both men end up in Rome, the capital city of the empire. Paul had planned to visit Rome on his way to Spain, but he got arrested first and was sent there in chains. Peter had gone to Rome many years earlier in order to establish the church and was the leader of the city's Christians, their first bishop. According to tradition, when a large part of the city burned down, the emperor Nero blamed the fire on the Christians as scapegoats, and when the persecution began the people of Rome urged Peter to flee the city. There is a legend that relates that as Peter was leaving the city he met Christ on the road walking the other way, toward Rome, and Peter asked Jesus where he was going. "To be crucified again," Jesus said. And Peter, realizing that in fleeing persecution he was denying his Lord once again, returned to face his enemies. So the two great apostles Peter and Paul found themselves confined in the same prison.

Peter was nailed to a cross as a public spectacle at Nero's circus on Vatican hill, head downward at his own request because, having denied Christ three times, he did not feel himself worthy to die in the same way as his Lord. Paul's end came, according to an early and strong legend, on the Ostian way. As a Roman citizen, Paul would have been accorded the privilege, if you can call it that, of being beheaded outside the walls of the city—a quick and private execution, rather than the slow death and public humiliation Peter received. After being marched out of the city, he was placed in a small cell overnight, and at first light he was tied kneeling to a short post. The lictors probably would have beaten him with their rods before the executioner, with a sharp swing of the sword, removed his head. Tradition says that they were both martyred in Rome on the same day, June 29, in the year 67.

That Peter and Paul are commemorated on the same day makes this the great feast of unity in diversity, or the feast of the church's catholicity. Peter and Paul disagreed about many things. Some of their differences were resolved; on others they simply agreed to go their own way. But for the good of the church and her mission, they found ways to live together and bear witness (μαρτυρειν) to the one thing that mattered: their common Lord. TM

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14)

July 6, 2008

Zechariah 9:9–12
Psalm 45:10–17
Romans 7:15–25a
Matthew 11:16–19, 25–30

Every time I read this text from Romans, I am reminded of Yogi Bear. (I hope these cartoons are still available on some cable channel, and I am not simply dating myself.) Every episode was pretty much the same. Yogi was born to eat, and he was never very satisfied with the berries and such that he found around Jellystone Park, and he didn't much like all the hard work that it took to catch salmon in the river as the other bears did. Yogi had a solution: "L-e-e-e-et's go find a 'picinic' basket."

Yogi knew better, and he struggled to do the right thing. He knew that if he kept bothering the campers in Jellystone Park, the Ranger was going to move him someplace else. He frequently made resolutions to do better, yet he couldn't help himself. He loved picnic baskets, and the Ranger's warnings were never enough.

It sounds a lot like Adam and Eve, doesn't it? Play around with someone else's food and you don't get to stay in the garden.

Yogi even had a conscience—Boo Boo, the smaller bear, essentially Yogi's alter ego—whose signature line was "But Yogi. . . ." When Yogi's desire for picnic baskets overwhelmed his good sense, Boo Boo was there as the voice of reason and caution to try to keep Yogi out of trouble; but it never worked. Even Boo Boo, however reluctantly, would always get dragged into Yogi's elaborate schemes.

Yogi's (and Paul's) problem, however, was not just that the temptation was too great, or even that the forbiddenness of the picnic baskets attracted him. Yogi's will was divided. As much as he wanted to do the right thing, he also didn't want to do it.

St. Augustine is the master at describing this inner conflict. Looking back on his adolescence, he wrote that he had prayed, "'Give me chastity and continence, but not yet.' For I was afraid you would answer my prayer at once and cure me too soon of the disease of lust, which I wanted satisfied, not quelled."[12]

It's a familiar situation, and one that many of us would easily excuse as typical of persons that age. But Augustine sees it as emblematic of a soul at war with itself. As a mature man, he thinks more deeply about this divided will.

> The mind gives an order to the body, and it is at once obeyed, but when it gives an order to itself, it is resisted. . . . For the will commands that an act of will should be made, and it gives this command to itself, not to some other will. The reason, then, why the command is not obeyed is that it is not given with the full will. For if the will were full, it would now command itself to be full, since it would be so already. It is therefore no strange phenomenon partly to will something and partly to will not to do it. . . . So there are two wills in us, because neither by itself is the whole will, and each possesses what the other lacks.[13]

The reading from Zechariah appears to be paired with this passage from Matthew because of the humility of the triumphant king riding a donkey into Jerusalem. This same theme of humility appears in the gospel in Jesus' description of himself as "gentle and humble in heart," and possibly also in the revelation of things hidden from the wise and intelligent to infants.

To my mind, the theme of humility is not the most interesting aspect of the Matthew pericope. This text follows hard on chapter 10, where Jesus had spoken repeatedly about the difficulties of being a disciple, the rejection of his message and those who bear it, and the divisions the gospel would cause even within families. In this text as well, Jesus points out that when the abstinent John proclaimed the kingdom, his opponents accused him of being possessed. When Jesus proclaims the same message through table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners, these same people still reject the message and accuse him of being a drunkard and a glutton. How, then, can all this struggle and opposition be called an easy yoke and a light burden? How can it be called rest?

Perhaps Paul's own testimony can help us here. Paul tells us that five times he was given forty lashes less one, three times he was beaten with rods, once he was stoned, three times he was shipwrecked, and once he spent a whole night and a day adrift in the sea, clinging to a board (2 Cor 11:24–28). And yet, he says, he "counts everything as loss," because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus (Phil 3:8). He considered the things he endured a small price to pay in return for the great reward of eternal life to come. To borrow a line from an epistle two weeks hence, it was not for nothing that he wrote, "I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing to the glory about to be revealed to us." TM

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[12] Augustine, *Confessions*, 8:7, p. 169.
[13] Augustine, *Confessions*, 8:9, p. 172.

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 15) July 13, 2008

Isaiah 55:10–13
Psalm 119:105–12
Romans 8:1–11
Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23

This Sunday is the first of three consecutive Sundays devoted to the third discourse in Matthew's Gospel: the parables of the kingdom. The parables from the first two Sundays are accompanied by interpretations. When I was in seminary and the historical-critical method was much more ascendant than it is now, these interpretations were ascribed to the early church, not to Jesus himself. The unspoken implication was that, because they did not go back to the historical Jesus, we might not be warranted in taking them as the best interpretation of the parables. On the other hand, because they are scriptural (canonical), perhaps these interpretations should be privileged in the church's reflection on Jesus' words. An exegete is going to have to make a choice. I settle on the conviction that if Jesus had only one thing he wanted to say, he would have said it. Instead, he told a story.

Any genuine farmer hearing Jesus tell the Parable of the Sower must be scandalized. A sower goes out to sow and throws seed anywhere and everywhere. Now, although it's true that ancient Palestinian farming practices were different than our own, the farmers of Jesus' day were not idiots. The seed they were throwing was precious stuff. It was gathered the year before along with the rest of the harvest and set aside for next year's crop. No matter how hungry the farmer's family got, they couldn't touch this grain or they would be even hungrier the next year. And the farmer did not deliberately scatter it on the path, or into thorns, or onto rocky soil. It was too valuable to throw where the farmer knew that people would be walking, or into thorns that would suck away all its nourishment, or onto soil that was so thin it would never take root. Real farmers would shake their heads at the terrible waste. But that's exactly the point!

A farmer who understood how much work went into growing that seed would never scatter it unproductively, but God does! God scatters his Word on all sorts of soil; the Father sends the Son to all sorts of people. What's more, God expects it to have an effect. Consider what Isaiah says:

> For as the rain and the snow come down
> from heaven,
> and do not return there until they have
> watered the earth,
> making it bring forth and sprout,
> giving seed to the sower and
> bread to the eater,
> so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
> it shall not return to me empty,
> but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
> and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

God's Word will have its effect. Unlike the farmer who can reasonably expect nothing from certain types of soil, God's Word will eventually succeed in growing a crop anywhere. It will accomplish the purpose for which God sent it.

The danger of preaching this text is that we end up communicating to those who hear us, "Don't be bad soil! God has given you his Word, nourished you with the sacraments, blessed you with a community of Christian brothers and sisters who care for you—now stop being so difficult for God to work with!" But the parable isn't about us; it's about the Sower. And the productivity of the soil is not up to us; it's up to God. We may in fact be difficult soil, but as John Chrysostom said to his congregation, "There is such a thing as rock changing and becoming rich land, a path that is no longer walked on, and thorns that are destroyed."[14] God is the original gardener. So alongside God the Sower is God the Rock-Picker, who clears away all those stones so the Word can take root. John the Baptist prophesied about Christ the Weed-Puller who would separate the wheat from the chaff and burn all the worthless stuff with unquenchable fire. God will not let the weeds frustrate the growth of his Word. And there's even God the Scarecrow who was set up on a pole in the middle of a garden precisely to overcome the evil one and cast him out so that he could not pluck away the seed he had planted.

In the epistle, the "setting of the mind" seems key to interpreting the text. Φρονημα, from φρονεω, should be read here as something like "resolution" or "intention." The word originally referred to the diaphragm, which, because it controlled the breath, was considered responsible for the human spirit and its emotions, but it quickly lost its physical connotations.[15] It is akin to καρδια, heart. When we say in the liturgy "Lift up your hearts," we invite the congregation to set its mind on higher things, not to be joyful, although the first may lead to the second.

Paul's dilemma in the previous epistle was that although he had set his mind on the law—indeed, he said he "delighted" in the law—he found himself unable to do the things on which he had set his mind. "Setting the mind" on something is not as easy as making a decision. Setting your mind means placing yourself in a position to grow in the life of the Spirit. Just as a garden requires certain conditions to grow, so does the human spirit in its quest for union with God. The spiritual disciplines are the water, light, and soil of the soul. Opening the heart through prayer and meditation, nourishing the spirit's life through frequent reception of communion and fellowship with other Christians, reading and studying God's word so that the roots of our faith are firmly established all put us in a place where God's Spirit can give us life.

So, on the one hand, Paul tells us that we have a responsibility here. We choose whether we are going to live in ourselves or in Christ, to live according to the flesh or according to the Spirit. On the other hand, Paul says that we are in the Spirit because the Spirit of Christ dwells in us. This points more to the active role of God. We have this Spirit not by our own doing but because of what God has done in Christ by raising Jesus from the dead and us along with him in our baptisms.

Paul wants to emphasize that we are accountable to follow by allowing the Lord to make our hearts good soil, open to the seed of God's Word (*ELW* #512). But he also wants to make very clear that the Spirit is God's Spirit, given to us in our baptisms, not something we have wrested from God through "our decision for Christ." I'll use another image from an old-time cartoon. Remember Popeye, the good-hearted sailor? Popeye loved Olive Oyl with a pure and unselfish love; he considered Olive Oyl his girl. Each episode would usually open with Popeye bringing her a bunch of flowers or a box of candy. And then Popeye's nemesis, Bluto, a big, mean, self-centered jerk, would step in and thwart his plans. Bluto loved Olive Oyl only for what he could get out of her. He was a poster child for a life lived according to the flesh. Things would get worse and worse for Popeye, and it seemed like he might lose Olive Oyl to Bluto forever. Then, suddenly, Popeye would remember who he was. He'd remember the can of spinach he had rolled up in his sleeve and, eating it, his forearms would turn into battleships that would blow Bluto out of the water and eliminate him as a threat forever, or at least until the next episode.

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[14] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, 44:5.

[15] Georg Bertram, Φρην, in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 220f.

Paul calls the Romans to set their mind on the Spirit and then reminds them of their identity. "You are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit." We are not in bondage to our self-centeredness and sin; we have been given the Spirit of God. This same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead can give us life as well. The key is remembering who we are and whom God has made us, and setting our minds on those things. TM

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 16)
July 20, 2008

Isaiah 44:6–8
Psalm 139:1–12, 23–24
Romans 8:12–25
Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

So what's a weed and what's a desirable specimen? How do we decide which plants are the ones we want and which plants need to go? If you looked through our yard and gardens, you wouldn't be too sure. The Creeping Charlie we planted several years ago as a perennial has definitely taken on some of the characteristics of a weed. The violets we planted as ground cover by the garage look beautiful in the bed but are definitely weeds when they send their runners outside that black border. The entire wildflower bed can be beautiful when it is growing well, but when the plants start popping up in the middle of the lawn, they're weeds. The grass itself is doing what it should when it is part of the lawn, but when it's inside the vegetable garden it too is a weed. The blackberries that grow wild along the property lines and in the small woods are definitely weeds, but I don't pull them because I like the berries.

You probably have a similar situation in your yard. The difference between a weed and a desirable plant is a matter of location, or size, or just personal preference.

Even the taxonomy of plants seems a little confused in our fallen world. Do we classify the rose among the thorns, or among the plants that are pleasing to the eye? Do we place bee balm among the thistles, or among the flowers? Who decides, and how? Sometimes there's nothing we can do except let the weeds and the wheat grow side by side, appreciate them both for what they are, and hope to be able to sort it all out someday in the future.

If we can't even be sure what is a weed in the botanical world, how would we ever be able to decide who is a weed in the human world? Unlike Hogwarts Academy in the Harry Potter books, we don't have a "sorting hat" to tell us the secret character of its wearer. We know very little about what is in people's hearts, what motivates them and leads them to behave as they do. Is that man unusually attentive to his wife because he loves her so deeply, or because he is filled with guilt about something he has done in the past? or because he fears that he will lose her unless he dotes on her? Does she stay with him because she wants to keep the family together for the children's sake, or because she is afraid she is incapable of living on her own, or does she love him and believe that there is yet potential in him to once again be the man she fell in love with? It's impossible to know. Very often we don't even understand our own hearts, our own motives and feelings—how could we possibly judge those of another person? Do even the wheat and the weeds know who they are, or do they each think the other is the problem? So we let the weeds and the wheat grow together and trust that someday God will sort it all out as God's kingdom comes.

In the early church the classical conflict over the weeds and wheat was Donatism. Heir to the rigorist tradition of Tertullian and Cyprian, the Donatists argued that the church should be a holy body and that the *traditores*, those who, under threat of persecution, handed over the Scriptures to the Roman authorities to be burned, should be excluded at least from the clergy if not from the church itself. This parable was the centerpiece of the imperial church's scriptural defense against Donatism. While it would be nice to say that the dispute was resolved amicably, the truth is that the end of Donatism came through the application of force by the imperial authorities and ultimately the invasions that led to the decline of the western half of the Roman empire.

When the weeds and wheat are allowed to grow together, as the greater part of the church understood matters, both compete for the same light, pull the same nutrients from the soil, and draw from the same water. Yet, only the wheat holds the promise of a harvest. The weeds, however much like the wheat they appear, will not produce the fruit. When the reapers come, they will gather the wheat into the barn, but the weeds will be gathered into bundles and burned. There will come a day when the truth will be revealed.

Until that day, all creation groans, waiting for it to be sorted out, even as we wait for the redemption of our bodies. With prophetic insight and poetic boldness, Paul sees all creation waiting eagerly for the revealing of the children of God, looking forward to being set free from its bondage to decay.

We should notice that the master does not seem terribly troubled by the presence of the weeds. It's the slaves, the ones who do the work, who suggest getting rid of them. The master is content to wait and see how it all turns out, counseling patience, as does Paul. TM

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 17)
July 27, 2008

1 Kings 3:5–12
Psalm 105:1–11, 45b
Romans 8:26–39
Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52

What do you do when five different parables are included in the reading? The first two, at least, seem to form a unit about miraculous growth. The next two both speak of the kingdom of heaven as so desirable that a wise person would surrender everything to possess it. The final one, the fish in the net, is little more than a restatement of the parable of the wheat and the weeds from last week. There's more material in just this reading than anyone can use in one sermon, so I'm going to make a selection and choose the short ones.

Most of our fifty states, these days, run lotteries. What happens when people win the big prize? The first question everyone wants answered is how this sudden windfall is going to change their lives. Are they going to keep their jobs and go on with their lives as they always have? Are they going to quit and maybe even tell their bosses what jerks they are? Do they plan to travel the world, give the money to a charity, or leave it to their grandchildren? Maybe they will go out and splurge on something really extravagant, something they could never have afforded otherwise. If we don't find out there's a feeling of incompleteness, we want to know more. Did the money make them happy? Was their sick grandmother finally able to have that operation? Did they find their new wealth fulfilling, or did it ruin their lives?

The way Jesus tells these two little parables about the pearl and the treasure, they are like jokes without punch lines. The merchant buys the pearl, and that's it! The man buys the field with the treasure—end of story! For Jesus, it seems, the point is not what the treasure can do for us; the point is in having it. What happens to the characters in the parable, or to the treasure, is not a part of the story because it doesn't matter. The goal and purpose is the pearl or the treasure itself, not what it can do for us. We cannot come to Christ in order that he might make us better people, give us a sense of belonging, or bring us peace in adversity, or for any of the other benefits we may hope to acquire from our faith. These things may happen as a consequence of our communion with Christ, but they are not an adequate goal in themselves. We do not pursue Christ in order to achieve other ends; Christ is the end we pursue. Jesus is the perfection of our humanity, the revelation of our destiny with God. If we possess Christ, we possess everything we need. If we are without him, we truly have nothing.

The second surprising thing, at least to me, is that these are stories without a moral; they don't offer any advice, at least explicitly. For instance, they never say, Go and rid yourself of all your earthly jewels, so that you can have the pearl of the gospel or the treasure of the kingdom. That counsel is expressed many places in the Gospels: "Love God above all things." "Seek first the kingdom of God." "Whoever does not love me more than father or mother is not worthy of me." "Go and sell what you have, give it to the poor, and follow me." *We* might draw that conclusion from the parable, especially given what we have read in these other places, but it is not a conclusion that Jesus makes for us. Again, the way Jesus tells the story stops short of what we would expect.

All we have is two stories about people going about their usual work when the normalcy of their lives is rudely but happily shattered; the treasure opens up for them a whole new world with unforeseen possibilities. These are two people with futures that they could never have planned for themselves. It doesn't even matter what that future is, just that from the moment of discovery on everything is changed, and their lives will never be the same.

The point, it seems to me, is the surprising joy that comes when someone encounters the kingdom of God. People who encounter the incredible treasure of the kingdom give everything they have in order to possess it, and they do it with joy, because they know that the transaction is gain and not loss. Their willing surrender of their most valuable possessions isn't commanded here, it's just explained, because when something of this value is found, it is the most natural thing in the world to give whatever it takes to have it.

The epistle reading today is one of those nuggets of gospel that is beyond any mere human estimation of its worth, one of those treasures that is worth any price to acquire. What great love God has for us! Not only does God the Father promise to hear our prayers; God pours out the Spirit as our intercessor so that the deepest longings of our hearts will be brought to God despite our inadequacies. God not only hears our prayer but also prays our prayers through the Holy Spirit. God prays the prayers for us that we don't even know we need. And when our needs are too complex, too deep, or even unknown to us, when all we can do is sigh, the Spirit of God groans right along with us in a prayer too deep for words.

When Paul says that we do not know how to pray as we ought, he does not mean that we cannot find the correct words to craft a fitting prayer. No, Paul means that what we pray for may not be what is best or even good for us. In our weakness we pray for all sorts of things, and we may neglect the true treasures of the eternal kingdom: faith, hope, and love; justice, prudence, temperance, and fortitude; or any of the other lists that Paul collects in his letters. The Spirit can even take our prayers for what is paltry or inferior and transform them into prayers for what is worthy, faithful, and eternal. TM

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