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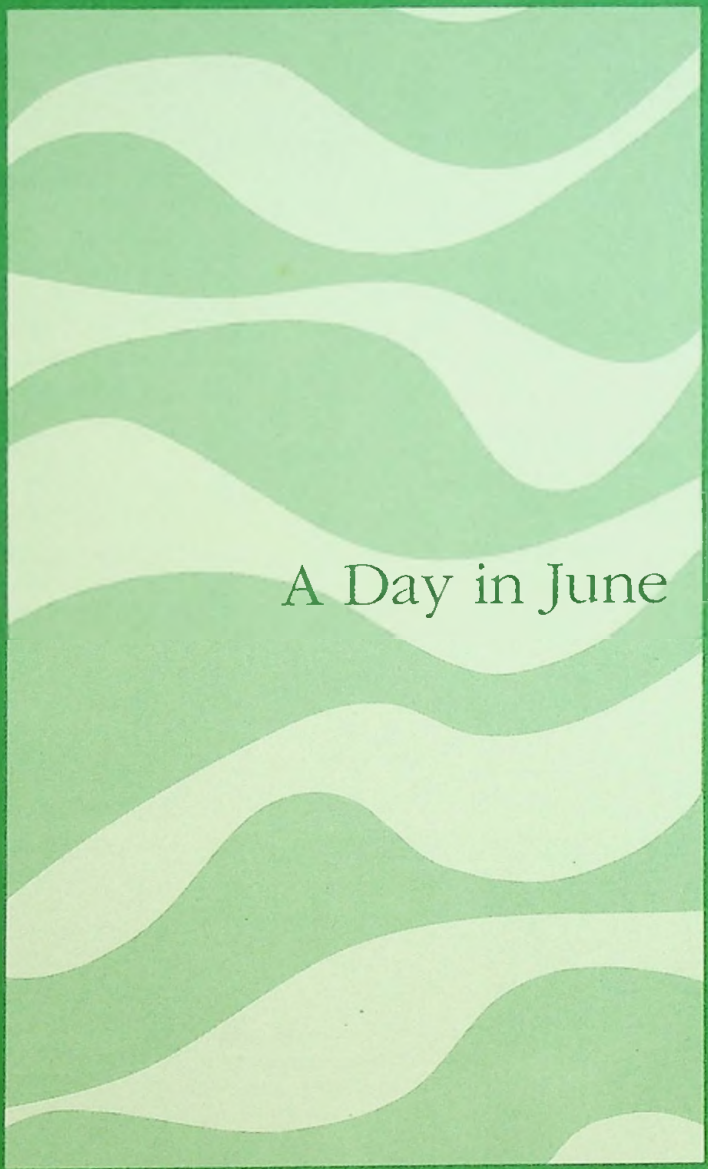

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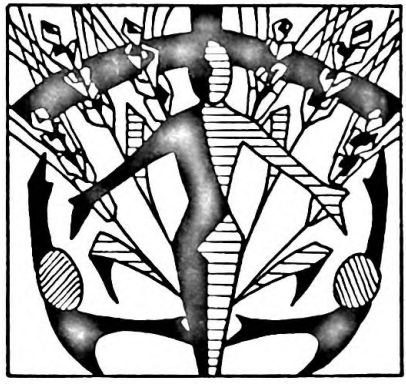

A Day in June

"What is so rare as a day in June? Then, if ever, come perfect days." Not too hot, not too cold. Just right. School's out! We northerners break out our golf clubs and squeeze gamely into our swimming suits. We lay plans for vacation, for catching up on our reading and catching our breath before the fall rat race begins. Perfect days.

Here also comes this year Whitsunday—and the beginning of the umpteen Sundays thereafter. Here we preach—to smaller numbers—about the Christian life and sanctification and growth in the faith. We live out with our people the unbearable paradox of God loving us unconditionally and God loving us precisely so that we might be God's own and live under God in the kingdom and serve God in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. We press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Perfect days.

Craig L. Nessan calls our attention to world hunger, in essays first delivered before the Conference of Bishops of the ELCA. For their publication here Craig has provided discussion questions, so that this section can be put to use as an instant four-week adult or youth study in the parish.

In the first article, Craig shows that the biblical witness is the justice tradition. The gospel sets the believer free from self-occupation and shows that the love of God is inextricably intertwined with neighbor love. Christian freedom leads me inexorably to my neighbor. Nowhere in Scripture does God's word on behalf of the poor and hungry sound more clearly than in the oracles of the prophets. God is revealed as the one who executes justice for the poor and hungry and who requires those wielding political, social and economic power to uphold this same standard. When Jesus began his public ministry, he established his mission within a justice trajectory. By his actions Jesus instantiated the kingdom, that is, he brought it into existence. The Apostolic church of Acts is remembered for its generosity, flowing out from its table fellowship. Concern for food and the hungry is not a distraction from the church's mission but belongs to the heart of Christian mission.

Craig bases his second article on the Our Father. Jesus' prayers propelled him into deeper commitment, finally, at Gethsemane, to the cross. How inexorably the petitions of the Lord's prayer turn our attention from heaven to our neighbor on earth. The Lord's prayer is a justice prayer. We are instructed to pray for the dawning of heavenly circumstances and heavenly relationships in the now. The Lord's prayer in its entirety moves the believer from prayerful relationship with

God toward relationship with the neighbor. Nearly all of Luther's explanations of the petitions in some way direct us to our neighbor and the affairs of this world. When we pray for "our" bread, we pray for all of God's children to have bread. If we ask God for our daily bread while neglecting the starving, we indeed need the very next petition in which we beseech God for forgiveness. The community which prays, "Give us this day our daily bread," and which has as its constitutive sacrament the breaking of bread in Jesus' name, is by definition a community in service to the hungry.

Craig begins his third article with a report from international students at Wartburg Theological Seminary about malnutrition and starvation in their four countries. Our sisters and brothers need our material relief, but also our advocacy that their governments might respond to the hunger crisis with responsibility. What we need to learn is that prayer and neighbor love, justification and justice belong together. To propose stopping hunger as a matter of *status confessionis* is to propose that we must turn from whatever else we are doing and respond to the silent screams of the hungry. How can we tolerate a status quo in which the reality of one billion malnourished human beings is considered "normal" and "acceptable"? The theology of the cross means that God suffers for the poor. By raising Jesus from the dead, God sets us free in order to live in conformity with the way of Jesus.

Finally, Craig asks what it would take to provoke the church to repentance for failing to feed Christ-incarnate in the hungry neighbor (Mt 25:42)—a piling up of statistics, or Bible passages? Perhaps this: The God of the Christian Bible is a God who is revealed as one who shows preferential concern for the hungry. The author proposes that stopping hunger should attain the priority of a matter of *status confessionis*, a concern of utmost confessional significance. But a particular issue becomes *de facto* a matter of utmost confessional concern not when a church body adopts a resolution but when a consensus emerges among Christian people that this cause is imperative for the integrity of the faith itself. To consider stopping hunger as a matter of *status confessionis* entails the belief that there is indeed enough food for all. The article then spells out the practical implications of such a stance. Two final thoughts: the theology of the cross means God suffers with the poor; the theology of the cross means we should understand why the Jesus who proclaimed the inbreaking of God's kingdom in his own words and actions ended up on a cross.

Paul Schauer and **Muriel Lippert Schauer** write from the front lines, in North Dakota, where the farm crisis rages quietly. In the face of that crisis, the church continues to be the church, encourages fellowship, educates and advocates. Farmers not only run the usual risks of unpredictable weather, but they are also challenged by the economic problems of overseas customers, the monopoly of ownership in large cooperations, an unfair marketplace, and a domestic market that enjoys the cheapest food in the world—to the great disadvantage of farmers. The

church is one of the last organizations present in rural America. Rural Christians seek the acknowledgment and support of non-rural Christians.

William J. Hassold writes a compelling and compassionate exegesis of Romans 16:17–20, a passage that has in the past been used to justify some of the separatist policies of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. Paul urges the Roman Christians to consider carefully those who seek to affiliate with their house churches, for some of these people might disrupt the harmony that should mark the lives of believers with one another. Paul warns his readers not about teachers of false doctrine but about those who, contrary to apostolic teaching, were causing dissensions and setting snares. Turn away from such troublemakers, Paul urges, and treat with love and concern those who may have been duped by them. It is important that the church in our day apply Paul's directive, "Turn from them," to those who foster factionalism and its negative consequences for the fulfilling of Christ's Great Commission. Good advice for all Christians in the growth days after Pentecost!

Andrew M. Weyermann notes that how we shape our sermons should be determined by a consideration of the intended effect on our hearers. The function of the Word to effect faith and community requires the integration of direct address, teaching, and storytelling. Preaching is putting into words what God is doing in the world so that the Spirit can do God's work in the hearer's life. The primary form for conveying the function of the gospel is the direct promise of God to the hearers. The pure didactic form of sermon is least likely to serve the lively function of the gospel word. The hearers' problem is not that they don't know God is love, but that they don't unconditionally surrender to God's grace in Christ. Still the need to explain is unavoidable in a secular context. The traditional terms of the faith often do not connect with the way hearers interpret their life experience. The narrative form of preaching puts the hearers in touch with the depth of human pathos and the experience of grace that evokes trust and love. The problem with many narrative sermons is that, though the story touches the hearers' experience, the direct promise of the gospel is not proclaimed for faith. When it comes to delivery, the experience of God's grace in Christ is the source of the preacher's authority, enthusiasm, and courage to say what has to be said.

As I write these words in the not-so-perfect days of March, I am getting ready to head out for a writing leave in Cambridge, England. The rat race of deadlines—met and broken—is contradicted by the promise of study on the banks of the Cam, typing out another couple hundred pages toward a commentary that may illuminate, clarify, and make relevant the testimony of the Chronicler. On Whitsunday—I love that word!—we all will sing, on both sides of the pond, *Veni, Creator Spiritus*, for ourselves, our congregations, our world. A perfect day in June.

—Ralph W. Klein, Editor

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

Craig L. Nessan
Wartburg Theological Seminary
Dubuque, Iowa

When I was a small boy growing up in Lansing, Michigan, we had to drive down Logan Street (now named after Martin Luther King) to get to the grocery store that my Uncle John managed. This is a street on which Malcolm Little, later named Malcolm X, lived for a short time as a boy. As I looked out the window of the car, I saw dilapidated houses and poor black children playing next to the busy street. It's the first time I remember asking myself the question, "Why?"

When I was a teenager I watched pictures of people living in abject poverty as I listened to reports on television covering the voter registration drives in southern towns. Even more disturbing, I remember being in Detroit for a Tigers game the day the riots started there and that evening seeing pictures of the world of the poor, this time burning down. Again I asked myself: "Why?"

There have been many periods of time, some of them rather lengthy, when I stopped asking the question, "Why?" Other concerns and priorities, personal and professional, pressed to center stage. Had my life taken a different course, I can easily imagine that the images of poverty that troubled me in my youth would have become submerged deep beneath my daily existence. I very much understand how it is possible to live life engaged in concerns that keep one detached from the world of the hungry. Every day I am tempted to construct such a life in which the poor seem absent. I am also tempted to construct a theology which makes me comfortable in a world where the poor are invisible.

As an adult, however, I have had the opportunity of visiting places like Mexico, Nicaragua, and India, and the images and encounters from these visits will not leave me alone. On the Mexico trip, I enjoyed the privilege of the company of Bishop Charles Maahs (Central States Synod, ELCA) and his son, David. In Cuernavaca we met Angela in a squatters village of 4,000 called La 'Estacion, literally on the other side of the tracks. Angela cared there for an invalid husband, receiving a little income from seasonal farm labor, selling Coca Cola, crafting needlework in a coop, and from grown children in California who sent her money. What sticks with me the most about our visit with Angela was a comment about her roof. The rainy season was coming and she was worried because she was going to have to give her roof back which she had borrowed. Can you imagine living with a borrowed roof? Outside, children played along filthy sewage ditches and in houses constructed in many places of discarded asbestos siding.

We also met Manuel in a Mexican village, who introduced his family by saying he had ten children. Then he explained that three of them had died as infants. He said this matter-of-factly, as though it was perfectly normal to have three of your children die from the diseases of the poor.

Lawrence was a pastor and theology professor in Madurai, South India. One afternoon he took me on a walking tour visiting his neighborhood. I saw family after large family living in narrow quarters—six, eight, ten, twelve persons to a room. Everywhere I saw thin, malnourished children and emaciated elderly people. Many lived at the edge of the streets.

In Nicaragua we drove by the shacks of those who lived on the city of Managua's garbage dump, scraping a living from the refuse.

These are experiences that will not leave me alone. No matter how I try to leave them behind, Angela, Manuel, the people of Madurai, and the staring faces in Managua accompany me wherever I go. Enrique Dussel writes:

> The . . . painful scream resulting from a blow, wound, or an accident indicates immediately not *something* but rather *somebody*. One who hears the cry of pain is astonished because the scream interrupts the commonplace and integrated world. The sound, the noise, produces a mental image of an absent-present somebody in pain. The hearer does not know as yet *what kind* of pain it is, nor the reason for the outcry. But the hearer will be disturbed until he knows who is crying out and why. *What* that cry says is secondary; the fundamental issue is the cry itself; one who is *somebody* is saying something. It is not what is said but rather the saying itself, the person who cries out, who is important.[1]

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[1] Enrique Dussel, *A History of the Church in Latin America: Colonialism to Liberation (1492–1979)*, trans. Alan Neely (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 307.

I begin my reflections, if you will, with a scream—a scream on behalf of the hungry children of Lansing, Cuernavaca, and Madurai. I still cannot fully answer the question "why" they are hungry, although I have my opinions. But I can use my privileged voice to scream in pointing to them. Initially, that's what proposing stopping hunger as a matter of *status confessionis* means to me: a way of screaming on behalf of the hungry. We are baptized members and leaders of the Christian church in the richest and most politically influential country of the world. The biblical tradition in which we stand establishes defense of the poor, widow, orphan, and stranger as a fundamental obligation. Together we must find the voice to respond to their scream.

1. Biblical Witness: The Justice Tradition

How can we pray for daily bread, with lip
Still smacking from a comfortable meal,
Or how, from Dives lofty table feel
With Lazarus the glow of fellowship,
Unless, with spirits destitute, we find
Fellowship in the deserts of the mind.

—Kenneth Boulding
The Naylor Sonnets XXV

All Bible verses are not created equal. As Lutherans we should know well this hermeneutical assertion. The Lutheran Reformation and tradition were founded on the proposal that within Scripture the truth of justification by grace through faith alone is that crucial article upon which all else depends. We are justified by faith in God's gracious saving act in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our sins no longer are counted against us but rather, for Jesus' sake, Christ's righteousness is reckoned to us. The Holy Spirit works faith in us to enable us to trust in Christ's saving work. The Gospel for Reformation Sunday declares: "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (John 8:31–32).

Set free for love of neighbor

To be justified by grace through faith is to be set free. Paul's voice echoes from his letter to the Galatians, "For freedom Christ has set us free" (5:1). And Martin Luther in his treatise on "The Freedom of a Christian" insisted: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none."[2] Among twentieth-century scholars, perhaps no one has better captured the essence of this evangelical insight than Ernst Käsemann with the title of his New Testament study: "Jesus means freedom."[3]

The radical freedom of the gospel of Jesus Christ is a dangerous thing. It shatters

[2] Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 596.

[3] Ernst Käsemann, *Jesus Means Freedom*, trans. Frank Clarke (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972.

every attempt to demonstrate our worthiness out of any other source. We must beware all attempts to temper its radicality. The freedom of the gospel means that because my sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, I need not exist paralyzed by guilt. The freedom of the gospel means I need perform no pious rituals to secure salvation, since Christ has died on the cross to accomplish my salvation. The freedom of the gospel means I need not worry about my eternal destiny because, as Christ has been raised from the dead, so will I live again in God's heaven. The gospel sets the believer free from self-preoccupation.

How then do I live my life within the realm of such radical freedom? One option is to bask in God's love irresponsibly, as though Christ neither died nor was resurrected, as though Christ's spirit does not continue to breathe new life into us. Bonhoeffer called this particularly Lutheran temptation "cheap grace," the deadly enemy of the church.[4] A second option for how we seek to avoid living in freedom involves a retreat into moralism and individualistic spirituality in the name of being "religious." Wandering in the wilderness of such radical freedom is so terrifying that we long for the fleshpots of legalism. This is the choice made by many "serious" Christians.

Martin Luther showed us a yet more excellent way (as did Jesus before him): "A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." Or, in the words of Jesus, rooted deeply in Jewishness: "'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Mk 12:29–31). The love of God is inextricably intertwined with neighbor love. Christian freedom leads me inexorably to my neighbor.

The biblical imperative of justice

All Bible verses are not created equal. The core of Scripture we name by the doctrine of justification frees us for a second biblical trajectory that documents the imperative of neighbor love, beginning with the least, the most vulnerable. During the last three decades we have been summoned by "Third World" Christians to awaken, as though from deep slumber, to the massive biblical testimony witnessing to God's way of justice. Only our own level of material comfort and economic security as "First World" Christians could have made these texts invisible to us in the first place (much as we also unwittingly contrive to keep the hungry poor themselves out of sight).

The call for justice permeates Scripture's witness. God is revealed to Moses and the Israelites as a God of justice: "Then the LORD said: 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey. . .'" (Exod 3:7–8; cf. also 2:23–25). The Lord hears the cries of the poor. In the promised land, there will be milk and honey, food for all.

One peculiar feature of the covenant law of Israel was its insistence on justice. Because God is righteous, God's law insisted that the covenant people be a people of righteousness toward the most vulnerable in its midst: "For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not par-

[4] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 45ff.

tial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves strangers, providing them food and clothing" (Deut 10:17–18; cf. also 24:17–22). God's law made imperative the care for the least.

Leaders in Israel were expected to uphold a high standard of justice. Judges were expected to judge righteously. The king of Israel was expected to be the chief representative of God's justice: "So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered justice and equity to all his people" (2 Sam 8:15). Likewise with regard to Solomon: "Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD loved Israel forever, he has made you king to execute justice and righteousness" (1 Kgs 10:9). The Psalms resound with songs imploring God to make Israel's king just: "Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. . . . May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy and crush the oppressor" (Ps 72:1–2,4). The king is held to this standard because God is a God "who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry." (Ps 146:7). Jesus will draw from this royal tradition when he later announces the coming of God's kingdom.

Because the potential was so great for a king to abuse power out of self-interest, there emerged at the same time as the office of king another figure, the prophet, to offer a check on the abuse of royal authority. Perhaps nowhere in Scripture does God's word on behalf of the poor and hungry sound more clearly than in the oracles of these prophets. "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8). Furthermore, Micah declares: "Hear this, you rulers of the house of Jacob and chiefs of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong! Its rulers give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for a price, its prophets give oracles for money; yet they lean upon the LORD and say, 'Surely the LORD is with us! No harm shall come upon us.' Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins . . ." (3:9–12).

To give another example, Jeremiah spoke this word of God to the king of Judah: "Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbors work for nothing, and does not give them their wages . . . Are you a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is this not to know me? says the LORD" (Jer 22:13, 15–16).

When the Messiah would come, this one would finally rule as a just king, representing God's righteousness: "A root shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth . . ." (Isa 11:1–4). Consistently throughout the Hebrew Bible, God is revealed as the one who executes justice for the poor and hungry and who requires those wielding political, social, and economic power to uphold this standard.

Kingdom of God, kingdom of justice

When Jesus began his public ministry, he established his mission squarely within this justice trajectory: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Lk 4:18–19). At the center of Jesus' message was the proclamation of the kingdom of God. "Kingdom" is a political term. Was it an accident that Jesus selected this guiding image for his ministry, a term that summons forth Israel's hope for a just and righteous king in the face of oppression?[5]

Jesus drew upon the Hebrew Scripture's testimony to Yahweh as a just king and defender of the poor as he shaped his central image of the *basileia tou theou*. The kingdom is not a place but the dynamic activity of God in the world now. "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Mt 12:28). Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you."

The kingdom Jesus proclaimed and instantiated brought near the reign of God to the people. Jesus' parables performed the kingdom,[6] invoking the arrival of a near and merciful God (cf. the parables of the prodigal son and the good Samaritan). Jesus spoke pointedly on behalf of the hungry: "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. . . . Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry" (Lk 6:21, 25). In the kingdom, the last will be first and the first last (Lk 13:30). In the parable of the rich fool, the rich man fails to see the folly of his ways and is unprepared for final judgment (Lk:16–21). Jesus summons the rich ruler to "sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor," a form of repentance he is unwilling to undergo (Lk 18:18–25). "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." Zacchaeus demonstrates, however, that with God all things are possible, even surrendering one's possessions to the poor (Lk 19:1–10). Jesus declares in response to Zacchaeus' act of relinquishment: "Today salvation has come to this house" (Lk 19:9).

Moreover, by his actions Jesus instantiated the kingdom, that is, brought it into existence. Jesus healed the sick, cast forth demons, and miraculously fed hungry multitudes (Mk 6:30–44, 8:1–10). Jesus showed compassion on the crowds and challenged the disciples to respond in kind: "You give them something to eat" (Mk 6:37).

Jesus' own ministry was characterized particularly by unconventional table fellowship: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (Mk 2:16). The meals Jesus shared with others were a sign of the kingdom's inbreaking. He warned those who held banquets: "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the

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[5] Bruce Chilton, *Pure Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 23–44.

[6] Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976).

crippled, the lame, and the blind" (Lk 14:12–13). Jesus poignantly depicted the anti-kingdom through the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19–31). Consistent with his concern for the manifestation of the kingdom at table, Jesus left his disciples a simple meal by which to remember him: "While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.'" Jesus' eating with tax collectors and sinners parallels the eating at the Lord's table: a welcome invitation to all, beginning with the outcast and sinners, the least. All are fed at the meal of Jesus.

The risen Jesus appeared to the disciples in the breaking of bread (Lk 24:30–31, cf. also Jn 21:12–13). The apostolic church of Acts is remembered for its generosity, flowing out from its table fellowship: "All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts . . ." (Acts 2:44–46). In this regard, it is important to recall the original reason the church began to collect an offering: as a collection for the poor. Likewise these early Christians remembered Jesus' words: ". . . for I was hungry and you gave me food . . . just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Mt 25:35, 40).

Jesus, as demonstrated by his unconventional table fellowship and his concentration on the coming of the kingdom, stands directly in the center of the Jewish justice tradition. Concern for food and the hungry is not a distraction from the church's mission but belongs to the heart of Christian mission. Nowhere does this become more focused than in the prayer Jesus taught his disciples, known to us as the Lord's prayer.

Discussion guide

1. The quote by Enrique Dussel distinguishes between "some*body*" and "some*thing*." How and when do bodies (i.e., people) become things (i.e., objects)?
2. What prevents our hearing the cries of the hungry?
3. In what ways is the gospel of Jesus Christ radical and dangerous?
4. Bonhoeffer distinguishes between costly grace and cheap grace, calling the latter "the deadly enemy of the church." What did he mean? Do you agree?
5. Where are the hungry in your neighborhood?
6. Micah 6:8 reads: "And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." What does this mean to you as a Christian? To your congregation?
7. Who are the prophets of today?
8. How is the kingdom of God being manifested in our world today? In what ways does it have to do with political issues?

2. The Prayer Jesus Taught Us

"My neighbor's material needs are my spiritual needs."—Israel Salanter[7]

Jesus on prayer

Does Jesus say far more about the poor and oppressed in the Gospels than about prayer? So some have claimed. It's an argument that attempts to correct a perceived imbalance between the church's concern for individual piety and its concern for social ministry. As part of my preparation for this project I set out to examine this claim.

That Jesus prayed, and prayed regularly, is well documented in the Gospels. The mentioning of Jesus at prayer is usually recorded by the evangelists in conjunction with some extraordinary deed which is performed: Lk 3:21, at his baptism; 5:16, in conjunction with a healing; 6:12, before calling the twelve; Mk 6:46, before walking on water; Lk 9:28–29, at the transfiguration. The most moving and only lengthy account of Jesus at prayer occurs in the garden of Gethsemane (Mk 14:32–42). Consistently, we see a direct relationship between Jesus' times of prayer and initiatives in active ministry. We can even say that for Jesus prayer and action belong inseparably together. Sometimes we imagine Jesus' moments at prayer as retreats from activity. But we might even more assert that his times at prayer propel him into ever deeper commitment, finally at Gethsemane to the cross. As Jesus immerses himself in devotion to his Father, he emerges into ministry on behalf of others. There exists a strong correlation between prayer and action in these texts.

Jesus has pointed words to say about how not to pray: not like hypocrites (Mt 6: 5–6), not heaping up words (Mt 6:7), not like the Pharisees (Lk 18:10–11), not making long prayers (Mk 12:40), and in criticism of temple ritual (Mk 11:17). Notice how these criticisms of prayer have largely to do with the failure of prayer to conform with action. For example, hypocrisy is praying one thing and doing another.

Jesus offered some brief instructions regarding how to pray: alone in one's room (Mt 6:6), for one's persecutors (Mt 5:44), for laborers for the harvest (Mt 9:38), to cast out an evil spirit (Mk 9:29), without losing heart (Lk 18:1), and following the example of the humble publican (Lk 18:10–11).

Somewhat shocking is the contrast between the followers of John and Jesus: "John's disciples, like the disciples of the Pharisees, frequently fast and pray, but your disciples eat and drink" (Lk 5:33). Interestingly, it's a charge Jesus did not deny. Other brief but significant references to prayer in the Gospels include Jesus' praying for the little children (Mt 19:13), Jesus' promise that "whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mk 11:24), and the reference to praying that the "end" not come in winter (Mk 13:18). Only five references to prayer occur in John, with three of these in the priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17 (vv. 9, 15, 20).

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[7] Quoted in Robert Gibbs, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 257.

The Lord's Prayer and the things of this world

Given the brevity of Jesus' other instructions on prayer, it is no wonder that the Lord's Prayer has obtained such a significant status in the Christian church. Here are words that Jesus, according to Luke, gave to his disciples in direct response to their request, "Lord, teach us to pray . . ." (Lk 11: 1). Although there are good exegetical reasons to prefer Luke's terser version of the prayer as more original, we will attend to Matthew's account (6:9–13) because of its greater similarity to the prayer offered in the church today.

> Our Father in heaven,
> hallowed be your name.
> Your kingdom come.
> Your will be done,
> on earth as it is in heaven.
> Give us this day our daily bread.
> And forgive us our debts,
> as we also have forgiven our debtors.
> And do not bring us to the time of trial,
> but rescue us from the evil one.

Some commentators have asserted the deeply "spiritual" character of this prayer Jesus taught his disciples. When I read the Lord's prayer in light of the justice trajectory of the Hebrew Scriptures and Jesus' own concern for the poor and oppressed, however, I am profoundly moved by how inexorably these petitions turn our attention away from heaven to our neighbor on earth. Directing our worship toward God in prayer leads us to pay heightened attention to our neighbor. In this way, the Lord's prayer is nothing less than a justice prayer.

Jesus invited his disciples to address God as "Father," a term of familiarity and intimacy. Yet the prayer makes clear the distinction of this father from all earthly fathers; this Father is "in heaven." The truth that God is in heaven, however, does not mean this God has nothing to do with earthly affairs. As we shall see when we reflect on the entire Lord's prayer, this heavenly Father is the very one who compels us to pay attention to the things of this world.

Directing our worship toward God in prayer leads us to pay heightened attention to our neighbor.

The otherness of God is further accented by the petition: "hallowed be your name." With this petition we ask God to guard us from all idolatry. God's name participates in God's reality. As we do or do not respect God's name, so we indicate whether we set idols before God as priorities in our lives. This first petition is explained by Luther in the Large Catechism as referring both to "word or deed, speech or act": "[God's name] is also profaned by an openly evil life and wicked works, when those who are called Christians and God's people are adulterers, drunkards, gluttons, jealous persons, and slanderers."[8] Luther drew direct consequences from this petition for how we conduct ourselves in relation-

[8] Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 425 (43).

ship to our neighbor. In fact, he does so consistently for the other petitions as well.

"Your kingdom come." As we have already seen, this petition is not so much a prayer for the end of the world as the request that the reign of God come over us even now. Whatever Jesus taught regarding an eschatological kingdom of God, what is distinctive about his proclamation of the kingdom is how it was coming near already in his words and deeds. When asked by disciples of John about the source of his authority, Jesus replied: "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news preached to them" (Mt 11:4–5)—signs of the kingdom all!

Notice how deeply the petitions of the Lord's Prayer move us into the dynamics of this world: "Your will be done, *on earth* as it is in heaven." Jesus does not teach us to pray for how things will be in heaven. God will take care of that. Rather, we are instructed to pray for the dawning of heavenly circumstances and heavenly relationships in the now. We are to pray that the kingdom come "also among us," to employ Luther's words. For wherever God's will is done, there reigns the kingdom.

The petition for daily bread (which will be taken up at greater length later in this essay) is bracketed by these petitions for the inbreaking of God's rule and the fulfillment of God's will already on earth and those about forgiveness and temptation. Does Jesus suddenly spiritualize the prayer by instructing the disciples to pray for forgiveness? Hardly! While we can scarcely begin to think of forgiveness in economic terms, Jesus taught his disciples to pray for the forgiveness of "debts." Granted, Jesus surely would include a variety of offenses that shatter relationships under this petition (cf. Mt 5:23–24). But that this petition includes economic obligations is also clear (cf. 5:25–26).[9] In doing so, Jesus was taking seriously provisions of the law regarding jubilee (cf. Lev 25:8–12).[10] In the kingdom of God all debts are settled—by being forgiven. The connection between God's forgiveness of our debts and our forgiveness of the debts of others appears especially striking in this petition. The Lord's prayer again leads us into and not away from the world with its broken relationships.

"And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one." Jesus did not get specific about the nature of the trials he had in mind. The range of situations in which one might face temptation is vast. Yet at the very heart of every temptation is the choice between trusting God's word or following the voice of an other, the tempter. Such was the choice faced by Jesus when tempted in the wilderness, whether to trust God's promises or to heed temptation into idolatry (Lk 4:1–13). In this way the final petition of the prayer brings us full circle: whom do we trust, our Father in heaven or the tempter?

The Lord's prayer in its entirety moves the believer from prayerful relationship with God toward relationship with the neighbor. Interestingly, nearly all of Luther's explanations of the petitions of the Lord's prayer in some way direct us to our neighbor and the affairs of this world. Nowhere is this more poignant than in the petition for daily bread.

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[9] The radicality of a prayer for the forgiveness of "debts" was so shocking that even Matthew (6:14–15) needed to offer interpretation.

[10] Sharon H. Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee: Images for Ethics and Christology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 81–84.

Give us this day our daily bread

"How much trouble there now is in the world simply on account of false coinage, yes, on account of daily exploitation and usury in public business, trading, and labor on the part of those who wantonly oppress the poor and deprive them of their daily bread!"[11] A quote from Saul Alinsky? No. Martin Luther. With these words Luther raised a critical voice against the disparity caused by injustice in his own society. Today the division between rich and poor, the monied and the hungry, has reached epidemic proportions. The number of those seriously hungry reached the figure of one billion in 1997. One billion human beings! Can we begin to fathom such a quantity of human need and suffering? It does not seem like so many to us because the hungry remain tidily tucked away in Nicaraguan villages and along back streets in Calcutta. Yet if you have eyes to see, they are plentiful to behold, not only in other countries but in your own backyard, county, and state. The largest percentage of the hungry remain the most vulnerable: children and mothers.

"Give us . . ." We petition God for bread because ultimately all bread derives from God's hand. God is a bountiful provider. Christians live with the conviction that God does provide enough bread for all. The problem is not bounty but distribution. Bread for the World reminds us that hunger could be stopped if and when we set it as our first priority.[12] But we as a culture live with an idolatrous faith, trusting not so much in God as in the beneficence of the market. We believe that when all individuals live competitively, each seeking his or her own self-interest, this will work for the benefit of all. There is no empirical evidence for this belief. To the contrary, what we see as this

God does provide enough bread for all. The problem is not bounty but distribution.

belief spreads across the face of the planet is a growing disparity between haves and have nots—one billion hungry neighbors. When we pray this petition, we acknowledge God as provider and not the idolatrous invisible hand of the market.

". . . this day . . ." Most of the world's population have always lived hand to mouth. This was as true in the time of Jesus as it is for most of the world's population today. Jesus' prayer teaches us to live in gratitude for what God has provided and in dependence on God's new generosity each morning. But what about those who live in the shadow of war? What about refugees? What about those whose environment has been degraded? What about those who suffer drought, or flood, or tempest? What about those who have no work? What about the sick? the aged? the children? What about those whose wages are unjust? What about those whose natural resources have been exploited by others? those who grow plentiful crops but for export? From whence

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[11] Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism," in *The Book of Concord*, 431f.

[12] Richard A. Hoehn, "Religious Communities Respond to Hunger," in *Hunger 94—Transforming the Politics of Hunger: Fourth Annual Report on the State of World Hunger* (Silver Spring, MD: Bread for the World Institute, 1993), 45.

this day comes their bread? What invisible hand is reaching out to them?

". . . our . . ." We pray not for "my" bread but for "our" bread. Who is this "our?" Me and my blood kin? Me and my race? Me and my congregation? Me and my nation? How large is the number of

We pray not for "my" bread but for "our" bread. Who is this "our?"

those with whom and for whom we pray for daily bread? When we pray for "our" bread, we pray for all of God's children to have bread. The "our" places us in solidarity with all of them, especially the hungry. We pray "our" unselfishly for the one billion hungry, hidden neighbors.

". . . daily . . ." We do not pray for excess bread. Luther was right to say that daily bread includes "everything our bodies need such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, fields, livestock, money, property, an upright spouse, upright children, upright members of the household, upright and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, decency, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like." (Small Catechism). A danger arises, however, when my right to money and property comes into conflict with your right to bread. Our economic system is designed not for the immediate purpose of providing daily bread to feed the hungry but for the accumulation of bread in banks to feed capital investments. The availability of bread and other life necessities is supposed to occur miraculously as a consequence of this system. In the prayer Jesus teaches, he instructs us to return to the basics. The most basic of all human needs is for food and drink. Unless these are available for all, the rest of what we accumulate as daily bread is theft. For this reason, daily bread does require, in the words of Luther, "upright and faithful rulers" and "good government" which ensure bread for all.

". . . bread . . ." By means of bread Jesus united matters of the flesh and matters of the spirit. Jesus fed both hungry multitudes and the hunger of the heart. Jesus demonstrated the inbreaking of the kingdom both as he sat at table with sinners and as he instituted the Lord's Supper for the forgiveness of sins. For him there was no division between body and spirit. What Jesus has brought together, however, we have rent asunder. How do we reunite body and spirit as we come together to eat bread in Jesus' name?

The heresy of the Corinthians was failure to discern the body of Christ, that is, the practice of a table fellowship at which the well off ate their fill, neglecting the poor in their midst, but then presumed to come together at the Lord's Supper as one happy family. Paul accused them of failing to discern the body, eating and drinking judgment against themselves (1 Cor 11:17–34, esp. v. 29). Paul preserved the unity of body and spirit in criticizing this abuse. Do we not fall under this condemnation when we spiritualize the blessings of Holy Communion without discerning the body of Christ, which consists of vast numbers who are physically hungry? If we ask God in this petition for our daily bread while we neglect the starving, it becomes tragically ironic that in the very next petition we beseech God for forgiveness. In our day,

perhaps more than ever, these two petitions belong together.

As we gather around the Lord's table week after week in our congregations at worship, we pray for the coming of God's kingdom, even that the kingdom may come to us (Luther). As we have seen, the kingdom for which we pray is one of justice—a kingdom in which the hungry are fed. Indeed through worship, God in Christ is still at work to create this very kingdom in our midst through word and sacrament! The community that prays, "Give us this day our daily bread," and has as its constitutive sacrament the breaking of bread in Jesus' name, is by definition a community in service to the hungry. By virtue of partaking in the sacrament of bread, we become united with the one body of Christ among whose members are multitudes who are hungry. The question becomes not *if* but *how* we are going to share bread with these hungry brothers and sisters.

Discussion guide

1. Are prayer and action inseparable? What action does God expect of us as a result of our prayers?
2. "My neighbor's material needs are my spiritual needs." What does this mean? Do you agree?
3. Is the Lord's prayer spiritual, political, or both?
4. How can we not only share bread with the hungry but "be" bread for them?
5. How are physical and spiritual hunger related?
6. "God's name participates in God's reality." Which names for God best describe God's reality for you?
7. We pray, "God's will be done." How do we discern God's will in a given situation?
8. "A danger arises when my right to money and property comes into conflict with your right to bread." What does this assertion have to do with our choices about lifestyle?

3. Hunger Imperatives

"To leave men without food is a fault that no circumstance attenuates; the distinction between the voluntary and the involuntary does not apply here." —Rabbi Yachanon[13]

Hear the cries of the poor!

In preparation for this project I invited Wartburg Seminary's international students to meet with me and respond to two basic questions: (1) What does hunger look like in your country? (2) What should the church be doing about it? Students from four countries, Tanzania, Namibia, El Salvador, and Papua New Guinea, several of them pastors, responded. In what follows, I want to share what I heard from them.

In all four of these countries there was deep concern for the problem of hunger, though the particular circumstances varied from country to country. From the outset of our discussion we found it necessary to make a distinction between starvation and malnutrition. Starvation refers to the desperate hunger of masses of people for a defined period of time, because of natural disasters such as earthquake, hurricane, drought, or flood, but also exacerbated by official negligence or mismanagement. This is the present situation in North Korea and is spreading in eastern Africa. Malnutrition refers to the chronic shortage of food leading to the birth of premature babies, infant mortality, and greater susceptibility to and life-threatening danger from various illnesses (malaria, flu, childhood diseases). Chronic malnutrition requires that larger sums be spent on health care, diverts money away from education, limits individuals from fuller participation in economic activity, and diverts investment from other developmental priorities.

Anna and Benson spoke about the situation in Tanzania, where starvation began in the North earlier this last year as a result of drought. While in neighboring states there was an excess of food, these northern states experienced starvation. Some people became so desperate that they sought to hand over their children to others in the central part of the country, to keep them from starving. The problem has been complicated by problems of infrastructure and distribution. Last year's bumper crops were sold to obtain cash for payment of debts and purchase of goods. The means to preserve last year's harvest does not exist. This year's crop was not adequate, and people began to starve. Without food, no schools opened at any level for three or four months, setting back the process of education. The tremendous setback in these regions will affect them for years to come.

While starvation is a dramatic problem, the consequences of chronic malnutrition are even more devastating. In Tanzania 80% of the population are chronically malnourished. One pastor reported, "You can see it in their eyes. . . . Malnutrition is the most deeply rooted problem inhibiting the development of my country." The average life span is 51 years, the lowest in Africa.

Malnutrition has multiple consequences for the church and its ministry. The pastor arrives at the church to preach and lead worship. The husbands are gone, searching

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[13] Quoted in Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquenes University Press, 1969), 201.

for food. Families wait at home, anticipating the man's return. People avoid coming to church because of the expectation that they must bring food to share when they have none for their own children. Contributions to the church are negatively impacted because people must spend more for food. When schools cut back on providing meals, families must themselves spend more to provide food for their children who attend school.

Daniel and Andries spoke of Namibia. Even after seven years of independence from South Africa, there continues to be no food sufficiency. Namibia is still importing food from South Africa. While Namibia is a country rich in agriculture, the majority of the population are settled on communal lands with the best commercial land still occupied by a white minority. A key problem is thus land distribution. Related to this is the issue of exporting crops and raw materials to profit the white minority, while the black majority must then pay high prices for manufactured import goods.

The small farms of the black Namibians are greatly impacted by climate, with crop yields varying significantly from year to year. Irrigation is a major challenge; there are only two major rivers, and Namibia is a dry country. There is also an urgent need for education in farming techniques and for more agricultural technology. Refugees place extra pressure on the food supply. Africa is a war-torn continent, and when there is not enough food for your own people, there is even less to share with refugees from Angola or Zaire.

While there is no starvation in Namibia, malnutrition needs to be addressed by the government. Malnutrition means money spent for education and health programs is less effective than it could be, because hungry children are not physically or mentally prepared to learn. Malnutrition contributes to health problems (such as tuberculosis and infant diseases) and magnifies the devastating impact of AIDS.

Vilma described the present situation in El Salvador, where the problem of hunger has been intensified by twelve years of war, in which there were enormous violations of human rights. In 1992, the people voted for a government that would bring an end to the war. The war's end has in no way decreased the tension, however, between the needs of the poor majority of the population and the government which has represented the interests of the wealthy. The people are becoming poorer than ever. 67% of the population are poor with 35% living in extreme poverty. The unemployment rate is over 50%. Most of the 45% of the population who live in rural areas lack basic services. In 1979, the illiteracy rate was 48%; now it is 58%. Only 6% have a college education. The lack of education means that people are unqualified for most good paying jobs.

Major support for the economy comes from cash sent by family members living and working in other countries, like the U.S., who send money back to their loved ones. Other countries are investing in private enterprise in El Salvador but not in the social infrastructure. For example, fast-food restaurants have been established throughout the country, but most of the people cannot afford to eat there. The banks support loans for large corporations but do not invest in small businesses. Polarization between rich and poor is increasing; the middle class is disappearing. Of those who have no economic means of support, many turn to crime. Most people were economically better off during the war than they are now.

Of the four countries represented, the most hopeful report in terms of hunger came from Kudud, whose home is Papua

New Guinea. Because of the isolation of the population, Papua New Guinea is a difficult country to study. The people live in three areas: most live in villages, others live and work in towns, and still others have migrated to yet larger towns in order to "look for more," with many of these now staying in squatter settlements. Normally there are no serious hunger problems because the soil is rich. Occasionally there have been periods of prolonged drought,[14] but the problem of hunger has been addressed by people sharing. Supplies of food have been available. One concern is that of certain dietary deficiencies due to similarity of the foodstuffs grown (tubers, banana, taro, yams, cacao).

Even in Papua New Guinea, however, there are some disconcerting trends. Here too one observes increasing disparity between the wealthy and the poor. This has meant the implementation of policies that have negative impact on villages. Another danger is that of clear cutting forests. If these trends continue, it will lead to an increase in hunger.

What should be the church's mission in the face of widespread hunger and poverty? Several important answers were given to this question by the international students. Where there is starvation, the church must provide not only material relief but also advocacy that the respective government respond to the crisis with responsibility. Where there is chronic malnutrition, the church needs to help provide social services —food, clean water supply, and medical support. Educational programs are urgently needed in agriculture and nutrition/food preparation. Such education is especially necessary among the younger generation. Developmental projects, such as the Heifer project, have been very successful in some places. Grassroots projects (providing bee hives, fish ponds, or poultry) offer not only material food support but also assist in providing needed education. Such projects are especially beneficial in developing self-reliance. Beyond these types of "in-kind" projects, however, people need cash income to purchase items which would otherwise be unavailable and to build economic security.

The students emphasized that the church has a key role to play not only in social service but also in social advocacy. People need education in the causes of hunger and poverty. The trend toward private ownership leads to increased poverty as people are displaced from the land and lose their means of support. Unemployment is reaching crisis levels in many places. Commercialization creates consumer desires that clash with the need to provide basic human services—food, water, and housing. Governments must be called to account for the failure to provide basic necessities. The indebtedness of most of these countries means that they are forced to service the national debt rather than invest in the development of services to meet the basic needs of the population. In its advocacy efforts, the church must work ecumenically in order to strengthen its voice. In the words of one student, "The church has the mission to denounce injustice and announce the good news of the kingdom of God."

Putting the problem of hunger in context by considering the unique situations in these four countries reveals that feeding the hungry is a complex challenge. While the biblical and theological imperatives about hunger are clear, in charting a particular

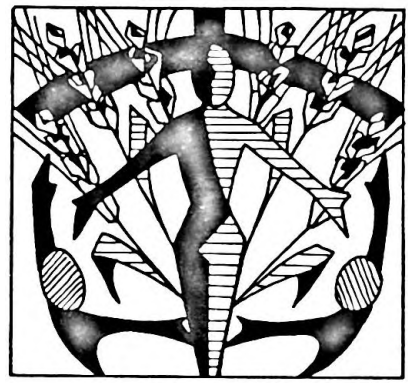
[14] Bonnie Jensen, Executive Director of the ELCA's Division for Global Mission, reported in October 1998 that Papua New Guinea appears to be entering at present into a situation of serious drought, related to El Niño.

course of action the church must also engage in detailed study of political, social, cultural, religious, and economic factors. A social statement on the economy can contribute much to directing our church toward deeper understanding and more committed engagement in the midst of a complex reality, particularly on the macro level. A social statement on the economy can provide direction for our advocacy efforts as a church. It also can offer an occasion for teaching in our synods and congregations. For implementation of specific programs, however, we depend on those who develop national, regional, and local strategies for implementation of particular projects that will directly meet the needs of the hungry. To this end we need the wisdom of those who direct our World Hunger Program and those who serve in global mission as they pay attention to the voices of those who live in a particular place. Above all, in developing strategies to stop hunger, we must listen to the hungry people themselves.

Stopping hunger as theological imperative

"There remains an experience of incomparable value, that we have learned to see the great events of world history for once from below, from the perspective of those who are excluded, suspected, maltreated, powerless, oppressed, and scorned, in short the sufferers." —Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Just as there were historical reasons for the emergence to prominence of the theme of justification in the sixteenth century, there are compelling historical reasons for the emergence of the theme of justice in the twentieth century. What we need to learn is that prayer and neighbor love, justification and justice, belong together. Justified sinners both acquire Christ's imputed righ-



teousness by faith and are made agents of God's justice by the power of the Spirit. The theological hiatus that we for good reasons place between justification and justice stemming from the historical situation of the Reformation does not exist to the Spirit of God. The Spirit at work in justification is the same One who makes us just, setting us free to live justly.

To pay attention to the cries of the poor in the world around us is to have our ecclesial business-as-usual interrupted as by a scream. How would we respond this very hour if even a few of the suffering hungry ones of this world stood as onlookers to our lives from the edges of this room? How would we think and act differently in the physical presence of even a single one who is starving? We could not continue per usual but would be forced to stop what we are doing and minister to that one. This is the very situation of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19–31). Lazarus sits right outside our room, out of sight and out of mind. And so we proceed with our, yes, important agendas, leaving Lazarus to fend for himself. Lazarus exists only at the periphery of consciousness. We awaken to his plight on global or inner city immersion experiences,

but the enormity of the problem overwhelms us and we quickly find ways to shelter ourselves from the stark reality of a billion hungry Lazaruses.

The evil of hunger deserves urgent attention from the church. The pervasiveness of hunger—one billion hungry human beings—forces us to think in terms of numbers that boggle the imagination. If we rightly stand aghast at a system that manufactured the holocaust of 6 million Jews, how is it that we fail to be scandalized by the death each day of 35 to 40 thousand children from hunger related causes? Philip Hefner writes:

> I believe that the destructiveness and suffering heaped upon persons by economic and social class divisions in the United States may well be known in the next century as our own "confessing church" problem. In Germany under Hitler, the churches brought disgrace upon themselves for their failure to recognize the anti-Jewish policies of the society and make efforts to counter them. The Confessing Church emerged from a remnant of the churches and did work underground against Hitler's policies and did attempt to serve the needs of the Jews. Even today, the mainstream churches bear the stigma of their failure, and the Confessing Church stands as a courageous attempt to be the authentic church under Hitler. Thirty years from now we may well find our churches falling under a similar judgment of history. Millions of Americans are becoming increasingly poor and disenfranchised. What record of protest and ministry have our churches presented in the face of this trend?[15]

As leaders in the church, how can we theologically and morally tolerate a status quo in which the reality of one billion malnourished human beings is considered "normal"?

As the church considers its social teaching regarding economic life, we have many alternatives as to how we may choose to address the complexity of the questions that face us. In our capacity as church, however, given the immensity of human suffering due to hunger and given the clarity of the biblical witness concerning justice for the poor, we have as our first obligation to speak boldly and consistently about the need to attend first to the needs of the hungry and to advocate for systemic change to ensure priority is given to their needs. Other institutions can and will assume other postures with regard to what makes for good economics. Whatever else we say as a church about the economy, our first and last word must be about God's concern for those hungry children of God whose lives rapidly become invisible when talk turns to economic theory. In my opinion, this is the most faithful and truly necessary thing the church has to offer to a public discussion of economic matters: in the economy of God, the needs of all people are given consideration, beginning with the least.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., preached these words in his sermon, "A Knock at Midnight":

> The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and critic of the state, and never its tool. If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority. If the church does not participate in the struggle for peace and economic and racial justice, it will forfeit the loyalty of millions and cause men everywhere to say that it has atrophied its will. But if the church will free itself from the shackles of a deadening status quo, and, recovering its great historic mission, will speak and act fear-

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[15] Philip Hefner, "The Church as a Community of Belonging in a Society Divided by Economic and Social Class," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 24 (June 1997): 220.

> lessly and insistently in terms of justice and peace, it will enkindle the imagination of mankind and fire the souls of men, imbuing them with a glowing and ardent love for truth, justice, and peace.[16]

As we continue to ponder the future of ecumenical relationships with the churches with whom we are in full communion and others with whom we have strong relationships, here is a task worthy of our time and effort: to cooperatively and in unity rejoin our efforts both in terms of immediate relief of human suffering and in advocacy for structural change on behalf of the hungry. While the record of ecumenical cooperation in social ministry for the hungry has been strong, the hour has come for giving even more central prominence to these efforts as church bodies. Such a witness would give visibility to the tangible difference made by ecumenical cooperation and provide a worthy outlet for new expressions of common cause. Feeding the hungry is an arena where ecumenical cooperation in mission is not a slogan but achieves visible and tangible results.

To propose stopping hunger as a matter of *status confessionis*, as will be elaborated in the final essay, is to propose that we must turn from whatever else we are doing and respond to the silent screams of the hungry. Already an ethical use of *status confessionis* was declared by the Lutheran World Federation in 1977 as the ending of apartheid in South Africa found its *kairos*. Apartheid was named as an evil of monstrous proportions. For the church to justify, or even tolerate, a system that produced a policy of apartheid was tantamount to heresy. The problem of hunger may be equally urgent, and even more insidious because of the invisibility of the poor from our daily routines.

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[16] Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James Melvin Washington (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 501.

Discussion guide

1. "To leave men without food is a fault that no circumstance attenuates; the distinction between the voluntary and the involuntary does not apply here." Do you agree or disagree with this claim?
2. This essay began with the questions: What does hunger look like in your country? What should the church be doing about it? How would you answer these questions about the United States and the community in which you live?
3. In what ways is hunger influenced by racism? by sexism?
4. The international students interviewed named stark disparity between rich and poor in their countries. Does that disparity exist where you live?
5. "The church has the mission to denounce injustice and announce the good news of the kingdom of God." Does your congregation see this as its mission? If so, how are you accomplishing it?
6. You may have heard the saying, "Live simply, so that others may simply live." What does this mean? Discuss the biblical basis for the following saying: "Live justly, so that others may just live."

7. How would you respond this very hour if even a few of the suffering hungry ones stood as onlookers to your life?
8. As baptized members of the church, how can we theologically and morally tolerate a *status quo* in which the reality of one billion malnourished human beings is considered "normal"?

4. Stopping Hunger—A Matter of *Status Confessionis*?

What would it take to provoke the church of Jesus Christ to repentance for failing to feed Christ incarnate in the hungry neighbor (Mt 25:42)?

The piling up of statistics? If our world were a village of 1,000 people, 500 of us would be hungry. One billion people in this world are chronically undernourished. 12 million children in the United States under the age of 18 are hungry. How have our minds become so dulled that such statistics become innocuous?

The piling up of dead bodies? 35 to 40 thousand children die each day of hunger-related causes. The risk of dying from a given disease is doubled for mildly malnourished children and tripled for those moderately malnourished. Who can measure the risks for those millions who are *chronically* malnourished? One child under the age of 5 dies every two seconds. In the ten minutes it takes you to read this essay, three hundred children will die of hunger-related causes. How have our hearts become so hardened that we do not feel outrage?

The piling up of Bible verses? Ronald Sider in 1980 performed a genuine service by compiling an anthology of Scripture passages pertaining to the matter of social justice. The edited texts, entitled *Cry Justice: The Bible on Hunger and Poverty*, total no less than 188 pages. The very core of the Christian Bible shouts out compassion and justice for the hungry. Reference was made above to the parable of the Great Judgment in Matthew 25 where the wicked are cast into the eternal fire for failing to minister to Christ in the form of the hungry neighbor. The biblical witness testifying to the imperative of feeding the hungry is clear, unambiguous, and massive. How have our eyes become so blinded that we can read God's word and not see the starving neighbors to whom it refers?

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in itself ought to suffice to summon the church to repentance for a world of hungry neighbors. Lazarus sits at the very gate of the rich man. Yet poor Lazarus remains invisible. And the rich man feasts sumptuously every day. After both are dead, the rich man is tormented in Hades and asks Abraham to summon Lazarus to minister to his need. This request denied, the rich man begs Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his living relatives.

> Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them." He said, "No, father Abraham;

> but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." (Lk 16:29–31)

Nor are we convinced by the raising of Jesus from the dead.

In the last decades a cry arose from the poor of the earth through the voices of liberation theologians. Their theology emanates from the standpoint of the world's poor. Never before has a theology so consistently addressed both God's word and the situation of the world's marginal people. Never before has a theology raised such a challenge to those who dare to write thick theological books but ignore the requisites of justice. For presuming, on scriptural grounds, to argue God's preferential option for the poor, liberation theology has been criticized as Marxist and slandered unmercifully. Its impact has been neutralized and the cry of the poor effectively muffled. But this in no way alters the facts of the case: the God of the Christian Bible is a God who is revealed as one who shows preferential concern for the hungry.

What theological resources are available to wake the church from its coma, to inspire response to the crisis of its hungry neighbors? As I search for an answer to this question, I return to a single proposal: that stopping hunger attain the priority of a matter of *status confessionis*, a concern of utmost confessional significance. Although the reality of hunger in our world is pandemic and therefore insidious, the church of Jesus Christ must more than ever raise a clarion call: existing circumstances are intolerable, and feeding the hungry must become a component of core Christian identity. Simply to lament the plight of the hungry is insufficient. The church must be summoned to respond to the hungry neighbor as to Jesus Christ himself. In the words of St. Rose of Lima, "When we serve the poor and the sick, we serve Jesus. We must not fail to help our neighbors, because in them we serve Jesus." At stake is the integrity of the gospel itself and the working out of our own salvation (Phil 2:12).

Defining *status confessionis*

Although the Latin term *status confessionis* arose in a German context, it does not appear as such in the Lutheran confessional writings. The idea, however, derives from the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord:

> We also believe, teach and confess that, at a time for confession when the enemies of God's Word are intent on suppressing the pure doctrine of the holy gospel, the whole church of God and every Christian, and especially the servants of God's Word as leaders of God's church, are in duty bound in virtue of God's Word to confess publicly, not only in words, but also in works and deeds, the doctrine and whatever belongs to religion, and that they must not yield to the adversaries even in such indifferent matters or allow the same to be imposed on them by the enemy by force or trickery for the impairment of the service to God and the introduction and maintenance of idolatry. (S.D. paragraph 10, 8–10)

This paragraph defines a situation in which faithfulness to God's Word requires giving confessional status to a secondary issue (*adiaphoron*) for the sake of defending the gospel. Such a "time for confession" summons all Christians "to confess publicly, not only in words, but also in works and deeds, the doctrine and whatever belongs to religion." The doctrine to which we here appeal is the biblical teaching regarding compassion for people in physical need.

The history of interpretation and appli-

cation of the concept *status confessionis* has been of two types. A *restrictive* interpretation applies only when the very identity of the church is temporarily threatened by a persecution that imposes false doctrine, which would force it into idolatry and heresy. It thus refers to very particular conflicts between church and state. Such times for confessing arose in the political strife of the Reformation period and in Nazi Germany with the attempt to apply the Aryan paragraph to the church, a law that would remove from office all pastors of Jewish descent. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, early in the church struggle, saw resistance to Nazi interference in the affairs of the church as such a matter of *status confessionis*. A restrictive interpretation greatly minimizes the number of occasions in which a *status confessionis* could apply.

A second, *ethical* interpretation of *status confessionis* broadens the range of instances where the church might choose to declare an issue to be of confessional stature. Karl Barth took this position, expanding the scope of *status confessionis* beyond the church struggle per se into general opposition to the Hitler regime. He opposed Nazi rule and policies as a matter of Christian conscience and appealed to others to do likewise as part of their fundamental confession of faith. The movement countering the influence and leadership of the state church (the "German Christians") came to be known as the Confessing Church.

In 1968 W. A. Visser 't Hooft, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches from its foundation until 1966, declared: "It must become clear that church members who deny in fact their responsibility for the needy in any part of the world are just as much guilty of heresy as those who deny this or that article of the faith."[17] The concept of "ethical heresy" informs this second interpretation of *status confessionis*.

Meeting at Dar es Salaam in 1977, delegates to the Lutheran World Federation's Sixth Assembly issued this summons to member churches: "We especially appeal to our white member churches in Southern Africa to recognize that the situation in Southern Africa constitutes a *status confessionis*. This means that, on the basis of faith and in order to manifest the unity of the church, churches would publicly and unequivocally reject the existing apartheid system." Other appeals to elevate a contemporary concern to the level of *status confessionis* have been made with reference to the rejection of nuclear weapons (by church "brotherhoods" in Germany during the late 1950s and 60s and by the Executive Board of the Reformed Alliance in Germany in 1982). More recently the issue has been raised through an appeal to *kairos*—the proposal that *now* is the opportune time to confess and act—with documents arising from South Africa, Central America, the United States, and a coalition with representatives from several nations. George Hunsinger argued (1985) that the political and theological issues facing the church in America (human rights violations, U.S. policy in the Third World, nuclear arms, racism) require a confessing church today. Ulrich Duchrow proposed (1986) that the transformation of the world economic system deserves attention as an issue for a contemporary confessing church movement.

A pitfall of declaring contemporary ethical issues occasions for a confessing church and reasons for declaring *status confessionis* is the endless list of special interests that might be proposed. The debate surrounding the adoption of the LWF resolution regarding apartheid illustrates

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[17] W. A. Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973).

the difficulty of attaining consensus. Any proposal to adopt a specific concern as a matter of *status confessionis* must be thoroughly studied and discussed. Yet a particular issue becomes *de facto* a matter of utmost confessional concern not when a church body adopts a resolution but when a consensus emerges among Christian people that this cause is imperative for the integrity of the faith itself. Adopting confessional status for ending hunger is a dramatic strategy—a peculiar recourse for elevating the discussion to the priority it deserves. Here is an issue of utmost urgency, literally a matter of life and death.

The imperative to stop hunger transcends denominational divisions. The testimony of the Scriptures regarding God's defense of the poor and hungry is so strong that it belongs to the *sensus fidei* of the entire catholic church (*Lumen Gentium* 12). The time has come for all churches to acknowledge both their biblical heritage and the scandal of hunger in the contemporary world. A kairotic ecumenical consensus could consolidate efforts to eliminate hunger in the twenty-first century. Such a shared *consensus fidelium* of the ecumenical church would attain results far beyond any individual denomination's.

At the core of the Christian faith

How then does commitment to ending hunger belong to the core convictions of the Christian faith? The hub of sixteenth-century theology was the question, What is necessary for salvation? Opposing any claim to righteousness by works, the evangelical parties confessed salvation by grace through faith for Christ's sake. Our proposal to adopt concern for the hungry as a matter of *status confessionis* ought not be considered a condition placed on the gospel. Salvation has been won by Christ's death and resurrection and by this alone. However, given the magnitude of starvation at the end of the twentieth century and given the biblical mandate to feed the hungry, this proposal would establish Christian commitment toward elimination of hunger as the highest priority in our response to God's grace. To be a Christian in a world of massive hunger is to minister "not only in words, but also in works and deeds" to feed hungry people. The Bible is clear, even overwhelming in its witness that we will be judged on the basis of our response to the hungry neighbor.

To this end, a comfortable church must awaken from its sloth into compassionate action. Sloth is the deadly sin that seduces the church into complacency by cheapening God's grace. Our sloth steals from us any sense of urgency in responding to the needs of our hungry neighbors, replacing it with a sense of futility. We become indifferent, apathetic, spiritually dead. In the case of starving people, the sloth of the comfortable is literally a deadly sin for those who daily perish. Though we are saved by grace, we are also judged by our works. How severe will be that judgment if we neglect to feed our hungry neighbor! The response to the needs of the poor has consequences both for their salvation and ours: their physical condition is inextricably linked to our spiritual wholeness. To disregard a world of hungry neighbors steals from our own humanity.

James 2:14–17 pleads:

> What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

The response to the needs of the poor has consequences both for their salvation and ours: their physical condition is inextricably linked to our spiritual wholeness.

Some scholars describe this passage as an intentional polemic against the consequences of an antinomian interpretation of Paul's teaching on justification. Salvation by grace through faith can become a self-satisfying mind game, detached from the experience of human suffering. Grace so cheapened is no grace at all. A fat church, basking in God's grace while the hungry starve, needs the shock therapy of James.

But it is one thing to take care of a brother or sister who confronts you in the starkness of their nakedness or hunger and another altogether if you cannot see them at all. This was the sin of the church in Corinth. When this church gathered to eat the Lord's supper, it divided into factions. At the meal preceding the sharing of the loaf and cup, some ate their fill (one would assume from their own provisions) while others went hungry. Although gathered in the same place, those with plenty took no account of those without. Then all presumed to come together to the Lord's supper.

Paul judged the Corinthians to be guilty of profaning the body and blood of Christ. He writes: "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves" (1 Cor 11:27–29). We are the Corinthians, guilty of failing to discern the body of Christ when we eat and drink, neither perceiving the hunger of those around us nor sharing our provisions. Our culpability is especially scandalous when the hungry include so many baptized brothers and sisters in Christ. To eat the Lord's supper without commitment to feed the hungry is to eat and drink judgment upon ourselves.

To consider stopping hunger as a matter of *status confessionis* entails the belief that there is indeed enough food for all. Jesus' frequently cited words, "For you always have the poor with you . . ." must cease to serve as a rationale justifying a world of hungry neighbors. Instead we must listen to the rest of this saying, ". . . and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish," as a summons to action. Just as it was once inconceivable that there be a world without slavery or a society where men and women are equal, so today we can scarcely imagine a world where all people have food to eat. Yet such a world would be realizable if there were but the will to put feeding the hungry at the top of our agenda. The final issue is not insufficient resources but their just distribution. Were we to attain fairness of food distribution, this would still not be the kingdom of God. But it would be a welcome anticipation thereof.

Practical implications

What would stopping hunger as *status confessionis* mean in practical terms? For individual Christians, it would mean an

intentional ordering of lifestyle to include acts of charity and advocacy for the poor. One would be challenged to examine all one's spending habits according to their impact on hungry people. Presently, Lutherans give an average of only $2 per member per year to denominational hunger programs. Such a giving level indicates vast ignorance (also indifference?) regarding the urgency of the problem. Charitable giving to hunger programs would become as normal as giving to current operating expenses of a congregation. Members would routinely volunteer to work in local soup kitchens and food pantries, providing both material assistance and direct personal connection to those who are poor.

In such a church, it would become standard procedure for members to write letters and otherwise communicate to members of Congress regarding bills that affect the welfare of the hungry. Participation in an organization like Bread for the World would be viewed as a basic expression of Christian concern. All legislation would be first evaluated for its impact on marginal people rather than on the criterion of self-interest. In a church where stopping hunger were a matter of *status confessionis*, members would set aside partisan political commitments and examine all political questions from the perspective of the hungry. Whether Democrat or Republican in origin, all economic and political strategies would be evaluated on the basis of their effectiveness in alleviating hunger.

In a church committed to ending hunger, the increased amounts of money available would multiply relief efforts and dramatically increase the number and types of developmental projects. Record numbers of members would volunteer to work in domestic and international projects that aim to improve the standard of living for the poor. In terms of advocacy, a church confessionally committed to eliminating hunger would continually educate members on the structural barriers impeding the availability of food for all and raise a collective voice for social structures that serve those most in need. The church would redouble efforts to sustain interest in stopping hunger over the long haul, transcending the sporadic attention given to immediate relief during times of famine or disaster. Bishops and pastors would so integrate concern for the hungry into their teaching that awareness of the need would consistently permeate our consciences. In short, the hunger program of the church would be lifted up from its status as one concern among many and be privileged among the pressing issues of Christian conscience today. Faithful response to the gospel at the beginning of the twenty-first century would require action to eliminate hunger.

Is a proposal to declare stopping hunger a matter of *status confessionis* too utopian to take seriously? Does it hopelessly confuse law and gospel? Many objections can be raised. If not this, what measures do you propose that can summon the church to devote itself to eliminating this great cause for scandal?

The kingdom of God and the Cross

To be confronted with the reality of massive hunger in our world and to hear God's word on behalf of justice for the poor leads us who are not hungry to be convicted by our sin. We see the effects of sin embedded in social, political, and economic structures. But we know finally that the roots of those sinful structures come out of the human heart, your heart and mine. To be moved by the plight of the suffering of the world is to be moved to confession of sin and repentance.

What is the connection between all that I have said in these pages and the cross of Jesus Christ?

First, the theology of the cross means God suffers with the poor. God's heart bleeds in the face of the suffering. When we go to respond to the hungry, God in Jesus Christ is already there to meet us.

Second, the theology of the cross, viewed from below in human terms, means we should understand why the Jesus who proclaimed the inbreaking of God's kingdom in his own words and actions ended up on a cross. To announce the arrival of God's reign is threatening to those in power. The sign hung on the cross mocked Jesus for his proclamation of the kingdom as it read, "The King of the Jews" (Mk 15:26).

Third, the theology of the cross, viewed from above in theological terms, means that God has chosen to save you and me and the entire world by the death and resurrection of this same Jesus Christ. On the cross, Jesus confronted and defeated all the principalities and powers that keep us in bondage to death and sin: our preoccupation with self, with security, with superiority (Col 2:15). By raising Jesus from the dead, God sets us free from our bondage to sin in order to live in conformity with the way of Jesus. We die and rise each new morning in remembrance of our baptism.

Because you and I remain entangled in sin, *simul justus et peccator*, no amount of rallying around justice texts from the Bible is sufficient to set us free. While remembering our justice heritage is vital, something yet more radical is required. As I listen to myself making the case that justice for the poor and hungry belongs to the core of Scripture, I also have become aware of how accusing, harsh, and merciless those texts can sound. I stand convicted by my own words. Those who give leadership in the church already lead impossible lives. And summoning leaders of the church to feed one billion hungry neighbors is adding one more impossible task.

There is finally only one solution to the dilemma in which we find ourselves as we listen to God's word in defense of the poor. There is finally only one way for camels to get through the eye of the needle. And so in conclusion, it is vital to proclaim the most clear and radical word that I know that can free our church to serve the hungry:

> In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for you, and for his sake God forgives you all your sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ God gives the power to become the children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit.[17]

For freedom Christ has set us free (Gal 5:1).

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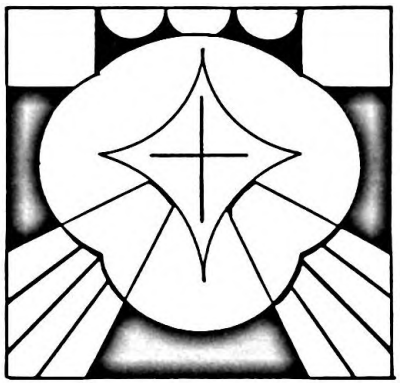
[17] *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), 56.

Discussion guide



1. What does the phrase "separation of church and state" mean? Should the church speak out on political issues?
2. What are the responsibilities of church members with regard to the hungry?
3. "When the church is silent, it supports the status quo." What does this statement mean? Do you agree?
4. What is the relationship between being saved by God's grace and being judged by God according to our works?
5. What does it mean to "discern"? How do we "discern" the body of Christ?
6. What belongs to the core commitments of your own confession of Christian faith? Where do the needs of the hungry fit in?
7. What are some ways in which your congregation can raise its voice and organize action on behalf of the hungry?
8. What was the most challenging for you about these articles? The least helpful? What might you be led to do differently?

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The Farm Crisis: The Reality of our Lives

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Last spring, our congregation's part-time secretary, who is a farmer, but who prefers to be called a "farmer's wife," asked me, "Just how does the church respond to the rural crisis?"

I answered her with the following. Our first response is to continue to be the church. We continue to proclaim the gospel to all people. We continue to celebrate the sacraments. We continue to preach, teach, and hear God's word. We continue to be the church.

Second, we encourage fellowship. We encourage people to listen to one another, to share with one another, to be supportive of one another. We encourage people to reach out to one another. We, as the church, take the lead in helping people struggle through the implications of this crisis.

Third, we educate and advocate. Those of us who live and work and breathe in the rural areas of our country are often amazed at how far removed this major crisis is from the rest of the country. While we struggle daily with the effects of the farm crisis, others are completely unaware. One of our farmers says this: Don't eat breakfast. Don't eat lunch. I'll talk to you about the farm crisis around supper time when you're good and hungry. Then you may be ready to listen.

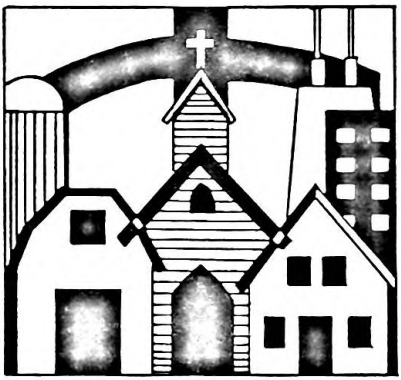
We recognize that there is no one solution to the farm crisis. There are many ways, and sometimes competing ways, of dealing with this difficult problem. What may work for one segment of farming may not work at all for another. But we are all in agreement that something must be done.

There are ways for the church as a whole to recognize and deal with the farm crisis. Since 48% of the congregations in the ELCA are classified as rural, this is a crisis that reaches across our whole denomination. One of the first things we church people can do is to say, "Yes, there is a farm crisis." So often we rightly hear about a crisis in this nation or that nation, but we fail to see the farm crisis in our own country. So often we rural people feel overlooked. There *is* a crisis here. It is real. And it is more than just the crisis of the day.

While other segments of the economy prosper, the farm segment does not. For several years now the farm segment of our economy has been hit by one disaster after another. Too much rain, not enough rain, weather-related diseases all have combined to bring about diminished crop yields. This

is, of course, nothing unusual for farmers. What is unusual is that the normal problems have been combined with the lowest crop and cattle prices in fifty-three years. Not only is there not enough of a crop, but the prices for the crop are disgraceful. It costs far more to produce an acre of wheat than a person profits from an acre of wheat. This is the farm crisis. For how many years can a person lose money?

The result of this farm crisis is that more people are leaving farms. More people are leaving rural communities. More people are leaving rural churches. An entire segment of our population is disappearing.



It is this crisis that we rural pastors face on a daily basis. There is no easy, quick fix. We know that society is moving from rural to urban. We know that worldwide markets and economies greatly influence farming, even in rural North Dakota. We know that as long as there is cheap food in the store, many people will remain indifferent. But we also know that there are solutions to some of the problems. We know that we are dealing with real people with real struggles.

Our first response, as it is in every situation, is to continue to be the church. All of us need to hear the word of the Lord. All of us need to hear about and know God's love and forgiveness. All of us need the reassurance of God's forgiveness that comes through Holy Communion. All of us need to grow in faith.

This is not rocket science. As the church, we offer the only real solution to any crisis. God's love and care for us can get us from one moment to another. God's acceptance and forgiveness can give us the strength to continue to live. Worshipping God can help us keep our lives in perspective.

The difficulty here is that as people sink deeper into despair and hopelessness they begin to drop out of activities. Often they begin to distance themselves from the church. The church becomes irrelevant to their lives. Since we can't take away the pain, it is much easier to hide. The challenge for the church is to continue to stay aware of the community at large, to continue to reach out to all, and to make special efforts to include those in crisis.

To help achieve this end, we encourage ourselves to walk hand in hand with those in crisis. In our farming communities we learn to listen and support one another. This is not always easy. In our part of the world we don't always talk about our feelings. There is an old joke that is partly true. "How can you tell an extroverted farmer? He looks at your boots when he talks rather than at his own." Talking about personal problems does not come easy.

So we learn to watch for the warning signs: change of character, isolation, withdrawal, suicide talk. Part of our difficulty is that many times we are afraid to talk about the problem, fearing that the problem may become ours. If we discuss with a friend or neighbor how tough things are going for him, we may have to admit how tough things are going for us.

For years we have used the excuse that the farmers that are really hurting are just poor managers. Although that may have been partly true, what we are seeing now is that the really good managers are also hurting. When some of our best farmers begin to struggle, we know that this crisis is widespread.

What are some of the factors that are contributing to this crisis in agriculture? This list is not exhaustive, but it is meant to stir you to ask more questions. We write from a North Dakota perspective and realize that some issues may differ in other parts of this country. Again we write to invite you to explore the issues more deeply and take appropriate actions.

1. The economic troubles in Russia and Japan have seriously diminished our customers' ability to purchase what we produce. In Japan $7.9 trillion worth of business capital and household wealth was wiped out between 1990 and 1996. Russia and Japan have purchased lots of grain and other agricultural products from the United States in the past; now they are unable to do so. Between 1996 and 1998 exports to some of our largest customers have been cut in half, or worse.

2. There is continuing concentration of ownership and control in our country's food system. As corporations merge and/or form alliances, they begin to establish what has been called a seamless system, a system that is so completely vertically integrated that the same corporation controls everything from the genetic makeup of the seed to the loaf of bread on the supermarket shelf with no knowledge of the price of anything until the finished product is on the supermarket shelf. The economic literature of the 1980s generally agreed that if four firms had 40% of the market, that market was no longer competitive. Just to give a couple of examples: 79% of U.S. beef packing is done by IBP Inc., ConAgra, Excel Corporation (Cargill) and Farmland National Beef Pkg. Co. 62% of U.S. flour milling is controlled by ADM, ConAgra, Cargill, and Cereal Food Processors. There are antitrust laws in our country, but often they are not enforced to the full extent of the law. Many people are continuing to question the approval of the merger of Cargill and Continental Grain. The North Dakota Attorney General has asked for a reexamination by the U.S. Justice Department of that deal. The largest corporations in our country now have bigger budgets, more money than our federal government. This threatens to turn farmers into employees or serfs working for the likes of ADM, Cargill, and ConAgra and using the land in the way the corporations determine, which may not be in the best stewardship interests of the land. (For further information see "Consolidation in the Food and Agriculture System," Report to the National Farmers Union, Dr. William Heffernan, University of Missouri, February 5, 1999.)

3. Farmers try to cut their costs of production, but they constantly face unfair circumstances in the marketplace. Canadian farmers can buy the same chemicals, many of them produced by Monsanto, for less money than farmers in North Dakota or anywhere else in the U.S. can. If the chemical is cheaper in Canada, why not go across the border, buy what you need, and bring it home? That is illegal. You cannot get through customs with the chemicals. The inequity of this situation has been documented in a study done by North Carolina State University and the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada. This issue must be addressed at international trade talks. There is also much concern over the volume of wheat and cattle being brought from Canada into the United States to be sold here. There were specific limits set,

and those limits have been violated. This is another issue that must be addressed at international trade talks.

4. The citizens of the United States of America enjoy the cheapest food in the world. We spend just 11% of our gross income on food. In comparison, people in Germany spend 25% on food, and in Ireland, 37%. Not too long ago I listened to someone lament the high cost of beef in Switzerland. Apparently the Swiss government prohibits a person from crossing the border, purchasing enough beef for a large dinner party, and bringing it back to their home in Switzerland. The Swiss government is looking out for its farmers. The farmers of the European Union are subsidized at a rate three to ten times greater than our own domestic and export support programs. Senator Kent Conrad of North Dakota has proposed the FITE (Farm Income and Trade Equity) Act as a long-term policy to address these tremendous inequities. It would address the agricultural crisis by increasing support for domestic producers and lay the groundwork to protect American agriculture in future trade negotiations. World trade needs to be fair, not just free.

Family farmers are not looking for a handout. They want to be able to participate in a global marketplace that is fair and equitable. They take pride in being good stewards of the land, watching things grow and working with God to produce goods that keep us well nourished and healthy.

As consumers and investors we must be willing to start asking the tough question, How much profit is enough? We measure the success of a corporation almost exclusively by its bottom line of profit. We need to look more closely to see how that profit was achieved—and at whose expense. Last year I toured a brewery and listened as the tour guide told us what great things the company had done in giving away $25 million that year. I would have been much more impressed if she had said the company gave away only $10 million because we paid a premium price to our barley producers. In North Dakota each year we produce enough barley to make 42 billion cans of beer. Paying barley producers a better price is a real investment in people and farming communities that will continue to bear much fruit.

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The church, as the body of Christ and as one of the last organizations in rural America, needs to take the lead in recognizing the farm crisis and in encouraging each one of us to reach out to one another. The apostle Paul writes about our interdependency in 1 Corinthians 12. If one member of the body of Christ suffers we all suffer together, and likewise, if one member of the body of Christ is honored we all rejoice together. We rural Christians seek the support of the non-rural Christians. We would appreciate recognition of the farm crisis, support from other congregations, and the commitment to work together as partners to find solutions. We look to the church to continue to be the church, to foster fellowship and to educate and advocate.

"Avoid Them": Another Look at Romans 16:17–20

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Paul's directive in Romans 16:17, *avoid them*, has significantly influenced the attitude of some in the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) as to the proper way in which to relate to other Christians and even other Lutherans. This passage helped to shape the attitude of the fathers of the LCMS even prior to their arrival in the United States from Germany and continues do so even today as the church enters the twenty-first century. It serves as justification in the minds of many in the LCMS for standing aloof from churchly involvement with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and from membership in the Lutheran World Federation.

In the early years of the nineteenth century, King Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia undertook to persuade the Lutheran and Reformed churches in his territory to establish a United Evangelical Church. His efforts at persuasion failed, and in 1830, in connection with the 300th anniversary of the presentation of the Augsburg Confession, he decreed the establishment of such a church body. Many confessionally committed Lutherans resisted the king's efforts and found justification for their stand in their understanding of Romans 16: 17. Even after their arrival in the United States the founders of the LCMS based their approach to other Christians on this passage and also used it to justify their attitude toward other Lutherans who were not as staunchly confessional as they were.[1]

Very often the use that is made of this passage assumes that its meaning and application are self-evident. In his *Christian Dogmatics*, Franz Pieper,[2] for example, cites this passage twenty-four times,[3] either to warn against false doctrine or to

[1] The common LCMS understanding of this passage was also held by those synods which at one time were in fellowship with the LCMS through the former Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America.

[2] Franz (Francis) A. O. Pieper was called to a professorship at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in 1878, three years after his graduation from that institution. Following the death of Dr. C. F. W. Walther he was called to serve as president of the seminary and remained in that capacity until his death in 1931. He was president of the church body now known as The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod from 1899 until 1911. His *Christliche Dogmatik*, appearing in three volumes between 1918 and 1924, was published at the request of the synod as it celebrated the 75th anniversary of its founding; and again at the request of the synod as it observed the centennial of its organization, this work was translated into English with the title *Christian Dogmatics*.

[3] Walter W. F. Albrecht, *Index: Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957), 1012.

direct believers to have nothing to do with those who are teaching contrary to the Scriptures. It is always legitimate to undertake a study of passages that on the surface seem to need no exegesis, so as to determine whether some aspect of God's revelation has been overlooked or neglected, and then to consider whether an interpretation or application of a particular passage that has been traditionally accepted is in need of reconsideration or revision.

This study has as its purpose to look carefully at Romans 16:17–20 in its context in Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome in order to determine what the passage meant in its original setting and whether the use that some have made of it is in harmony with Paul's intent in issuing his warning.

The passage and its context

The first task, then, is to seek the meaning of the passage in its original context, and only after that has been done will it be possible to suggest how Paul's warning is to be applied in the life and activity of the church as it enters a new century. What follows is a translation of the entire passage under consideration.[4] Justification for the various exegetical decisions made in preparing the translation will be discussed at the appropriate place in this study.

I implore you, brothers and sisters, to keep your eyes open for those who, contrary to the teaching you learned, are causing dissensions and setting snares, and to turn away from them, for people of such a sort are not serving our Lord Jesus Christ but their own belly, and through fine speaking and flattery they deceive the hearts of the guileless, for your obedience has come to the attention of all. Over you, therefore, I rejoice and want you to be wise in respect to the good and innocent as to the evil. May the God of peace crush Satan under your feet quickly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you!

When Paul wrote his letter to the Christians in Rome, he was writing to a group of Christians to whom he was, for the most part, personally unknown. He wrote the letter to introduce himself to them. He had previously filled the eastern portion of the Mediterranean world with the good news about Jesus, and now his plans called for him to go to Rome, and from there to move on to Spain, which lay at the western edge of the Roman world. His intent was to preach the gospel there as well. One of Paul's purposes in writing to the Roman Christians was to assure them that the message he had been proclaiming elsewhere was in harmony with what they had been taught when they became members of the church. In this way he hoped to gain a welcome for himself upon his arrival in the capital of the empire, and then, with the support of the believers in Rome, to make that city his base of operations for his contemplated missionary endeavors in Spain.

The origin of the church in Rome is shrouded in uncertainty. We can only conjecture as to how the gospel came to the capital of the empire and how the church in that city came into existence. Most of the believers in the house churches in Rome knew of Paul only by reputation, but among them were some individuals who had previously come into contact with him during his missionary activity in Asia Minor and Greece. It was to them that Paul directed the words of greeting in Rom 16:3–15. At the conclusion of that greeting, Paul very

[4] The Greek text underlying the translation is that which appears in *Novum Testamentum Graece*, ed. K. Aland et al. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 26th ed., 1979).

suddenly, without any effort at transition, expresses a serious warning in v. 17 concerning people who foment dissension and thus set spiritual snares to beguile believers.

Though seemingly abrupt, Paul's warning may have been triggered in his mind by the directive, *Greet one another with a holy kiss* (v. 16), with which he brings his greetings to his acquaintances in Rome to a conclusion. The holy kiss was an action that served as a mark of fellowship in the early church (cf. 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:16; 1 Pet 5:14). As he thought of the Christians greeting one another, Paul may have recognized the possibility that peace and harmony in the church might be shattered by the activities of people who cause dissension in the life of the congregation.[5] While this suggestion is plausible, even probable, it should be admitted that we cannot with certainty read Paul's mind to determine exactly why he issued his warning at just this point in his letter.

The appropriate rendering into English for Paul's παρακαλῶ depends upon the urgency of the situation with which Paul is dealing and can be determined only by a study of the entire passage. The fact that Paul introduces his word of warning without transition from the greetings to his acquaintances in Rome suggests that there was a sense of urgency behind Paul's words; accordingly, in the light of context and content, the appropriate translation most probably is *I implore*, a rendering that stresses the apostle's earnestness and implies his anxiety concerning a possibility that he contemplates and against which he warns.[6]

Paul addresses the Christians in Rome as ἀδελφοί (literally, *brothers*), but the context (vv. 3–16) indicates that both male and female members of the church are being addressed.[7] Paul frequently employs this term in addressing the recipients of his epistles; in Romans alone this term appears ten times.[8] The word need have nothing to do with blood relationships in a context such as the present one. At the minimum level this term places an emphasis upon some sort of relationship that exists between Paul and the members of the church in Rome, even if most of those members are personally unknown to the apostle, and he to them.

On occasion the term ἀδελφός need mean no more than that the individual so designated is a neighbor (see the usage in Mt 7:3, 6; Lk 6:41–42); even Mt 18:15 and its parallel in Lk 17:3 may still refer by this term only to forgiving one's neighbor for a transgression against one of Jesus' followers. But the term also goes beyond the relationship of neighborliness.

The use of the term ἀδελφός implies something like a familial relationship. Jesus describes those who hear what he says and carry out God's will as he proclaimed it as his "brothers and sisters and mother" (Mk 3:31–33). And his action on the occasion when the members of his family, his mother and brothers, sought to speak with him, perhaps with the intention of getting him to stop preaching, is in harmony with this understanding of the term, for on that occa-

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[5] This suggestion has been offered by C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* in *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), II:797.

[6] For a brief presentation of the distinction between the various synonyms for making an appeal, the reader may consult the discussion of synonyms in *The New American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, ed. William Morris (Boston: American Heritage Publishing Co., 1973), p. 119, sub "beg."

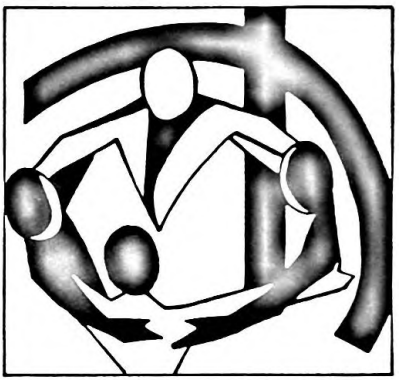
[7] Prisca, Mary, Julia, and the sister of Nereus are clearly female.

[8] 1:13; 7:1, 4; 8:12; 10:1; 11:25; 12:1; 15:14, 30; 16:17.

sion he pointed to his disciples and said, "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Mt 12:46–50). Jesus promises that whoever leaves "house, or brothers, or sisters, or mother" for his sake or the sake of the gospel will be recompensed with a thousand times as much in the age to come (Mk 10:29–30; compare Mt 19:2, 9; Lk 18:29–30), meaning that they will be the members of a larger and better family, the family of God's people.

Though using different terminology, Paul in Romans 8 employs familial language to refer to the relationship of Christians with one another. He states that the Holy Spirit, along with the believer's spirit, testifies that those who believe are "children of God" (v. 16). And later in the same chapter Paul refers to Christ as "the firstborn among many brothers and sisters" (v. 18), that is, he has the status of the elder brother in the Jewish family structure, while those who believe in him have been brought into God's family through adoption. The relationship is familial, but, as Paul indicates, Jesus is God's Son in a special way, being begotten of the Father, while believers enter God's family by the grace of adoption (Rom 8:15; see also Gal 4:6; Eph 3:10). This adoption, as Eduard Schweizer states, "shows that this sonship is not regarded as a natural one but as a sonship conferred by God's act."[9]

It is also important to call to mind the distinction Jesus made in speaking about "my Father" and "your Father," a distinction Paul also maintains (Rom 8:15). The relationship of believers as children of God to their Father in heaven is not the same as that of Jesus as the Son of God to his Father in heaven, though both address God as "Father." Jesus is the incarnate Son of God, while those who believe in him—to use the Pauline way of speaking—are children of



God by adoption (Rom 8:15). All who believe in Jesus have a vertical relationship with the Father through his Son, and at the same time they also have a horizontal relationship with one another as members of God's earthly family.

Paul's first directive to his readers in the verses under consideration in this study is that they should be on the alert, keep their (spiritual) eyes open so as to recognize people whose practice it is to create dissension in the life of the church and thus ensnare believers to the detriment of their spiritual life. The Roman Christians are to consider carefully the conduct and words of people who seek to affiliate, or perhaps who have already affiliated, with their house churches, for some of these people might possibly undertake to disrupt the unity and harmony that should mark the lives of believers with one another.

The term διχοστασία (dissension) occurs in the New Testament only here and in Galatians 5:20, where Paul refers to it as

[9]Eduard Schweizer, υἱοθεσία, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964–1974), VIII:399.

one of the works of the flesh. The dissensions which the flesh fosters may result in deceiving guileless believers (cf. v. 18) and impact their spiritual life. The other term Paul joins with διχοστασία is σκάνδαλον. In its literal sense this term refers to the trap stick, which, when tripped, ensnares the unwary animal and may cause its death. In the present context, the imagery is that of a spiritual snare, which will harmfully impact the lives of unsuspecting Christians. The word is often translated as *offense* and refers to words, actions, or activities that hinder, impact, or destroy faith (Rom 9:3; 11:9; 14:23).

The crucial question to be dealt with in this study concerns the identity of those about whom Paul warns his readers. But before it is possible to discuss this concern, several matters of grammar require consideration. The use of the article τούς with the participle ποιοῦντας allows it to function as a substantive without losing its verbal ability to receive a direct object. The verbal base of the participle is the present stem of the verb ποιεῖν, and this stem may show an ongoing activity on the part of those individuals against whom Paul is warning,[10] or, with equal possibility, it may point to an action that is attempted.[11]

Another matter requiring consideration is the function of the phrase παρὰ τὴν διδαχὴν ἣν ὑμεῖς ἐμάθετε. Is this phrase adjectival, so as to further describe the nouns διχοστασίας and σκάνδαλα, which are the direct objects of the participle ποιοῦντας? Such an understanding of the phrase indicates that the dissensions are doctrinal in nature. Or is its function adverbial, so that the sentence might be translated, *I implore you, brothers and sisters, to keep your eyes open for those who, contrary to the teaching you learned, are causing dissensions and setting*[12] *snares*? On this way of understanding the sentence, the phrase modifies the participle ποιοῦντας, and Paul's warning indicates that the creation of dissension is a contradiction of what the Roman Christians had been taught when they came to faith in Jesus as their Savior.

Some who understand the phrase παρὰ τὴν διδαχὴν ἣν etc. as adverbial maintain that, if the phrase were an adjectival modifier, it would be necessary for the article to precede it. Robert G. Hoerber, however, has clearly demonstrated that the New Testament "has numerous instances in which prepositional phrases modify articular substantives without a connecting article."[13] At the same time, it must be remembered that just because a grammatical construction is possible, other ways of construing the phrase are not thereby excluded. It is equally possible, in accordance with good grammar, to understand the phrase as either adjectival or adverbial. The issue cannot be settled on the basis of grammar alone.

The proper classification of the articles τάς and τά, whether they are specific

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[10] A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), 879. See also Herbert Weir Smith, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 1119.

[11] See Robertson, 800, where the conative use of the present stem is discussed.

[12] Though only one participle appears in the Greek text, two separate English verbs are here employed to agree with contemporary English idiom.

[13] Robert G. Hoerber, *A Grammatical Study of Romans 16, 17* [*sic!*] (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, n.d.). He lists the following New Testament examples of this construction: Gal 1:13; Rom 16:3, 9; Eph 2:15; 2 Cor 9:11 [*bis*]; Col 1:4; Eph 3:4, 13; 1:15; Phil 1:26; 3:9; Col 1:24; Rom 6:4; 4:11; 9:3. It should be noted that the above sequence is that which appears in Hoerber's study.

or generic, is important for interpretation. Theoretically there are four possibilities. The prepositional phrase might function adjectivally and the articles might be generic. But that is not a tenable option, for "as soon as an articular substantive and the accompanying articles are limited by a modifying word or phrase, such as the phrase παρὰ τὴν διδαχὴν ἣν ὑμεῖς ἐμάθετε, used adjectivally, the substantive and accompanying article become specific."[14] At the same time, it is highly unlikely for the prepositional phrase to serve as an adverbial modifier of the participle when the articles τάς and τά are specific, for, as Hoerber notes, if such were the case, "one would then expect the same sentence or the immediate context to make clear to what the specific article is referring."[15] There are, then, two viable options: either the prepositional phrase is adjectival and the articles are specific, or the prepositional phrase is adverbial and the articles are generic.

The next concern is with the function of τούς, which introduces the entire phrase. Does it point to particular individuals who are now threatening the unity of the Roman congregation, or is Paul speaking generally about spreaders of dissension, who at some future date may appear upon the scene? But the question then arises whether the articles τάς and τά point to specific instances of dissension and obstacles that are in Paul's mind as he writes, or whether he is speaking in a general way about what may happen at some time in the future.

Some interpreters undertake to identify specific errorists as the people against whom Paul is alerting his readers.[16] If that view is correct, Paul's warning to the Roman Christians suggests that he is aware that people who had previously sought to undercut his ministry are now working—or are about to work—among the believers in the capital of the empire. Because Paul is sure that these people will dog his footsteps even to Rome, he is expressing a warning against them. The article τούς on this interpretation is specific and points directly to specific divisionists, whose activities are already troubling—or soon will trouble—the house churches in Rome.

There is, however, another possibility worthy of consideration. The articles τούς, τάς, and τά may equally well be generic, pointing to representatives of a class, without reference to specific individuals and their activities. Paul here, then, would not be referring to particular groups or individuals that he had previously encountered, but his warning would be against dissensionists in general. The characteristic that marks such troublemakers is that they cause dissension and set snares that disturb the faith of believers. Paul's experience over the years may well have led him to recognize the need to issue a warning concerning such people, since he had encountered a number of them during the course of his ministry.[17] In his warning, then, Paul is not singling out particular individuals or groups, but rather his reference is to any who foment dissension in the congregation and thus threaten the faith of Christians.

In the prepositional phrase παρὰ τὴν διδαχὴν the preposition παρὰ undoubt-

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[14] Hoerber, 12.

[15] Hoerber, 14.

[16] Cranfield, 799, surveys the various identifications that have been proposed.

[17] The factions that troubled the Corinthian congregation could not have developed without leadership from some source; there must have been individuals who fostered dissension. Paul's letters and Luke's record in the Book of Acts undoubtedly provide only a partial record of Paul's experiences during his missionary endeavors, and there may well have been many situations of this sort that do not find a place in the biblical record.

The crucial question . . . concerns the identity of those about whom Paul warns his readers.

edly is to be understood as adversative[18] and thus may appropriately be translated as *contrary to*. The διδαχή to which Paul refers cannot be a locus in a dogmatic system, since at the time Paul wrote his letter to the Romans no such system had yet been developed. This fact alone should serve as a warning against the unexamined use of Rom 16:17 as primarily a warning against false doctrine. Paul's use of διδαχή in Rom 6:17 sheds light on the meaning of that term here; there is a pattern of teaching which is to mould the way in which Christians conduct their lives. On the assumption that the phrase is adjectival, the reference to *the teaching you learned* would have to be a perversion of some aspect of the work of salvation derived from the Old Testament Scriptures, along with the consequences of this perversion for Christian living.

If the phrase is understood as adjectival and the articles are specific, is it possible to make a closer identification of the individuals or groups that Paul had in mind when giving his warning? Scholars have pointed to a number of possibilities, but after canvassing the various suggestions that have been offered, Cranfield comes to the conclusion that "to imagine that one can, on the basis of these two verses [his discussion appears at the conclusion of his study of v. 18] or of any other evidence afforded by the epistle, single out one group of troublemakers, either already present in the church in Rome or as yet only constituting a possible danger from the outside as the people he had in mind, seems to us quite unrealistic. If Paul had one particular group in mind, we cannot be at all certain which it was."[19] But on the view that the phrase is adjectival, the error must have been in the area of teaching falsely, even though it is impossible to make a definite identification of the troublemakers and their doctrinal error. The difficulty involved in this view is that the article must be regarded as generic, while the adjectival modifier is understood as specific—a situation that has already been shown to be highly improbable.[20]

If, however, the phrase is adverbial, those about whom Paul is warning are creators of dissension that might prevent potential converts to the faith from accepting Christ as Savior, or threatens the faith of those who already believe. Though Cranfield does not consider the possibility that the prepositional phrase may be adverbial, he leaves room for such an understanding when he writes: "Paul may have been warning in a more general way against a danger which he knew would always threaten the churches but could present itself in many different forms."[21] According to this view, the articles τοὺς, τὰς, and τά are all generic. Paul's warning, then, as

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[18] Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, 3d ed., revised and augmented by F. W. Gingrich and F. W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) sub παρά, III. 6, p. 619.

[19] Cranfield, 802.

[20] See p. 201.

[21] Cranfield, 802.

suggested above, would be *to keep your eyes open for those who, contrary to the teaching you learned, are causing dissensions and setting snares*. Such dissension may, of course, involve teaching falsely, but need not be limited in that way. The warning is against any who in any way sow the seeds of discord and disharmony in the church. Such activity is contrary to what they had learned and experienced about the believers' relationship to God and their fellow believers, when they came to faith, and which they had been taught in catechesis prior to being brought into the family of God by baptism. The use of the second person pronoun, ὑμεῖς, stresses the responsibility of the Roman Christians, to whom Paul was sending this warning, to be on the guard against such troublemakers.

This interpretation of v. 17 shifts the emphasis from divisions and offenses caused by false doctrine to dissension of any sort (including, but not limited to, false doctrine) that shatters the harmony God wants exhibited in the life of the church. A close connection may be recognized between the dissensions and the snares about which Paul warns, for dissension in the life of a congregation can easily become a hindrance that prevents the acceptance of the good news about Jesus, or, once the gospel has been accepted, dissension can lead to a questioning or even rejection of it. In this way it is an impediment to faith and thus proves to be a snare.

Often too little attention is given the substantivized participle, τοὺς . . . ποιοῦντας. Paul's warning is not about the unwary and gullible who are ensnared (cf. v. 19) and who are thus unwittingly involved in the dissension; rather his concern is primarily with those who *cause* dissension and division in the church. They are the ones to be avoided; those who follow them often have been duped, and they are to be pitied and helped rather than avoided.

What is the teaching to which Paul here makes reference, the teaching that the believers in Rome had learned prior to their baptism? The eminent British New Testament scholar C. H. Dodd analyzed the content of the sermons in the Book of Acts (2:14–40; 3:12–26, 29–32; 10:34–43) and compared them with pre-Pauline creedal fragments cited in the Pauline letters (Rom 1:1–4; 10:9; 1 Cor 11:23ff.; 15:3ff.). He detected a common pattern running through these passages and designated it *kerygma*, a Greek term suggesting a message brought by a herald; its meaning is often expressed by the English terms "preaching" and "proclamation." Dodd pointed to six elements that commonly appear in these passages:

1. In Jesus messianic prophecy has found fulfillment.
2. Jesus went about doing good and performing miracles.
3. He was crucified in accordance with the divine plan.
4. He was raised and exalted to heaven.
5. He will return to judge.
6. Therefore repent, believe, and be baptized.[22]

These six elements are fundamental, and they underlie all the missionary activity of the early Christians. The kergyma may have been expressed in varying but congruent ways by the early Christian missionaries, such as Peter, John, Andrew, Silas, Apollos, and many others. But in whatever way the kergyma was proclaimed, the Holy Spirit used the gospel message to bring people to faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and in this way also into fellowship both with God and with all who believe in

[22] C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Development* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1936).

Christ for salvation. They became brothers and sisters in the faith, members of God's family by adoption. The unity and harmony that ideally should be experienced in families would be shattered by those who foment dissension in the life of the church.

Paul's warning is against involvement in the activities of those who seek to cause dissension in God's family on earth.

Family feeling that did exist among the early believers (Acts 2:42) might serve as a pattern that would assist the Roman Christians in recognizing that dissension and the setting of snares are contradictory to what they had learned and experienced when they first came to faith. Paul anticipated that no matter how the Roman Christians had been taught, they would be able to recognize that the message he had been preaching was in harmony with the beliefs they had been holding, and thus they would be ready to support his contemplated missionary endeavors in Spain.

Dissension in a family is inevitable; failure to deal with it constructively is unhealthy. Paul therefore must give instruction to his readers as to how to deal appropriately with people who cause dissension: *Turn away from them* (ἐκκλίνετε ἀπ' αὐτῶν). Paul employs a present imperative,[23] which, in connection with τοὺς ποιοῦντας, suggests that the problem of people who cause dissension and set snares may occur again and again. History has shown that Paul was correct; this has been an ongoing problem in the church. Paul directs his readers to be alert and, when they recognize such troublemakers to *turn away from them* or, as this word has often been rendered in this context, *avoid them*. There is a need for constant watchfulness, and when the situation arises there is only one appropriate course: *turn away from them*.

It is valid to inquire what Paul is implying by his use of the verb ἐκκλίνειν. Is he calling for a breaking off of all relationships, such as the "shunning" practiced by some in the Mennonite tradition? Or does he simply mean that believers should keep away from people who cause dissension in the church and not get involved in their disruptive activities? Cranfield correctly observes that "one can avoid subjecting oneself to a person's evil influence without hardening one's heart against him and refusing him kindly help, should he be in distress."[24] Paul's warning is against involvement in the activities of those who seek to cause dissension in God's family on earth. The attitude that believers are to take toward those who have become unwittingly involved in dissension will be considered in connection with v. 18.

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[23] If Paul's reference is to specific individuals or groups, he would appropriately employ an aorist imperative. Cf. Cranfield, 798, who notes that the textual tradition shows variations. The present imperative appears in the Egyptian tradition, while the majority of the textual witness have the aorist. He opts for the present imperative as the more difficult—and therefore more probable—reading.

[24] Cranfield, 799.

In v. 18 Paul offers the reason why believers should turn away from the type of people about whom he is warning: *People of such a sort are not serving our Lord Christ but their own belly.* In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus had stated as a principle: "No one can serve two masters" (Mt 6:24); that principle applies here. Such people as those about whom Paul is warning do not serve Christ, who as their Master has the right to demand their service, for he has made them his own at the price of his life. They are to be his slaves who are to carry out his will; their lives should be devoted to his service; instead, they are serving their own belly.

The term κοιλία (belly) in its physical sense refers either to the womb or to the stomach as the organ of digestion. If Paul's warning is directed against specific errorists whom he had previously encountered in the course of his ministry, the reference would be to people who insist upon dietary restrictions, such as Judaizers. But, as has been previously discussed, it is likely that the articles τούς, τάς, and τά are to be understood as generic; in fact, this way of understanding the function of these articles appears to be much more probable than does regarding them as specific. By interpreting the articles as generic, the warning is against potential creators of dissension in the congregation, no matter who they might be, and who thus are serving their own selfish interests. Κοιλία, then, is used metaphorically.

It must be granted that the interpretation that regards the significant articles as specific and the prepositional phrase *contrary to the teaching you learned* as adjectival and thus warns against false teaching, means that the troublemakers are causing dissension by means of false teaching. On this understanding, the troublemakers may well be unbelievers who have infiltrated the church and are doing Satan's work (cf. v. 20). Or they may be some who at the beginning accepted the good news about Jesus and who later were led astray and now are using their leadership talents in the cause of error. Such people are to be avoided, because for selfish purposes they are causing dissension and setting spiritual snares for the unwary (ἄκακοι).

On the alternate interpretation, those who are involved in causing dissension for any reason also are to be avoided, for by causing disturbance and division in the church they are employing their leadership ability in a wrong cause. They are destroying the familial unity that should exist in the church. They may well be people who are not well grounded in the faith and who thus place their selfish interests ahead of the cause of the gospel. In this way they are not giving Christ the service that is his due; they are unwittingly undermining their Master's cause. Involvement in these evil activities must be avoided.

The interpreter must weigh both possibilities in the light of the evidence that the text itself provides. The difficulties in understanding the articles as specific, as well as the proximity of the phrase παρὰ τὴν διδαχὴν ἣν etc. to the substantivized participle ποιοῦντας, tilt the decision in favor of the alternative view, which regards Paul's warning as directed toward the probability that Paul's readers at some point may have to deal with people whose forte it is to cause disturbance in the congregation and thus undermine the cause of the gospel by the creation of an atmosphere of dissension and distrust.

The probable tactics that might well be employed by the people against whom Paul warns—and here he may be speaking from experience—are χρηστολογία and εὐλογία (fine speaking and flattery). A fourth-century writer, Julius Capitolinus,

describes a χρηστολόγος as "an individual who speaks well but acts wickedly."[25] The term associated with χρηστολογία here is εὐλογία, a word that may bear a wide variety of senses, such as "fine speaking," "praise," "blessing," "beauty," or, in a negative sense, "flattery." The association of the two terms suggests that there is a negative cast to the second term in this context. If the two terms form a hendiadys, as seems likely, the probable meaning is that the people who cause dissension make plausible but specious arguments and with insincere praise flatter people who are simple, unsuspecting, and naive. Such people believe everything they are told. In this way the dissensionists *deceive the hearts of the guileless*. Such people are easily deceived, gullible.

The distinction Paul makes between those who seek to cause dissension and those gullible individuals who follow them is significant. Is Paul's directive, *turn away from them*, to include both those who cause dissension and those who are misled? Or does Paul aim his warning primarily at those who are active in causing dissension and setting spiritual snares? This point has not received the attention it deserves in the practical application of this passage. Paul clearly is distinguishing between those who create dissension and those who, in their innocence, are unwittingly ensnared into participation in such divisive activity. By distinguishing between *those who cause dissensions* and *the gullible* Paul implies that the way in which these two groups are to be dealt with should differ. Those who cause dissensions are to be avoided, while their gullible dupes are to be treated with Christian love and concern which may help to deliver them from their involvement in dissension. Paul's concern for the "weak" in chapter 14 of this letter suggests that a similar approach should be followed in the case of those who are gullible and guileless.

Paul now expresses a word of encouragement to the believers in Rome when he writes, *your obedience has come to the attention of all*. He undoubtedly has heard from various sources about the obedience that the members of the churches in Rome exhibit toward God's Word and will. He here refers to their obedience in order to encourage them to pay close attention to the warning and directive that he has just issued. His intention is to strengthen the Roman Christians' resolve to hold fast to the fellowship and family feeling which the gospel has produced among them. Paul's words here, as Sanday and Headlam suggest, "imply that there were not as yet any dissensions or erroneous teaching in the [Roman] church."[26]

Paul then continues: *Over you, therefore, I rejoice and want you to be wise in respect to the good and innocent as to the evil*. Paul's words are a recognition of the fact that as a result of their obedience to the gospel message they enjoy the God-given wisdom to have accepted the gospel; and at the same time it is his wish that they be innocent of becoming ensnared in the divisive activities of people who seek to cause dissension in the life of the congregation. Paul's desire is that they preserve their spiritual integrity over against those who would cause dissension in the life of the church.

Paul concludes his warning to the believers in Rome with a word of assurance

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[25] Julius Capitolinus, *Pertinax*, 13.5, as quoted in Cranfield, 802.

[26] William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans*, in *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 8th ed., 1903), 430.

that they will share in the ultimate victory over those who cause dissensions and set snares for the faith of believers. Paul speaks confidently of God's final victory over Satan. God is the God of peace, not only because he has brought about peace between himself and his people but also because it is his intent that peace and harmony should mark the life of the church. Dissension and strife are impediments to effective evangelism. God will achieve his goal of true peace when he will *crush Satan under* the believers' *feet*[27] in the victory celebration at Christ's Parousia, which, according to the divine timetable, will come *quickly*. Paul then concludes this part of his letter with a brief benediction.

Conclusions

This study has raised a number of concerns about the interpretation and application of Romans 16:17–20, a passage which has proved significant in the life and activity of some portions of Lutheranism in the United States, as well as elsewhere in the world. The passage—in particular v. 17—has been crucial for the teaching and practice of some parts of Lutheranism concerning church fellowship. This study has sought to look at the passage in such a way as to give due weight to lexical and grammatical concerns and to give proper consideration to Paul's words of warning in the light of conditions in the church at the time Paul wrote this letter. In this final section, I draw conclusions from the exegetical study of the passage and then propose appropriate applications to the life of the contemporary church.

While we have seen that the phrase *contrary to the teaching you learned* may possibly be adjectival and thus refer to false doctrine, the much greater likelihood is that the phrase is adverbial and the reference is to dissension of any sort. As the study has shown, if the phrase is adjectival there must be a specific referent; but since it is well nigh impossible to make an identification of the dissensionists against whom Paul warns, the probability is that Paul's words of warning are to be understood as directed against people who either may attempt or make it their practice to sow seeds of dissension in the life of the congregation. On this understanding, the phrase in question is adverbial and the teaching that the Roman believers had learned refers to the familial relationship that exists between themselves and other Christians as a consequence of their relationship with the heavenly Father through their faith in Christ.

We have reviewed the reasons for the difficulty of making an absolutely certain identification of the errorists or dissensionists against whom Paul warns. The fact is that understanding the phrase *contrary to the teaching you learned* as adjectival requires the article τούς to be specific; but when connected with the difficulty of identifying the troublemakers, the probability that the phrase is adverbial is strengthened. The proximity of the phrase to the substantivized participle points in the same direction. Paul's warning, then, does not directly point to doctrinal error or errorists; rather, Paul is warning against any and all who seek to stir up dissension in the life of the church and thus are shattering the familial fellowship that should exist between those who call upon God as their Father and worship Jesus as their Lord. To be sure, teaching and advocacy of teachings contrary to the Scriptures are divisive and thus come under Paul's word of warning, chiefly

[27] Though the terminology that Paul employs does not reflect the wording of the Septuagint of Gen 3:15, there is an obvious allusion to the first messianic promise.

because of its negative effect upon the church and its witness to the world. It is even possible that Paul's warning is applicable to a situation in which advocates of pure doctrine can come under its condemnation, because, even in support of a good cause, unevangelical tactics can create disharmony and dissension in a congregation or in the church at large.

Paul's warning was originally directed to a congregation. It is in congregations that dissension is most readily recognized. Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2) undoubtedly had sympathizers in their disagreement with one another, and thus there was the potential for the development of cliques and factionalism in the congregation at Philippi. In Corinth, too, there surely were individuals who expressed dissatisfaction with various elements in congregational life, and they gathered supporters around them. They thus became leaders, and various factions developed, causing problems with which Paul had to deal in 1 Corinthians (cf. 3:19; 8:7–12; 11:17–22). Satan can foment dissatisfaction and dissension (cf. v. 20) and thus place an impediment to the course of the gospel. In his letter to the Romans Paul was writing to a congregation (or to a number of house churches), and in the light of this context it is wisest to seek to apply this warning initially to congregational life. Every pastor should recognize the potential for such developments and be prepared to deal with them in an evangelical manner as soon as they appear.

The directive *turn away from them* (or avoid them) is often indiscriminately applied to all who are involved in dissension, even to those who are innocently duped by false teaching. Such an approach does not take seriously the fact that Paul makes a distinction between those causing the problem and the gullible dupes who have innocently been misled (v. 18). Avoidance is the proper way in which to deal with those who are the source of trouble; but in accordance with Paul's manner of dealing with weak Christians in chapter 14, efforts should be made with love and patience to rescue those who unwittingly have become ensnared in such activity. The distinction between those who cause division and those who are innocently involved should be given due weight, no matter which interpretation is given the prepositional phrase, *contrary to the teaching you learned*. Paul's words concerning avoidance should not be taken to mean that Christians should have no dealings with such people, but rather that they should not involve themselves in divisive activities, because of the harm that divisiveness produces in the life and work of the congregation. The proper procedure for dealing with those who in all innocence involve themselves in such activities without taking a leadership role should be governed by an evangelical concern for their spiritual welfare, and every effort should be made to rescue them from the error of their ways.

The divisiveness that can occur in congregational life can also manifest itself in the life of church bodies. Factions in support of one issue or another can wreak havoc and thus impede the cause of the gospel. In the light of the contemporary situation Paul would assuredly apply his word of warning to such situations. It is important that the church in our day apply Paul's directive, *turn from them*, to those who foster factionalism with its negative consequences for the fulfilling of Christ's Great Commission (Mt 28:18–20) by the church.

Forms Serving the Function of the Gospel

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A gifted architect once said to me, somewhat grandiosely, "I could design a house for a couple that would ensure their eventual divorce." The form a house takes has to serve the function of a home to help effect a happy marriage. A building cannot serve as a home if every room is three by three by four feet and without windows.

There is an integral connection between the form of a sermon that aims at serving the function of the Word of God and its effect on the hearer. *What* a preacher says is determined by prayerful meditation on the Word of God addressing the hearers today. *How* the preacher will shape the message is determined, for the most part, by a consideration of its intended effect on the hearers.

When the form of the sermon is changed, the way it works on the hearer may change together with the anticipated effect. The central message may not change. Our Lord's direct address to his opponents is in the indicative mood: "You search the Scriptures. . ." (John 5:39). His address functions as a criticism, and the effect on the hearers is likely to be rejection leading to counter-accusation. Many preachers have used the imperative to "search the Scriptures" as an exhortation to believers to read the Bible. This imperative can have the force of a demand and function as a criticism: "It's time you get serious about Bible reading." But the imperative also can function as an invitation, part of a gift of grace: "Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise and grace to you, and you are invited to find the fullness of joy in your meditation on the Scriptures." The essential message in both instances remains: "Jesus as the Christ is the fulfillment of God's promise in the Scriptures."

The basic form of God's word in Scripture and from the preacher is address. The Word is not words about God but God's address to people. The address, however, can be communicated directly or indirectly. When expressed in proclamation, exhortation, blessing, invitation, criticism, accusation, and threat, it addresses the hearer directly. Indirect address can take a didactic or narrative form.

The thesis of this article is that *the function of the Word to effect faith and community requires the integration of direct address, teaching, and storytelling.* In a period in which the didactic form for the sermon is criticized to the point of scorn and the narrative form is promoted with almost religious devotion, the call for balance and interaction is important.

The functions of the Word

The biblical view of the word of God is that it is both God's utterance and God's work. "Then God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Gen 1:3). Here the utterance is God's doing the work of creation. "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28). By this word God continues creation. "What you sow, you will reap" (Gal 6:7) are words that promise reward for good works of righteousness and negative consequences for bad. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor 5:19). This is the word made flesh doing the work that redeems, reconciles, and recreates the world.

Preaching is putting into words what God is doing in the world so that the Spirit can do God's work in the hearer's life. "Let there be light" is God's address that establishes the hearer as a responsible self. "Be fruitful and multiply" calls a married couple to be a partner with God in continuing creation. "What you sow, you will reap" addresses the hearer as a promise and is a pure gift that calls the hearer to accept God's acceptance: "Be reconciled." "Forgive seventy times seven" can be a demand by which discipleship is critically evaluated or an invitation to enter in on a new possibility in response to God's gift in Christ.

Luther taught that all discourse having to do with the relation between God and the people of God can be divided in two ways. The first form is language that demands a response by the hearer. It speaks of responsibility, obligation, rewards, threats, challenges, and criticism. The other form is the language that conveys God's gift in Christ. The heartbeat of this second form of discourse is the blessing, inviting, and consoling that comes to the hearer by proclaiming God's deed in raising the crucified Christ from the dead and bestowing the gift of the Spirit. Luther labeled the two ways of speaking about our relation with God *law* and *gospel.*

The languages of demand and gift have different functions and different anticipated effects on hearers. The language of demand, grounded in the promise of reward and threat of punishment, serves constructive social behavior and curbs antisocial behavior. The language that obligates, evaluates, rewards, and threatens the hearers is essential for a long and happy life for the individual and the maintenance of the body politic. That is why preachers who avoid such talk do so at great peril.

The address of God's gift of unconditional grace in Christ functions in opposition to the radical demand that can drive a person to despair or delusion. The validity of the demand is not denied but trumped by God's suffering love in Christ for the world. The free, unconditional gift has the power to effect trust, hope against hope, agape love. The gift of forgiveness frees one from the demand to justify oneself. The gift of reconciliation invites the hearer to accept his acceptance. "Be reconciled" is an invitation to live in the trust that God has reconciled the world in Christ. The gift overcomes the demand, because God in Christ became sin that we might become saints by trusting God's self-giving grace for sinners.

The effect of this gift is trust. Paradoxically, an early sign of that trust is the freedom to confess the whole truth about ourselves before God. The lively function of the gospel gift is to nurture and sustain the hearer's life of trust active in agape love.

Direct address

When a sermon is largely direct address, the continuity between its main parts is maintained by a direct diagnosis of the hearer's need and prognosis for the hearer's faith life. Salvation is healing, and the preacher

serves as Christ, the physician, healing those in need in direct diagnosis/prognosis conversation.

Direct address is essential. No indirect address is effective if the hearers do not translate it into a direct address applying to them. If I had to chose one form for the sermon, it would be direct address. Whatever form is used, the criterion is always: "I believe that this will speak to the hearers personally."

There are, however, limitations to direct address. Sometimes direct address is too hard for the hearer to hear. Indirect address might enable him to "overhear." It is hard to address the racist in a hearer without defining racism at both a personal and a social level. It is also hard to address the hearer as racist without offering a narrative in which racism is illustrated.

The didactic and narrative forms are necessary at some point in most sermons. The exception might be a life situation or social event so dramatic and obvious that the whole sermon takes the form of a letter to friends in shock, pain, or celebration of life. Such situations might be the assassination of a President, a split of a congregation, or the suicide of a teenage member.

When I first entered the ministry, I used the direct diagnosis-prognosis more often as the sermon's form. After a while I not only ran out of "problems" to solve or diagnose, I began to feel like a patent medicine salesman. There is a need to vary the form the sermon takes.

The didactic form

Traditionally, the didactic form has dominated preaching in mainline churches. The focus is on teaching the faith and the moral life. The sermon is unified by a central idea, and the parts are derived deductively from the central thought, which can take several forms: explaining a simple truth, answering a question, resolving a paradox. The continuity of the sermon is determined by the logical connections necessary to unfold the idea.

The pure version of the didactic form is scorned today for good reasons. Some of the reasons have to do with the way messages are communicated today. Pedantic, predictable outlines can make for dull sermons. Left-brain analysis of concepts bereft of poetic imagination or emotion leave people cold. Ideas abstracted from lived experience are all but meaningless except for a very few people. All of these reasons for rejecting the didactic form contain truth.

The most critical concern in the employment of the didactic form, however, is a theological one. The pure didactic form is least likely to serve the lively function of the gospel word. The didactic form functions to serve the word of God as a guide to understanding Christian faith and life. The intended effect on the hearer would be "Aha! Now I understand."

The danger would be to let the matter rest here. Faith is not essentially an intellectual assent to a truth about God but absolute trust in the Living God in my life. The hearers' problem is not that they don't know God is love but that they don't unconditionally surrender to God's unconditional grace in Christ. Knowing what love is does not make a lover. Being loved does.

The basic danger of the pure didactic form is that the preacher implicitly assumes the hearer's problem is intellectual and can be solved by using Jesus as the one who gives us the right information. Christ either reveals the true God that we ought to believe in or offers the true way to God that we ought to follow. In either case the so-called gospel functions as demand and not gift.

Despite its limitations, the didactic form is particularly important in our present cul-

> Knowing what love is does not make a lover. Being loved does.

ture. An outline based on a single idea that is logically divided into parts that together equal the whole insures clarity, cohesion, transition, and unity in a sermon. These are all important in communication. Preachers today cannot assume that a single important theological word in the text or sermon is rightly understood by the hearers. The couple that chooses 1 Corinthians 13, Paul's ode to love, to be read at their wedding usually does not have a ghost of an idea of what the word "love" in that text means. The words "church," "humility," "sin," "kingdom of God," etc. all have a particular meaning determined by the language game of the gospel. The need to "explain" is unavoidable in a secular context.

A sermon given in pure narrative form without any explanation runs the risk that the very strength of the narrative—the human experience—will be interpreted by the hearer in secular humanistic terms and not in terms of the eschatological promise of the gospel.

The need for clear exposition lies even deeper. The hearers live in a secularized context which functions without any necessary reference to God. The hearers handle most important matters in their life without necessary reference to angels, the devil, sin, or the kingdom of God. This means the traditional terms of the faith often do not connect with the way hearers interpret their life experience. The unspoken challenge to the preacher is "Make some sense out of all this God-talk for me in my daily life." The challenge is to make the connection between word and life in a way that the Word Christ is not swallowed up in psychological and social political categories. This takes some careful instruction.

Perhaps the most important need for reasoned discourse is that both the preacher and the hearers are predisposed to being unreasonable. By virtue of human weakness, both are predisposed to using the name of God ideologically. The preacher who proclaims "Thus says the Lord" owes the hearers a careful exposition of a biblical text and a clear explanation of how this word speaks the whole truth of God. Hearers need to be instructed on why "The poor you will always have with you" is not an excuse for a social policy that abandons the poor. The effort to explain the truth not only enables the preacher to get her own head on straight, but gives the hearer that chance as well.

The didactic form is so important in our time that I believe the "doctrinal sermon" should be included in a preacher's arsenal. Where else are most parishioners going to gain a practical understanding of their baptism, the Eucharist celebration, and the relevance of the Trinity other than in the context of the worship service?

Doctrinal sermons can be kerygmatic if "doctrine" is seen as "faith seeking understanding" of the full meaning of God's word and work in Christ for the world. The Trinity is not mathematical nonsense that the church invented to explain who God is to God. The Trinity is the answer to the question of what God has done and is doing for us all in Christ and the church in the world. Every Christian doctrine has a practical significance, because doctrine is not words about God, but faith understanding the fullness of God's address to us all.

A way to ensure that the didactic form

of the sermon serves the function of the Word is to state the central idea in terms of a need in the hearer's life. The central idea should answer these questions: What is the subject of your sermon? What is your main point? Why are you saying this to the hearers? The answer to the last question should be framed in terms of what effect the Word will have on the hearers' actual faith life. For example, your subject is "self-reliance." You intend to say that self-reliance is found in our total dependence on the grace of God in Christ. Why are you saying this? So that you can proclaim the grace of God in Christ as a means by which the hearers are able to be self- reliant in a surrender to that grace. When the goal is stated this way, direct address will be inevitable and the form serves the function of the gospel.

The narrative sermon

In recent years the narrative form has been the central interest in homiletical literature. Preachers have used narratives in their sermons for some time, but the sermon as a story with no direct address or explanation is a new focus in preaching.

In pure narrative preaching the continuity is determined by the dynamics of the plot. The sermon has no central idea, but it tells a story that speaks for itself, evoking a personal response from the hearers. This response is varied and multidimensional depending on the way the hearers experience the story. What happens in the story in some way affects the hearer, and that effect is the relevant meaning of the story. Pure narrative preaching is, therefore, a form of indirect address of the word of God.

The didactic form is intent on stretching faith that is seeking understanding. The narrative form searches for reasons of the heart by putting the hearers in touch with the depth of human pathos and the experience of grace that evokes trust and love.

James Carroll's parable "Dead Alive" is an example for me of soul-searching devotional story telling (James Carroll, *Wonder and Worship* [New York: Paulist Press, 1970], 65–70). The story is about an eloquent speaker whose words of wisdom drew crowds of admiring hearers. After years of fame and success as an orator, he suddenly stopped speaking. He came to feel that his words about life were merely cheap talk in a brilliant masquerade of mystery.

> The man became a hermit living and dying at the edge of a vast desert. One day a stranger crawled into the hermit's camp and pleaded with him: "Speak to me. I am dying for want of a word from another person." The hermit did not speak.
>
> That evening, as they both lay dying, the hermit held the stranger in his arms. The stranger said: "A word from you will heal me. A word from you will heal." He said this and held the hermit's eyes. "Do you want me to die?" he asked.
>
> The hermit began then to weep and he lowered his head to rest on the newcomer's neck. From this muffled and muffling place there came a sound. It was a moan from deep in the cave of the hermit's life. But it was a moan that grew clearly into a word. The word was low and long and many times. The word was "No."
>
> Neither man lived through the night. But, when they could have died dead, they died alive.

When I first read this parable in 1991 after crossing my 60th birthday, I immediately identified with the orator who stopped speaking. As a preacher I had experienced the accolades of the congregations I served, yet at this time in my life, I wanted desperately to stop preaching. I wanted to say nothing. "Words, words, words. . . . What difference does it make? . . . I have nothing more

to say. . . ." The story awakened all of these thoughts and the desire to retreat from the world in silence.

The poignant climax also affected me profoundly. Two desperate men dying alone in silence. "Do you want me to die?" The call of an agonized soul yearning for a word that expressed care. The effect was deeply personal. The word came to me, "We die without a word that conveys the power of love." You must speak. The Spirit interceded for me "with sighs too deep for words" (Rom 8:26). "No, I don't want you to die. I want to bless you with God's *Yes* in Christ."

The crucial question in narrative preaching is, Does this story serve the lively function of the gospel?

Narrative preaching can evoke a holistic response. It does have the limitations of indirect address. There is a time when indirect address says more than direct address. The hearer can safely overhear a critical message in a way less threatening. But the fact is we are prone to hear what we want to hear and project criticism on others.

The prophet Nathan is sent by God to hold King David accountable for his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah (2 Sam 12:1–5). Nathan tells the story of the ewe lamb so that the king can identify indirectly with the crimes he himself has commited. But when David projects the crimes on someone else in righteous indignation, Nathan is forced to direct address: "You are the man!" (2 Sam 12:7–15)

Indirect communication of the gospel can also be problematic. "Dead Alive" contained no explicit gospel in the narrative itself, but it did communicate the gospel to me indirectly. In meditation I connected the story of God as the Word of grace and steadfastness in Christ. The logic and power of God's anguish in Christ became the logic for my enduring the anguish of preaching. But will most of the laity, who may not persistently and consciously engage in meditation that centers all life in the gospel, make some such connection? Is it not the preacher's primary task to insure that that connection is made?

James Carroll in fact does make the connection at the end of the story by referring the readers to Luke 2:25–32. Simeon sees the light and salvation of God for all people in the Christ child that is the source for the canticle *Master, Now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word* . . . (Lk 2:29). Why not help the hearers see the same light that enables them to die alive in peace?

The crucial question in narrative preaching is, Does this story serve the lively function of the gospel? Does it open the heart of the hearers to the depth of their own experience that cries out for the passionate grace of God? Does it offer a vision of new being and new creation made possible by the unconditional grace of God present in Christ? Does the story climax in an encounter with the Risen Lord who opens the eyes of the hearers so that their hearts burn within them? Is the consequence of this encounter a Hollywood "happy ending" rather than a life lived in obedience to God's grace in the midst of life's struggles?

The crucial problem in pure narrative preaching is telling a true-to-life story that

contains the gospel story within the confines of the narrative. A true-to-life story is based on universal experience. The gospel story is based on the unique event of God's raising the crucified Christ from the dead. A true-to-life story reaches a climax and resolution that is possible within the confines of universal human experience. The gospel story promises an eschatological reality that cannot be verified by universal human experience and is lived, only in part, by faith.

I want to illustrate this issue by using the movie, *Places in the Heart*. This is a real-life story, a compilation of remembrances by the writer-director, Robert Benton. In this movie Benton intersects a true-to-life story based on universal human experience with the eschatological reality grounded in the unique Christ event.

Benton remembers the people and a small town in Texas during the Depression that are in his heart. Sally Field plays the widow of the sheriff, who is shot and killed by a frightened black youth. The young man is lynched by a mob. The banker tries to cajole Field off the farm, but she bravely sets out to save her homestead. A black itinerant worker joins her in this struggle. There are subplots, one involving Field's brother-in-law who is having an affair with the local school teacher.

The last scene takes place in a church during a communion service. As the camera pans the congregation, we see the brother-in-law sitting with his wife and the mistress not far away. Sally is there with her son—and the black youth who killed her husband. The living and the dead, the blacks and the whites, the moral and the immoral—they all are there in one new humanity.

Film critic Roger Ebert describes this ending as "a dreamy, idealistic fantasy." It is, in his view, a scene that is too strong for the movie it concludes. *Places in the Heart* can't support such an ending because it hasn't led up to it with a narrative that was straight and well aimed as an arrow. (Roger Ebert, *Home Movie Companion* [Kansas City: Andrews & McMeell, a Universal Press Syndicate Company, 1993], 499–500).

On the one hand, Ebert is right. There is nothing in any narrative that depicts observable human behavior good or bad that offers sufficient ground for joining them all in one new humanity. The institutional church does not verify that there is one holy catholic apostolic church, either.

On the other hand, there is an event in the narrative that does offer sufficient justification for one new humanity to those who have faith. It is the action in the communion itself. Most good secular storytellers bring us to the door of the church by exposing the depth of human experience. Benton brings us to the nave. Throughout the film this was the sacred place in the hearts of many of these people. Now they receive from one loaf, and the camera plays an eschatological trick on us. It makes visible what can only be seen by faith. They are made one Body of Christ. There is neither slave nor free, black nor white, male nor female, living or dead. All are one in Christ.

But is this little more than another *Field of Dreams*? Is this a human aspiration devoutly to be wished and never realized? Benton would have to take us one step further into the chancel the holy of holy places in the heart. There the celebrant representing Christ the Host stands and speaks the word of promise, "Take and drink, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sins."

These words continue the event that justifies the realized eschatology of the last scene. It is God's reconciling deed in Christ that results in the new creation of new

humanity. The church is not a human ideal to be achieved by ideal humans. The church is a divine reality the faithful will more fully realize through the power of the gospel and this sacramental encounter with the Risen Lord. For the faithful this scene is neither a wistful fantasy nor an unachievable ideal. It depicts the reality they already are in God's eyes and are on the way to fully realizing in their daily life.

The sacrament preached is not only the justification for the scene of one body of Christ. It is also the ground for interpreting the past behavior of the characters and the motivation for future action. Seen from the perspective of her participation in the Eucharist, Sally Field's character's courage is not just the universal gift of the Spirit that enables hope to spring eternal in the human heart. Her fortitude is also a response to the encounter with the Risen Christ who convinces her that all things work together for good and nothing can separate her from the love of God. When she leaves the church service, the presence will be with her. One way she may seek more fully to realize God's one new humanity is by working for the desegregation of her rural church in Texas in the 1930s. In this way, the narrative that depicts universal human experience is seen by faith from the perspective of the unique eschatological event of God's deed in Christ.

Do Robert Benton, Roger Ebert, and the people in the pew see all this? Some not at all, and all not fully. This is the way the Spirit calls, gathers, and strengthens the whole church in one body. I, for one, do not know how to join a true-to-life story with the gospel story without resorting to direct gospel proclamation.

The problem with many didactic sermons is that the meaning of the gospel is explained in a way that does not directly touch the hearers' experience. The problem with many narrative sermons is that though the story touches the hearers' experience the direct promise of the gospel is not proclaimed for faith.

The primary form for conveying the function of the gospel is the direct "promise" of God to the hearers. This promise can be offered indirectly using didactic and narrative forms. Usually these forms support each other in a single sermon. The criteria that determines the use of form is: Will this form serve the lively function of the gospel?

Postscript: The form of delivery

The messenger is not the message, but the way the message works is closely related to the way the messenger delivers it. A mother assures her infant, frightened by the dark, by saying, "Everything will be all right." The light sparkles in her eyes and shines on the infant. Her warm smile seals the message of assurance, and the child is at peace. The form of delivery does serve the function of the word.

The style and delivery of a sermon is an expression of the person of the preacher and the preacher's appreciation for tradition and ethos of the congregation. There can be no one prescribed form of delivery. The presence of the preacher as a person alive in God's grace in Christ reaching out directly with conviction and authority to engage and bless the people of God is the form of delivery that serves the function of the word. The qualities of good delivery are naturalness, honesty, intensity, care, and conviction. These qualities shine through the eyes that engage the hearers face to face.

The greatest obstacle to this kind of delivery is self-concern. Preachers lose real presence whenever they try, however subtly, to defend themselves. This self-con-

cern can express itself in a pulpit tone, loss of eye contact, rigid body language, manipulation of the audience, playing to the gallery, or entertaining to avoid serious encounter. Preachers may succeed in protecting themselves with these maneuvers, but the message that functions to bring courage and hope is obscured by the fear in the messenger.

This spiritual malady is overcome when the preacher hears the call of the Spirit through the gospel to be free from self-concern for service to God's people. The experience of God's grace in Christ is the source of the preacher's authority, enthusiasm, and courage to say what has to be said.

Self-surrender is the heart of the prayer before beginning a sermon. "Lord, help me surrender all need to justify and defend myself, and by your presence make me an instrument of your peace."

The second greatest obstacle to direct, personal delivery is a manuscript that has to be read because it is too dense in context for the time available, too abstract to convey without reading verbatim, too beautifully written to sound natural, or too precise and polished to allow for any spontaneity. A sermon is not a formal lecture, not an oratorical *tour de force*. It is, rather, a confession of faith made to, with, and for the people of God that happens in the moment of its speaking.

If self-concern is the greatest problem in delivery, no one should deliver in a way in which they are not comfortable. For some this means the need to read a manuscript. But that manuscript must be suitable for oral communication, and the preacher must know it well enough to maintain considerable eye contact with the hearers.

I do believe there is much to be gained by being free from a manuscript—if the preacher can be comfortable. Why? First, it is very difficult to write a manuscript as if you were speaking. With me, it never happens, because I am far more analytical in my writing and far more emotive and spontaneous when I speak. Second, once preachers start to look down at a manuscript they tend to lose more and more eye contact as the sermon proceeds. Third, there is no way to let go and let fly as the moment of encounter dictates when tied to a finished text. A sermon is not meant for publication. It is meant for the moment it happens. It is not possible to predict for any particular Sunday morning who will be in the congregation or what might have happened since the manuscript was completed. Finally, there is a certain intensity and mental focus on the message that is present when a preacher has functionally appropriated the message as a whole and is prepared to work on it with the congregation during the delivery itself.

The experience of God's grace in Christ is the source of the preacher's authority, enthusiasm, and courage to say what has to be said.

The following suggestions will aid anyone who wants to work toward a more direct and extemporaneous way of delivery.

1. Functionally memorize the sermon as a whole until you know what it is that you want to say. When you know what you want to say, you don't have to know exactly *how* you will say it. Knowing that you

The final edit takes place when the preacher sees the facial responses of the hearers in the moments of delivery.

know takes most of the fear out of forgetting this or that point.

2. Go with the flow. There is a continuity of current flow in every sermon design—telling a story, explaining a truth, etc. Be aware of the organic connection between the parts. As one section concludes, the necessity for the next section is felt until all is said and the sermon is complete.

3. Concretize every significant point by using illustration, metaphor, story, or empirical language. A paragraph that contains only concepts is hard for the preacher to remember and will land like a lead balloon from his lips.

4. Say the sermon aloud or in your mind without stopping. If you get stuck, ask why. Repeated hang-ups usually signal something faulty in the design. When you do forget a point while preaching, which happens occasionally, say what you just said or glance at your notes or manuscript.

5. Edit the sermon each time you review it: Is this necessary? Will the hearers get this? Why doesn't this flow? How can I make this more concrete? Time is short. Clarity and economy of words are important. The final edit takes place when the preacher sees the facial responses of the hearers in the moments of delivery.

6. You know you know when you can flash the entire sermon without a hitch in your mind in less than one minute. When you know you know, then place yourself at the disposal of the Spirit, and there really is nothing left to fear.

Book Reviews

Saint Paul Returns to the Movies: Triumph Over Shame. By Robert Jewett. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999. x and 221 pages. Paper. $14.00.

Robert Jewett (Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary) has returned to the movies with the Apostle Paul as his companion and interpreter. Actually there were others with him: he dedicates the book to LSTC professor David Rhoads and spouse Sandy who shared some cinematic adventures. This volume is a sequel to Jewett's *Saint Paul at the Movies: The Apostle's Dialogue with American Culture* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993) and deals with such popular movies as *The Prince of Tides, Babette's Feast, Forrest Gump, Mr. Holland's Opus, Groundhog Day, Babe, Edge of the City, The Firm, Unforgiven,* and *The Shawshank Redemption.* Jewett's study is a very interesting, even fascinating, interplay between themes in the letters of Paul and significant movies of our time. Of late Jewett has become convinced that Western Christians have bypassed ancient Near Eastern anthropology—specifically the honor-shame dynamic. He believes Paul proclaims in Jesus Christ an honor of God that overcomes the shame of peripheral birth, lack of achievement, or marginal existence.

He sees echoes of this theme in current movies. For example, Forrest Gump was born with a minimal IQ and lacked perceptive abilities. Yet unwittingly he receives great honor. In another example, Babe, by being kind and unwilling to be categorized as a dumb pig, created a strong relationship with the lowly sheep. In the end the honor granted him was incredible (champion sheeppig). Despite the useful interplay between text and movie, the thesis does not always work, as Jewett would admit. Screenwriters can very seldom allow honor to arise out of suffering or marginality (shame). Mr. Holland eventually learns not to seek self-aggrandizement, but, despite the powerful servant theme of the movie, in the last scene Holland nevertheless receives popular adulation. In the marvelously Pauline *Shawshank Redemption*, the prisoner Andy, in the most shameful of conditions, manages to resist that shame by means of hope. Yet in the end he must resort to deception and vengeance to become free.

Not every text used by Jewett can be applied directly. For example, Galatians 6:7–10, which expresses well the Hebraic sense of receiving honor for doing good during the ongoing process of time, does not match the sense of time found in *Groundhog Day*, where reporter Phil Conners learns to do good by going around and around in a circle.

Jewett is a fine companion for the movies. Given his knowledge of Pauline theology and his cinematic research, the reader will learn much. Besides personal enjoyment, possibilities for homiletical and educational illustrations are bountiful.

Graydon F. Snyder
Chicago Theological Seminary

On Living in the Township of Heaven. By Gary B. Puckett. Fort Collins, CO: Owl Mountain Muses, 1997. 64 pages.

Dandelions. A deer at the edge of the woods. Aurora Borealis. A child protesting the restraints of a car seat. What have these to do with parish ministry? Everything, for those with the eyes to see and the ears to hear.

This book of poems takes the stuff of the ordinary and discloses how the common experiences of life reveal to us that we are living in "the township of heaven." That is Puckett's descriptive phrase, coined to echo what Jesus meant by the kingdom of God. These poems were written while Puckett was serving as a Lutheran parish pastor. Many of the poems connect, in surprising ways, moments of daily life with the realities of parish ministry: baptism, stewardship, communion, congregational work days. The poems first were written as church newsletter articles,

bulletin covers, annual reports to the congregation, and sermons. If they serve to inspire others to trust their own creative impulses, all the better.

I share one poetic fragment that gives the flavor of this collection, taken from the poem that gives the title to the book, "On Living in the Township of Heaven." Puckett juxtaposes the making of crayfish soup to the township of heaven:

'Cause once crayfish find a place on the menu
They may retain their flavor
But they lose their ability to surprise us
And finding ourselves in the township of Heaven
Is always a surprise
Appearing when and where we said it could not be
And withdrawing from the ground we thought
Safely hallowed

This book may be ordered from the publisher at 1015-M S. Taft Hill Road #144, Fort Collins, CO 80521, or by e-mail at *OwlMntnSbe @aol. com.*

Craig L. Nessan

From Word and Sacrament: Renewed Vision for Diaconal Ministry. Edited by Duane H. Larson. Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1999.

Church leaders need to read this timely book on the history, theology, and practice of diaconal ministry. Prepared by the Eastern Cluster of ELCA seminaries, this collection of essays speaks directly to diaconal minister candidates, but an equally urgent audience is the entire church as it learns the meaning of diaconal ministry.

The title intrigues and is spelled out in the editor's chapter, which provides systematic and confessional theological descriptive framework for diaconal ministry. "The Lutheran Confessions commend a Christian life that is for the world, strengthened by and from the ministry to Word and Sacrament" (p. 11). Diaconal ministers are a welcome gift to the church and world, not detracting from but complementary with ordained clergy and the ministry of the baptized. Diaconal ministers are charged specifically to be bridges between church and world, in solidarity with both publics. This foundation, rooted in Trinitarian theology, which Larson provides in this pivotal chapter is important, particularly since at a few other points in the book some authors present we/they relationships.

In the first section of the book, Brooks Schramm, Richard Carlson, and Erik Heen present biblical grounding for diaconal ministry. Schramm focuses on the Hebrew Scriptures and God's love being preferential in caring about the lost beloved ones. Carlson emphasizes the embodied presence of Christ in the world, resulting in a cruciform ministry. Heen explores biblical theology, distinguishing between an historical biblical theology of the diaconate and a contemporary theology of the church and ministry based on sound biblical study.

Susan Wilds McArver wrote an important chapter on the history of the diaconate, beginning with the great diversity of ministry expressions in the earliest New Testament communities. Scanning 2,000 years—a formidable task—McArver catches the key of service, showing diaconal liturgical, administrative, and charitable work from the early church, through the Constantinian Era, and the Protestant Reformation. She helpfully includes insights on both the possibilities for and removal of freedom for women to minister and then sketches the rebirth of the modern diaconate in the nineteenth century and its coming to America in a variety of deaconess communities.

Madeline Busse had the challenge of describing the complex recent history, which brought multiple lay rosters from the three predecessor bodies into the ELCA in 1988. Busse tells of her own journey in claiming a diaconal identity.

Norma Schweitzer Wood's essay on ministry at the intersections of church and world, from her discipline of pastoral counseling, focuses on diaconal dynamics of the congregation, human need and oppression, and the self. Because diaconal ministers often serve in the midst of intractable social problems and complex systems, they need to be aware not only of the assumptions and intentions ministers bring to that context but also of the resulting anxiety.

Nora Frost shows evidence of understanding those challenges, writing from her own deep

roots in diaconal service. Diaconal ministry is rooted in the gospel, is caring, imaginative and prophetic as women and men cherish community, worship, nourish congregational connections, and uplift the priesthood of all believers.

The book concludes with a sermon given at the consecration of a diaconal minister and with a hymn that readers might "add their voice" to a growing chorus led out to serve from Word and Sacrament.

The book would have been strengthened by material from rather than mere reference to the Hannover Report on the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission working in 1995 which produced The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity.

The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg and the Eastern Cluster need to be congratulated and thanked for their leadership in guiding the ELCA's diaconal ministry formation and in producing this necessary volume.

Norma Cook Everist
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The Gospel of Mark. By Donald H. Juel. Interpreting Biblical Texts. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999. 200 pages. Paper. $20.00.

This is the second literary-critical monograph on Mark that Donald Juel has produced. His first effort, *A Master of Surprise* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994, reviewed in *Currents* 23:1, February 1996), demonstrates how the rhetorical impact of this Gospel shapes an implied audience for whom complacency and overconfidence are its most pressing problems. There as here Juel focuses on "the world in front of the text," that is, on the interaction between the text and the reader, rather than on the historical "world behind the text."

In the present volume he is more concerned to show how readers, especially those who read or perform the narrative out loud, shape the story and are in turn shaped by it. "A rhetorical strategy should be less concerned with arriving at the one correct interpretation than with making possible actual engagement with a story," he says. "Only when the narrative comes alive among real audiences can we speak about what it means and how it seeks to move us" (p. 42).

Rather than give a running commentary on Mark's narrative, Juel delves into the story via a series of choice topics and passages. His analysis is peppered by a succession of intriguing bon mots: "What drives the story is the problem that God comes too close in Jesus." "Jesus is never with the right people." "God has something invested in Jesus' career." His relatives "apparently do not appreciate his work." "Jesus will be accused of 'breaking and entering.'" "Jesus is the Christ comes as a surprise to everyone." "He apparently is not bound by notions of fairness."

Especially helpful is Juel's treatment of the "necessity" of Jesus' death. He shows that Mark does not operate with a traditional theory of atonement whereby the justice of God requires the death of an innocent sacrifice or substitute. Rather, says Juel, Jesus dies *because the people have no alternative but to kill* the one who subverted their tradition by transgressing the "theological" boundaries between the divine and human and by breaking the "social" boundaries between the privileged and the marginal. In short, "Jesus must die . . . because God is gracious and is willing to suffer the consequences of becoming vulnerable" (p. 165).

One might argue with Juel at several points: Is it true that the title "Son of Man" is merely an equivalent (rather than a corrective) to "Messiah" or "Christ"? Do Mark 13:26 and 14:62 really refer to Jesus' triumphant *return* in glory (rather than to his *departure* into the heavens)? But on balance this volume is a clear, accessible introduction that will open up the literary and dramatic features of Mark's narrative for lay people, seminarians, and parish pastors. It's a good read.

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Action in Waiting. By Christoph Blumhardt. 3d ed. Foreword by Rodney Clapp. Introduction by Charles Moore. Afterword by Karl Barth. Farmington, PA: Plough Publishing House, 1998. 222 pages. Paper. $15.00.

The Awakening: One Man's Battle with Darkness. By Friedrich Zuendel. Farmington, PA: Plough Publishing House, 1999. 150 pages. Paper. $10.00.

Lift Thine Eyes: Evening Prayers for Every Day of the Year. By Christoph Blumhardt. 4th ed. Farmington, PA: Plough Publishing House, 1998. Cloth. $13.00.

These three books will serve to introduce the work and thought of the Blumhardts, father Johann (1805–1880) and son Christoph (1842–1919). Not much is available in English on or by these remarkable pastors of the Swabian region of the State of Württemberg, Germany. They founded and sustained a spiritual renewal movement centered in the small town of Bad Böll. Their influence continues to this day in Germany, and such figures as Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, as well as Paul Tillich in his early socialist phase, were deeply touched by their writings and their witness.

Two of the books, *Action in Waiting* and the prayer book *Lift Thine Eyes*, are revised and handsomely republished editions of works which I previously reviewed in this journal some ten years ago. It is time to uplift them once more for consideration by *Currents* readers.

Action in Waiting is a collection of seventeen sermons by Christoph Blumhardt, interspersed with sentences from a prayer by Bishop Oscar Romero. Blumhardt's style holds up after a century! There is a directness to his preaching that is unmistakable and even slightly jarring to this day. Blumhardt attacked Christianity as another religion, as Barth and Bonhoeffer would do after him and as Kierkegaard had done before. He focuses clearly on the message of the coming kingdom of God, before which all religion must give way, including that which Christians invent. Blumhardt lived one world at a time and did so with great zest. He was involved in politics for a time, but his great love was the healing ministry at the center his father had established. In an age in which we see so much egocentricity, comfort, and therapy pass for or be supported by Christian faith, it is bracing to have the resurrection proclaimed as a global political event which we are called to life in this world.

Lift Thine Eyes is a collection of personal prayers, attractively published, for each day of the year. They are from the evening prayer services which Christoph Blumhardt held daily at his home at Bad Boll. They were spoken with no thought to their eventual publication. The Plough editor has arranged them with Bible verses for reading and meditation. There is no discernible ordering to the prayers, and they do not match the rhythm of the church year except at obvious times (e.g. Christmas). These are the prayers of one who is at once saddened by the suffering of the world and yet empowered by the message of the gospel. They breathe the spirit of *hilaritas*, bold confidence and joy before God, of which Bonhoeffer wrote.

The Awakening contains translations of three chapters from a much longer biography of Johann Blumhardt originally published in 1880 but never translated into English. This definitive biography by the Swiss pastor Friedrich Zuendel remains in print to this day. The volume is prefaced with the translation of an abridged version of a 1991 journal article on Blumhardt by Günter Krüger.

The Awakening tells the story of the origin of Blumhardt's ministry of healing, confession, and renewal. It concerns the healing of a woman in Blumhardt's parish at Möttlingen, a small town on the northern edge of the Black Forest. Blumhardt struggled with the mental illness of this young woman over three years (1841–43), and the tales of her demonic possession in the book are quite stirring, especially to us century 21 rationalists. No matter your approach to such affairs, the book contains the genesis of the renewal movement, which eventually was centered on preaching and healing, with a strong component of confession as the third part of the renewal. One gets a real feeling for the struggles Blumhardt encountered through this biographical sketch, and at the same time one senses the professional jealousy and institutional rigidity

Blumhardt had to face when the renewal got under way. These forms of opposition eventually drove Blumhardt to the ancient spa at Bad Böll as a place where he could continue his ministry without interference from the State Church on one hand, and yet with their approval on another. Throughout the book, it is clear that Blumhardt eschewed all personal favor and fame as a result of the renewal and wanted all glory given to God. While he succeeded in overcoming his own ego, he was beset by many who thought him a miracle-worker, and he was constantly troubled that people continued to be more interested in the first healing of the possessed woman than with the revival that was going on in subsequent years.

The Bruderhof has done major service in printing these three books. Their publishing program continues to grow and expand in new and exciting ways. If you are not familiar with the Bruderhof communities, that is a story in itself but one which you will have to discover on your own. Many bookstores carry their publications, and in the back of those books you will find addresses for the Bruderhof communities in the U.S. and abroad. They also publish a monthly magazine called *The Plough Reader*. The web page is at www.plough.com for the publishing house.

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The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions. By Marcus J. Borg and N. T. Wright. Harper San Francisco, 1999. xi and 288 pages. Cloth. $24.00.

While falling short of its billing as "capturing the historical Jesus debate in one volume," Borg and Wright's new collaborative book is nevertheless a worthwhile investment. The book is thoughtfully produced and contains few typographical errors.

In alternating chapters, the authors present their views on the topics central to the historical Jesus debate: sources and methods, Jesus' mission and message, Jesus' death, the resurrection, the nature of Jesus' divinity and humanity, Jesus' birth, the *parousia*, and the Christian life. Both authors obtained their degrees from Oxford working under Professor George B. Caird, acquired their affinities for the "quest" from this experience, and became friends. The arguments in the book lie in intentional contrast to one another. Comments such as "The single most important difference between Tom and me . . ." (p. 54) or "I still find it impossible to agree with Marcus in his analysis . . ." (p. 225) give the reader the feeling of sitting with them, observing their camaraderie and conversation.

Although the authors purportedly represent leading alternative views within the new quest, I doubt whether this is the case. If the so-called "third quest" can be characterized at all, it is by nothing less than utter eclecticism. Here it is perhaps meant that one of the authors is conservative (Wright) and the other liberal (Borg), although the case is not clear cut as Wright denies the "second coming" and Borg denies Jesus' apocalyptic eschatology. The book encourages a wide readership to consider two different but not completely contrasting approaches to the historical Jesus. The authors refer at many points to other works that supply their arguments in full (i.e., N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992] and M. Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision* [San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987]).

The "subtle and consistent theme" (p. 197) that the authors reiterate throughout the book is that of "both/and" (pp. 14, 37, 217–18, 232, 247, 249). These authors would, it seems, like biblical scholarship to lay down its arms, share the Eucharist together for a week in Lichfield Cathedral (as they did to initiate this project, p. viii) and consider the essential unity of the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. However, Borg ("*etic*") separates the "pre-Easter"/historical and "post-Easter"/"metaphorical history" Jesus with the result that the Gospels et al. fall into one or the other category. While Wright ("*emic*") jettisons the Two-Source Theory, claiming that modern scholars have turned healthy suspicion into destructive paranoia ("anything to show how clever we are, how subtle, to have smoked out the reality behind the text," p. 18), he evades the problem of nonexistent or problematic data by summoning texts for special significance in

isolated cases. Thus, the "both/and" theme has the effect of leveling the playing field; the numerous irreconciliable differences of their two positions are never parsed out. However, if this describes a shortcoming, it is partly due to the fact that this book only summarizes arguments these scholars present thoroughly elsewhere.

The discussion of resurrection is illuminating, particularly for those unfamiliar with how the arguments run. However, Wright's discussion misses the nuances as he characterizes resurrection in Daniel 12 and the Wisdom of Solomon as physical and clearly misses the mark with, "First-century Jews do not seem to have had time or mental energy to indulge in that peculiar twentieth-century phenomenon, cognitive dissonance, believing that something is still true when events have in fact disproved it. Life was too short and hard for fantasy" (p. 117). Further, Wright argues from silence that it would have been "tautologous" (p. 119) in 1 Corinthians 15 for Paul to include the empty tomb, while Borg rightly points out that the empty tomb is clearly and significantly absent in the letter from the *ex*-Pharisee.

On the surface, this book might be viewed as diametrically opposed to the open apologetic of Robert Funk (to debunk Christian faith). However, as the final pair of chapters makes clear, it too is an example of open apologetic (to *substantiate* Christian faith). Thus, the book is suitable for Christians and Christian pastors seeking reasonable ways to evaluate their faith in terms of some modern historical debates. These scholars have placed their views in a format that should attract the type of interest of which this subject is in need.

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The Character and Purpose of Luke's Christology. By H. Douglas Buckwalter. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 89. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. xxii and 342 pages. Cloth. $59.95.

This monograph originated as a thesis at the University of Aberdeen, under the direction of I. Howard Marshall. The author is currently Assistant Professor of New Testament at the Evangelical School of Theology in Myerstown, Pennsylvania.

Its central thesis is that the controlling concern for Luke's Christology is "the servanthood of the Lord Jesus." Luke presents Jesus as one who is co-equal in being and status with the Father but whose earthly life and death represent a voluntary humiliation in deliberate service to the Father's will. Luke accentuates this theme to provoke readers to image such servanthood in their own lives. Indeed, presenting the servanthood of the Lord Jesus as the ethical model for Christian living is the primary purpose ("concrete occasion" for his two-volume book.

Demonstration of the essentially high Christology of Luke-Acts rests principally on redaction study of three themes: resurrection, Spirit, and salvation history. Compared to Mark, Luke portrays the exalted Jesus in terms similar to those describing Yahweh in the Old Testament. For example, Jesus remains present on earth while also in heaven, is able to bestow the Spirit, and is expected to judge the world. Development of the humiliation theme allows Buckwalter to deal with those texts that seem to present Jesus as subordinate to God.

The nearest New Testament parallel for such a scheme is Philippians, especially the Christ hymn of chapter 2. This is a happy analogy for conservative evangelical scholarship, for it serves to connect Lukan Christology with Pauline tradition and increase the likelihood of the third evangelist's association with Paul.

The central thesis is sound and well argued; other points, less so. There is marked concern to undermine Lukan originality (all significant ideas are traditional) and to suggest that other christological themes in Paul (pre-existence, atoning death, union with believers) are presupposed for Luke without being explicitly developed. With regard to the latter point, the comparison with Philippians is not helpful, for Luke-Acts is much longer and clearly less of an occasional composition.

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Hillel and Jesus: Comparisons of Two Major Religious Leaders. Edited by James H. Charlesworth and Loren L. Johns. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997. xxxii and 486 pages. Cloth. $50.00.

This stimulating volume presents twenty papers that contrast one of the seminal teachers of first century Judaism, Hillel, and Jesus. The four essays in the first section discuss the possibility and the value of comparing these two figures. Eight essays in section 2 treat social and historical studies of value for the project. Their sweep is broad, from Lee I. Levine's consideration of what archaeology can teach about the religious ethos of Palestine before the destruction of Jerusalem, though consideration of apocalyptic, the Pharisees, Jewish factionalism, and the socio-economic background in Jesus' time. I found David Aune's critique of a possible Cynic background for Jesus very helpful (pp. 176–92), while B. Pixner locates Jesus between Essenes and Pharisees as one who appropriated teachings from various Jewish groups (pp. 193–224).

The ten essays in section 3 discuss "The Sayings of Hillel and Jesus." J. F. Strange examines Jesus' sayings in the light of archaeology, three essays look at Hillel's sayings and his attitude to Scripture. Three deal with aspects of Jesus' teaching (the golden rule, Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls, and problems in recovering the teaching of Jesus). Ben Viviano contributes the only essay that explicitly contrasts "Hillel and Jesus on Prayer" (pp. 427–57).

The volume is both more and less than its title suggests. Specific comparisons of Hillel and Jesus are rare. (Charlesworth lists nine conclusions in a brief epilogue, though it is difficult to find them in the essays themselves.) To that degree the title is misleading. Indeed, A. Goschen Gottstein in his essay suggests that a direct contrast is difficult, since Hillel and Jesus differ in type; hence the comparison may put each into sharper profile, but is limited in its significance.

The volume offers more than the title suggests. Many of the essays are important contributions, even when they have little to do with contrasting these two figures. J. Sievers' essay "Who Were the Pharisees?" is a brief, helpful summary of current research. P. S. Alexander's "Jesus and the Golden Rule" is a rich contribution to the history and interpretation of this moral principle, even though he concludes that "Comparing the historical Hillel and the historical Jesus is a questionable exercise."

The essays in this volume are brief, well written, and interesting in their own right. But they do little to illuminate the similarities and contrasts between Hillel and Jesus.

Edgar Krentz

Jesus the Intercessor: Prayer and Christology in Luke-Acts. By David Crump. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999. xviii and 295 pages. Paper. $26.99.

Jesus the Intercessor, Crump's doctoral thesis at the University of Aberdeen, was first published in 1992 by J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) and now has been reprinted without revision in Baker's Biblical Studies Library. Currently Crump teaches at Calvin College.

Crump writes on Luke-Acts primarily because Luke deals with Jesus and prayer more than the other Gospels do. His exegesis of the various prayer passages is thorough and informative. The bibliography is quite extensive. Crump recognizes that Luke's intent was to show his readers how Jesus was a person of prayer and also to indicate the kinds of prayer to be expressed. But Crump goes well beyond the modeling motif. Luke's Jesus also uses prayer as self-revelation (e.g., Lk 24:30–31). As for intercessory prayer, using a slightly dull Occam's razor (he admits the complexity, p. 204), Crump believes Luke described the earthly Jesus as an intercessor who had ascended to the right hand of the Father. Some prayers of Jesus in Luke are proleptic advocacy by Jesus as a prophetic intercessor. The complexity, of course, is how Luke could think of the post-ascension Christ as also the pre-ascension Jesus, a situation Crump does not consider unique.

Graydon F. Snyder

Studying Congregations: A New Handbook. Edited by Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney. Nashville: Abingdon, 1998. 256 pages. Paper. $20.00.

Congregations seeking to examine and renew their identity and mission will find this an excellent resource. The authors (different for each of the seven chapters) guide users of this handbook to explore various facets of past and present congregational reality in order to unleash new energy for effective ministry in the future. The book provides both sound rationale for the methods of congregational study and much practical advice for undertaking recommended approaches.

Successive chapters elaborate how to investigate a congregation's theology, ecology, culture and identity, process (dynamics), resources, and leadership. A concluding chapter summarizes several methods for congregational study: direct observation, interviewing, constructing a time line, employing census data, questionnaires and surveys. Alongside the narratives of each chapter are copious sidebars that spell out checklists for implementation of the study process and provide illustrations from congregations that have undertaken study. The appendices contain material that can be employed in developing a "Parish Profile Inventory" and offer a comparison of various styles of questioning. These features of the book underscore its usefulness as a "handbook" to be employed by scholars, theologians, and members of congregations involved in actual study of congregational life.

Robert J. Schreiter writes the opening chapter on "Theology in the Congregation: Discovering and Doing." According to the methods of congregational study, Schreiter offers direction for examining not only the explicit but especially the implicit theologies that inform a congregation's practices. This approach seeks to discover a congregation's extant theologies which may exist in tension with its normative confessions of faith.

Jackson W. Carroll summarizes the threefold task of congregational leaders as "(1) helping the congregation gain a realistic understanding of its particular situation and circumstances; (2) assisting members to develop a vision for their corporate life that is faithful to their best understanding of God and God's purposes for the congregation in this time and place; and (3) helping them embody that vision in the congregation's corporate life" (p. 170). The remainder of his chapter discusses how leaders undertake this responsibility.

This book deserves careful attention from congregational leaders who desire an authentic appraisal of congregational reality for the sake of developing vital possibilities for mission. While congregational study in itself does not guarantee engagement in mission, congregations that take mission seriously will seek to understand local traditions and resources in order to incorporate them into a vision of what God is doing among them. So employed, the methods of congregational study, carefully documented in this book, undergird the ongoing mission of God in the world.

Craig L. Nessan

Preaching Helps

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost—Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Series B

Crumbs

Reading through the chapters in Mark from which several of the lections are taken during these weeks, I was struck by small things. Like crumbs. The Syrophoenician woman doesn't ask for much. She is nothing like those characters in old and new stories about uncorking a bottle and having a genie pop out who is willing to grant three wishes. In modern jokes, the first two wishes tend to be requests for fabulous amounts of money and other symbols of status and power. The third request initiates the surprise ending. I guess the moral is, "Be careful what you wish for."

What does this woman wish for? And where does she get all her boldness? She comes alone to Jesus, and that seems unusual. A solitary woman of the territory around Tyre, boldly approaching a Jewish teacher surrounded by his male Jewish companions? Where is her husband? Working? Dead?

She does not come to the Great Judean Miracle-Worker with a laundry list of petitions like a big house, a large orchard, a wealthy husband, or a map to hidden treasure. She comes simply and modestly seeking one of the basics of human life: a healthy child. "Her little daughter had an unclean spirit." In spite of the fact that assaulting unclean spirits had been Jesus' program from the day when he first stepped out into the public arena, Jesus at first seems to brush aside her request. In fact he seems to speak in tones that are insulting: "It just isn't right to take the children's food and throw it to [you pagan] dogs!" Her response is famous: "Even the little dogs under the table get to eat the crumbs that fall to the floor."

Crumbs. That's all she asks for from this powerful and bountiful Giver. Her response got to Jesus. "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter."

Crumbs. References to food, especially bread, began back on the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost in the story of Herod's banquet, and neither Mark nor John wants to let go of food. The lectionary, however, does (finally! you say!)

get tired of talking about bread, and so we do not get to hear the feeding of the 4,000 (Mark 8:1–10). Nor do we hear the strange conversation between Jesus and his disciples as they cross the lake in the boat after that second miracle of bread (Mark 8:14–21).

In the boat Jesus cautions them to "watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod!" What? Don't eat some bread that was cooked up by those adversaries of Jesus? "Yes, that's it!" they say. "He sees that we have no bread here in the boat. And he wants us to be careful where we get our next loaf!"

But Jesus breaks in on their confused and literalistic conversation. "Why are you talking about not having any bread?" He reminds them that he fed 5,000 and then 4,000. And not only did those 9,000 men plus unnumbered women and children eat their fill. Nineteen baskets full (count them!) of broken pieces were left over. "What do you mean by saying that you have no bread?"

Well, what does Jesus mean with his not-so-gentle reminder of fabulous feedings? Why does Mark give us this record of a really odd conversation in the boat crossing the lake? The clue has got to be in Mark's introductory comment: "The disciples had forgotten to bring any bread." Jesus had produced a surplus of bread, perhaps also what some call "a surplus of meaning," and the disciples missed both the bread and the meaning.

Mark says that they had neglected to bring any bread and then immediately adds, "And they had only one loaf, one bread, with them in the boat." Or should it be spelled with a capital letter: one Loaf, one Bread.

Maybe "crumbs" should be left with a lower -case letter. I am not sure. The woman was fed. The demon was cast out and her daughter was healed. So the woman received what? Something medical, something physical? That, of course, and that is a great good. But with her daughter's health she received her daughter's life, a freshly minted relationship with her daughter, a renewal of joy in creation and a new relationship with the Creator who has welled up among us in the person of this Strange Galilean.

He is certainly not "crumbs." He is the Bread of Life celebrated in that long chapter, John 6. And in the Eucharist of the church. And in the reflections and meditations offered by two friends of long standing who are now pastoral partners at Trinity Lutheran Church in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Christopher Hoyer, one of our two contributors, is George Hoyer's son, and now I guess he is also George's pastor, or at least he is one of them. Some of you will know that I inherited the editorship of these pages from George Hoyer. George has a wonderful way with words, and thought up the name "Preaching Helps." "Helps," he explained to me one day, "is sometimes a noun

but sometimes it's a verb. Good preaching really helps." "Helps!" There's a low-key word for what the good news can do. That's like the word "crumbs" for the gifts God gives in and through Jesus. A wonderful understatement!

Christopher is partner in ministry with Pastor **Susan Nachtigal**. Susan and Christopher do not call themselves "co-pastors." Nor do they use the language of "Senior" or "Associate." They just call themselves "pastors" and let others try to figure out whether there is any hierarchy at work there. Their own intent is that there not be. They aim at working out a model of mutual conversation and consensus building.

I am grateful to them for working together on these pastoral reflections for the middle section of the Pentecost Season. They are, they say, "happy to preach the Gospel and to keep on inviting people to the Table." I am happy to be able to hand on to other preachers these pages—I almost said "crumbs"—cooked up by Christopher and Susan.

Good eating! Good preaching!

—Robert H. Smith, Editor of Preaching Helps
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Ninth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14) August 13, 2000

1 Kings 19:4–8
Psalm 34:1–8
Ephesians 4:25—5:2
John 6:35, 41–51

The angel in the story of Elijah being fed in the wilderness reminds me of many mothers or grandmothers at mealtime. The hot stones render the warm cake ready to be served. The first time around the angel rings out that familiar invitation: "Oooo-kaaaay! Sit up before the food gets coooold!" And then when Elijah has eaten his fill, and has even retreated to sleep again, the angel will have nothing of it. Instead, the angel of the Lord comes at it yet a second time, "What!? You don't like my cooking? You barely ate a thing. Eat! You need your strength!"

The text says that Elijah "went in the strength of that food" for a long, long time. Some of that strength must have come from the nutrients in the food. But there is something more to it. When a meal strengthens and sustains for days, even weeks at a time, it bears an essential quality way beyond nutrition. It bears all the power, presence, promise, and preparation that went into making it. It bears all the immediate and insistent love of the one who offers it. "Oooo-kaaay! Come now!" is not for chiding. "You barely ate a thing! Eat!" is not for

rebuking. It is the mother and grandmother declaring the offering of themselves in the offering of the meal. The food is for us. They are for us.

How much more, then, does our Lord Jesus Christ offer himself to us in the Holy Meal! "Take and eat, this is my body. Take and drink, this is my blood." In the offering that is the Holy Communion, Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life, is the offering for us—offered not for scolding or rebuke or punishment but for our every forty days and forty nights in the wilderness. We are invited to be fed by his power and presence and promise, fed by his victory over suffering and death in order to prepare for our own suffering and death, fed by his immediate love and insistent resurrection in our own lives and for the life of the world.

Just when we've said, "enough now, O Lord," when there is only one solitary broom tree left, just when we think we'd rather die: a second helping. For us. Every time. To carry us through the journey to the Mount of God.

A friend in Texas often says: "Good eats. Them there is good eats." And that's exactly what we're talking about: good eats. Never be hungry, never be thirsty. Not manna in the wilderness, which the ancestors ate and then died, but "the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat of it and not die."

St. Paul, on the other hand, reminds us about bad eats. "Them there is bad eats" when you consume or are consumed by falsehood, anger, evil talk, and bitterness. These are foods that spoil. If you've ever had food poisoning you know what St. Paul is talking about. Spoiled food spoils you. And when that happens, you don't just *think* you're gonna die. You wish you *would* die.

And if you've ever had food poisoning twice, and can't figure out why because you haven't been frequenting out-of-the-way "greasy spoons," then you begin to realize that food poisoning happens everywhere, even in restaurants that seem to be clean and pleasant, in eateries that have a good reputation—places where you would least expect it.

And, of course, that's the point. The same holds true for people. For us—the clean, the pleasant, the reputable, the ones in whom everyone would least expect it. Evil talk comes out of our mouths: wrangling, slander, together with all malice. We make room for the devil. At times, on purpose. And our falsehood poisons our brothers and sisters and grieves the Holy Spirit.

A wise and faithful father taught his children how to distinguish between good eats and bad eats. He taught them in a very practical way how to share the bread of life come down from heaven instead of bread that spoils. He instructed that every time before they speak about someone else, they give a second thought and ask themselves three simple questions: "Is it true?" "Is it kind?" "Is it necessary?"

This Sunday, "Eat! . . . You need your strength." Take the second helping offered to help our every second thought be kind, true, and necessary. And then, be "imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." SKN

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 15) August 20, 2000

Proverbs 9:1–6
Psalm 34:9–14
Ephesians 5:15–20
John 6:51–58

On a hot Sunday morning in the late summer not a few of us sliding into the pew quickly check the length of the lessons if they happen to be in print and at hand. There is some sense of relief in discovering that the pericopes today get right to the point.

The first lesson provides proverbial instruction for the simple on simply living. Wisdom takes the form of a gracious woman who lives in a comfortable house, has prepared a meal (this is the bread and wine of wisdom) and invited the simple folk to share in the supper.

The psalm seconds the invitation, simply and succinctly. "Come, children, and listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. . . . Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it" (vv. 11, 14).

There is more straight-to-the-point talk in the second lesson: "Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (vv. 15–17)

The lessons provide us with the sum and substance of living well and wisely, but the Gospel is much more. It provides us with the Son and sustenance. It is the difference between addressing the one who "desires long life to enjoy prosperity" and being the one "who eats this bread and lives forever." This is not merely about what we shall eat and what we shall drink, but about what we shall put on. It is about more than consuming bread and wine (acquiring sufficient wisdom and absorbing appropriate instruction). It is about incorporating the flesh and blood of the Son of Man and being subsumed into eternal relationship with him and with the Father through our baptism into Christ and our participation in his body and blood. "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them" (v. 56).

The texts provide the preacher with an opportunity to celebrate the "high cost of living"—what it cost the Christ of God in his dying; what it cost the Father in his sharing; what it costs the Spirit in her forbearing and eternal inviting. This is not an insignificant exercise. We tend to forget and often fail to contemplate the cost of the abundant life to which we have been joined. In failing to contemplate it we too often undervalue it.

The day provides the preacher with an opportunity to detail the cost of living wisely and well, of turning from evil to good, of seeking peace and pursuing it, of discerning the will of the Lord; of being wrapped up in this Jesus, enveloped by this Holy Trinity, in your neighborhood, in your day.

The point made, it need not be prolonged. After all, it is probably getting hotter outside. CGH

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 16) August 27, 2000

Joshua 24:1–2a, 14–18
Psalm 34:15–22
Ephesians 6:10–20
John 6:56–69

To "revere the Lord and serve him in sincerity and faithfulness," as Joshua invites in the first lesson. To fight the good fight of faith for the sake of the gospel, as St. Paul instructs in the second. To eat and drink and "come to believe and know," as the Gospel of John declares.

This is our life. And we do it over and over and over again—each time not better or worse, each time not closer to God than the time before, each time no more saint or sinner than last week or last month. This is our life in Christ Jesus. It is the circle of dying and rising. It is our flowing from and living to the blessed font. It is our every day emerging from and returning to the Word Made Flesh, spoken and broken for us, so that our flesh will have life again and again, until, at the last, we live with God forever.

It is true, however, that we, along with some of the early followers of Jesus, fall into grumbling and complaining: "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" We, with many of the disciples, wish to turn back and no longer go about with him. But, when these difficulties and diversions threaten to defeat us, the Word Made Flesh ever continues to do the work of a-biding and a-binding himself to us in the promise spoken and the body broken for us, in, with, and under the bread and the wine. "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them . . . whoever eats me will live because of me."

This flesh-bound God who is our spirit and life meets our flesh in the Holy Eucharist as we receive with our hands and our lips. But this flesh-bound God also meets us through our ears and the meditations of our hearts. Along with the Word broken, we believe and trust in the Word spoken. That is the Word spoken and proclaimed from the lectern and pulpit, but it is also the Word spoken and proclaimed as we, with the promised Holy Spirit, do our daily Wording in devotion and prayer.

Any number of phrases from today's texts provide bread from heaven that will sustain us and be for us the words of eternal life. To speak these words in refrain, to let them bring to heart and mind all that our Lord has done for us, is to let the Word Made Flesh work on our flesh and abide in our flesh.

"It is the Lord our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight."

"Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power."

"Therefore take up the whole armor of God so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day. . . ."

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

"We have come to know and believe that you are the Holy One of God."

Sister Wendy is a nun who lives in a convent outside London. She spends her days praying, contemplating, and studying artwork. In a PBS interview with Bill Moyers, she helps us to understand this ever and ongoing cycle of how the Word Made Flesh keeps on working on us by explaining how art (a picture paints a thousand words!) does its work on us and in us.

Not verbatim, but in spirit, and with some inter-weavings of my own thoughts and interpretations, I heard the interview unfold something like this:

Bill Moyers asks: "Well, how does a person know where to begin? I mean, the average person walks into an art museum and doesn't even know where to begin. People don't know one artist from another. People don't know one technique from another. They don't know what they are supposed to be seeing. And they surely don't know how to articulate what they are experiencing."

Sister Wendy, as only she can, listens, trying to figure out the root of this question. And then finally she responds: "But you see, Bill, the point isn't to be the smartest, or to do it the right way. The point isn't even to know your art history or to be an art critic. The point is not to live your life a zombie. The point is to be alive. The point is to wonder at the painting and to let the painting wonder at you. . . . And this takes *time*. A zombie simply moves from one place to the next: never seeing, never hearing, never tasting, never touching. Never taking time to be at-one-with, never abiding."

And then, Sister Wendy suggests sitting with a painting twenty, forty, fifty times, letting it do its work on us, letting it speak to us, letting it wash over us and through us.

Likewise, the Word Made Flesh is for working on our fleshly living twenty, forty, fifty, five thousand times. It is for those times when we gather all the tribes at Shechem and summon all the elders and present ourselves before God together. It is also for when we are alone, praying in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. The Word Spoken promises to wash over us and be spirit and life for our flesh even while the Word Broken ("take and eat my flesh, take and drink my blood") promises to wash through us and makes our flesh even the body of Christ. This is our life, over and over again, until finally, at the last, "after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God" (Job 19:26). And the mystery of the gospel shall be revealed. SKN

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 17) September 3, 2000

Deuteronomy 4:1–2, 6–9
Psalm 15
James 1:17–27
Mark 7:1–8, 14–15, 21–23

The reading from Deuteronomy provides us with a perspective on the law of God as the declaration of love that it is intended to be. It sharply contrasts with our frequent sense of "laboring under the law." The text suggests that the gift of the law illustrates the nearness of God, the wisdom of God, and the love of God.

The laying down of the law as "love-note" is evident when the rules are clear, fair, and life-affirming. It is true with parents and children. Call it tough love if one must, but love establishes boundaries for the young. It teaches them right from wrong. It is true with people who are "going together" and people who are married. There are rules. True love honors and lives within limits. St. Paul's phrase was, "love does not insist on its own way." It was true for Israel, the people of God. ". . . give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe. . . . what other great nation has a god so near to it as the LORD our God . . . ? And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today?" (Deut 4:1, 7, 8)

Don Juel in his Augsburg commentary on Mark helpfully observes that as an extension of law, "the tradition of the elders [was a way to] apply the Torah to every facet of life. . . . Washing of hands is a mark of

respect for every aspect of God's created order: it signals the desire to bring mealtime under the sacred canopy of the Torah" (pp. 102–3). God's people, the church, share the law with Israel. It is a declaration of love in its giving and in its observance. It helps us to bring every aspect of life "under the sacred canopy" of the dominion of the divine. So we teach the commandments to our confirmands and insist that they memorize them. We encourage one another to pray before meals and before bed and as the day begins and as it draws to its end. We urge faithfulness at worship. As we sense the law as love-note, we do all we can to encourage and help one another be "doers" of the Word as well as "hearers."

Clear, life-affirming rules are far from the only love-note from God. Proximity is the other crucial characteristic of love. Love is made known in the "nearness of you." It is true with parents and children. Call it quality time if one must, but the quality that children require most from their parents is time. It is true for significant relationships and marriages. The lament "s/he is never here" is an early sign of trouble.

It is true for the people of God. The gospel as love-note *par excellence* has to do with the proximity of the Lover. Who "has a god so near to it as the LORD our God?" Nearer than the Christ child? Seven pounds and thirteen ounces of Almighty God, wiggling and squirming and tugging at the breast of the Virgin mother. The Lord our God, so close at Sinai, draws closer still at Bethlehem. The incarnation is such a gift of love because in this mystery God is there for us, present to us, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

How is it, then, that we who are so loved in both law and gospel can be so unloving? How is it that our lives are so frequently scarred by the list of failings our Lord enumerates in Mark: "fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride and folly"? In a word—in Jesus' words (and he was quoting Isaiah—the problem is not new)—"this people [us!] honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." With our lips, perhaps even our ears, but not with our hearts. We may know the lyrics, but our heart is not in the love song we sing. That is the source of our sin and our sorrow. Always has been, always will be. We are sinners to the core. It is not merely *mea culpa* (my fault) but *mea cor* (my heart).

It is to the heart of the matter that the crucifixion speaks. In the mystery of that sacrifice, Jesus, the very heart of God, is given for us, dies for us. Our trust in that redemptive love is counted to us as righteousness. For Jesus' sake our God pronounces our hearts as good as new, as good as his. As the love of God is evident again and again to us in law and gospel, word and sacrament, we are continually reminded that because his heart was in it there is hope yet for our hearts. The taste and touch of his presence in the Holy Communion, in the forgiveness it imparts and the strength that it gives, sustain the people whom God loves with all God's heart. CGH

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 18) September 10, 2000

Isaiah 35:4–7a
Psalm 146
James 2:1–10 [11–13] 14–17
Mark 7:24–37

An examination of the Gospel text and context will reveal that the passages preceding these two stories about Jesus healing outsiders (a Gentile of Syrophoenician origin and a deaf man from the largely Gentile region of Decapolis) are passages about Jesus and the insiders, the Pharisees and scribes. The Pharisees are concerned about the details of ritual purity, while Jesus is concerned about details of the purified heart. And so, as one reads on into today's Gospel text, there is an emerging sense of contrast and chasm, opposites and opposition. Following these two healing stories, Jesus feeds four thousand, gets into a boat and goes to Dalmanutha where quickly he is confronted with another argument from the Pharisees accompanied by insistence for a sign (Mark 8:11).

In our homiletical preparation there is once again the pressing need to be clear about the disposition of our own hearts and how our hearts are made right and pure. We hope that we don't behave as Pharisaic insiders, but at the same time we would be offended as preachers or as parishioners to be considered Gentile outsiders. We don't want to be the *bad* of the Pharisees. But at the same time we would be challenged to demonstrate that we willingly and consistently bear the *goodness and goodness of heart* it takes to commit ourselves to working at eliminating the contrast and chasm and opposition that exists between insiders and outsiders in the church, in the parishes and institutions we serve, in our local communities, and in our society.

It is interesting and useful to take a look at the clash that is set up for us in the first and second lessons. It is a clash that convicts us and a clash that confirms our life in Christ Jesus:

We take notice of the one wearing "gold rings" and the one "wearing the fine clothes." *God will open the eyes of the blind.*

James implores us to" Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters." Listen. *God will unstop the ears of the deaf.*

James challenges our crippled and ineffectual efforts asking, "What good is it if they say they have faith but do not have works?" *God will make the lame leap like a deer.*

We see the one who is poor and say: "Stand there" or "Sit at my feet." If we say to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet we do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? *God will make the tongue of the speechless* (the tongue of the one whose speech means less than nothing) *sing for joy.*

We don't only clash with our neighbor, who sins as we sin. We clash with God, who is goodness and grace. We are opposite, in opposition, in contrast, in conflict with God who favors all creation. "God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good" (Gen 1:31).

Our favoritism places us outside the garden and into a wilderness of blindness, deafness, lameness, and speechlessness. And there, as we are isolated from one another, from ourselves, and from God, we destroy our God-given goodness and goodness of heart and no longer have the power to live and reach out to those outside. There is, instead, a preoccupation with keeping the outside, and the outsiders, from coming in.

But this is exactly where the Gospel stories touch our lives. It is when we are so filled with favoritism for ourselves and *our*

kind, when we are so outside being the human beings we were created to be, when we are so bowed down, and when we are so burdened by all our impediments, that God chooses again to favor us. Favor us! Bearing in himself all the vengeance and terrible recompense, God favors us by bowing down his life again in Christ Jesus. The cross we wear on our foreheads is an outside indicator of an internal and ongoing truth. When immersed in the waters of baptism we will never drown but only be washed, inside and out, by springs of water breaking forth in the wilderness.

At the baptismal shore is where we get purified hearts. At the baptismal shore is where we join Jesus' early followers to be "astounded beyond measure" at our own healing and new life. It is at the baptismal shore that we can look at our every neighbor with goodness and goodness of heart and see again, *in that neighbor*, that our Lord "has done everything well." Inside and out. SKN

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 19) September 17, 2000

Isaiah 50:4–9a
Psalm 116:1–8 (1–9 NRSV)
James 3:1–12
Mark 8:27–38

Psalm 141:3 might provide us all with an apt prayer before preaching. "Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips." It is most certainly an apt prayer before speaking.

All the texts speak to speaking this Sunday. "The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word" (Isa 50:4). "The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature" (Jas 3:6b). "But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan!'" (Mk 8:33a). This last might be translated, "Cut your tongue out, Peter!"

It is a timely concern. Perhaps the most apparent, and least frequently addressed threat to our civilization, our culture, and the church is the growing assumption in the late 20th and early 21st centuries that it is perfectly permissible for anyone, any time, to say anything they please. Civility (let alone courtesy) has been all but washed out to sea on the rising tide of *South Park*, *The Simpsons*, and the Beastie Boys.

So often what is wrong in our congregations and councils, in our homes and schools and places of work, may be traced to the lack of care with which we address one another. With the same tongue "we bless the Lord and Father . . . and curse those who are made in the likeness of God" (v. 9). With little or no thought to consequences, to the feelings, sensitivities, or considered opinions of others, we frequently go after one another tooth and nail and tongue. James' admonition is pointed: "this ought not to be so" (v. 10).

The truth be told, ours is as much a hearing problem as it is a speaking problem. In the same breath that Isaiah speaks of the tongue's ability to "sustain the weary with a word" he acknowledges the importance of God's gift (day after day) of good hearing. "Morning by morning he wakens—wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught." After rebuking Peter, our Lord makes it clear that Peter's failing has as much to do with his poor hearing as with his loose speaking. "Those who are ashamed of me *and my words* in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed" (v. 38).

That the Lord God has and will "open our ears" can be heard not only in the first lesson ("The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward") but in the bitter weeping of Blessed St. Peter after his betrayal of Jesus. In the patient teaching of Jesus, as well, "that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again." In the repeated proclamation of the Word from ambo and pulpit, in the echo of splashing baptismal water making saints of sinners in the font, in our frequent participation in the body and blood of the Incarnate Word in the Holy Communion, the ears of those who would not hear are unstopped. And with better hearing comes improved, Christ-like speaking: words that heal, words that help, words that hallow the name of God and honor those made in his likeness.

"O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise" (Ps 51:15). CGH

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 20) September 24, 2000

Jeremiah 11:18–20
or Wisdom of Solomon 1:16—2:1, 12–22
Psalm 54
James 3:13–4:3, 7–8a
Mark 9:30–37

In such a free and democratic culture, at such an unparalleled and prosperous time, with more than our parents ever had and more than we really need, it is ironic that we as individuals and as a society fall so frequently into being insecure. There is no doubt but what our insecurities are a primary point through which false well being, false power, and false identity enter and take hold.

James tries to inform about such pitfalls. "For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind." And again, "Those conflicts and disputes among you . . . do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you?" And then James offers the word of guidance, "Draw near to God, and God will draw near to you."

Some time ago, the comic strip Calvin and Hobbs picked up on the truth of our insecurities and how the world addresses them. Mom and dad are in the kitchen, where dad is holding a clutch of envelops, magazines, and other miscellaneous postal pieces. Mom asks: *Any good mail today?* Dad replies: *Mmmmm . . . not really. . . . Here's a "you're not covering the cost of all these mailings" charity request.* Handing her a magazine: *You got a "You're not attractive enough" women's magazine with an article on swimsuits that minimize all your body flaws.* He continues to sort the pile: *Here are some "you're not stylish or ostentatious enough" catalogs . . . and coincidentally, an invitation to go deeper in debt from a credit card company.* He's still sorting: . . . *And here's our news magazine to identify the trend of the week we're missing . . . and I got a hobby magazine featuring new equipment I ought to have. Yikes!* Dad scratches his head with a stare in his eyes: *Why do I get the feeling that society is trying to make us discontented with everything we do and insecure about who we are?* Then, in the last frame, Calvin runs into the kitchen: *Hey Mom! I just saw a bunch of products on TV that I didn't know existed, but I desperately need!!"*

It is no wonder that the disciples were silent when asked, "What were you arguing about on the way?" To argue with one

another about who is the greatest is only to reveal the depth of our insecurity and dire need to "submit ourselves therefore to God" . . . and hear again the words of instruction and promise: "Draw near to God, and God will draw near to you."

This is our security, our identity, our power. *Whenever* we turn to God, God in Christ Jesus promises to welcome us back, tender as welcoming a little child, reaching out his gentle hands to take us to himself and secure us in his arms.

These hands belong to the Son of Man who was betrayed into human hands and was killed and after three days rose again. These hands continually reset themselves on our lives as a potter resets his hands to the clay. And with these hands reset to the clay, each child of God is remade, remolded, and reshaped day after day. Here, our greatness comes by the power of God's grace and forgiveness. Here we are made into strong, sure, secure vessels—vessels readied and able to hold the gospel, vessels ready and confident to carry that same gospel to others, to brothers and sisters of every kind: those thought to be first, those thought to be last, those thought to be in-between.

The disciples did not understand what Jesus was saying and they were afraid to ask him. But as we teach our confirmands, "Faith trusts the promises of God." This side of the three days we live by faith that the world cannot give. We believe that which the world cannot understand. We are marked with the cross of Christ, whom the world cannot defeat. And, we can throw the junk mail away. SKN

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 21) October 1, 2000

Numbers 11:4–6, 10–16, 24–29
Psalm 19:7–14
James 5:13–20
Mark 9:38–50

You gotta hand it to God!

In the midst of the strong cravings of the rabble, the weeping of the Israelites longing for meat to eat, and the anger of the LORD, Moses is feeling overburdened by those in his charge. "I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me."

One suspects that this Mosaic displeasure is not unknown to more than a few parish pastors. The hectic weeks of early fall sometimes provide a context in which we are particularly vulnerable. There are times and places, not limited to parish life, in which we feel as though we are carrying the weight of the world on our shoulders. Responsibility for our children, aging parents, spouse, employees and others easily and often mushrooms to overwhelming. The late comic, Gilda Radner, had it right: "If it's not one thing—it's two."

The lessons for this first October Sunday make it clear that the Spirit of God is ready to relieve us of this crushing burden, but you gotta hand it to God.

Left to our own devices, we increase the burden and multiply the weight. In our arrogance, selfishness, and fear we say, "I can handle it." And it gets worse. We become critical and even judgmental of those who offer solutions or suggestions that are unlike our own. We injure those whom we love the most when we close them out in an effort to prove that we can "make it on our own." Having cut ourselves off from others and from the Other, the pain and suffering increase.

What is a body to do? Blessed St. James gets right to it in the first verse of the second lesson: "Are any among you suffering? They should pray." "The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up, and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven." Moses quickly resorts to prayer (although at first glance its structure strikes one as something less than orthodox): "So Moses said to the LORD, 'Why have you treated your servant so badly? Why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? . . . If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once . . . and do not let me see my misery.'" The disgruntled disciple, John, also takes it to the Lord in conversational prayer when he says, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." Prayer provides the occasion and context for all of us who are struggling with the burden of overwhelming, multiple responsibilities, to hand it to God.

And our God will respond, as is God's wont, by taking matters into his own hands. As it was in the beginning—when God formed humankind from the dust of the ground and breathed into us God's own, life-giving Spirit. As it is now—when in the Holy Eucharist we remember that God took on human hands in the person of Jesus and offered them for our salvation, widely stretched on Calvary's cross. As it will be forever—in the surfacing of seventy new elders in Christ's church; in the rediscovery of the power and effect of the prayer of the righteous; and the truth that no one who does a deed of power in the name of Jesus will be able soon after to speak evil of him.

With God in charge, we win. Hands down. To surrender to God's love, authority, might and promised presence is to be relieved of the enormity of the burden of difficult days. To pray in all things, "*Deo volente*, God willing," is to hand it to God and to find in those holy hands the strength to carry on. CGH

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