Greed and Structural Sin
By Elsa Tamez

Pauline Freedom and Market Freedom
By Elsa Tamez

Jewish-Christian Relations: The Dark History, a New Beginning, and Current Tensions
By Skip Cornett
FROM THE EDITOR’S KEYBOARD

Few voices in theology have been more widely heard than Elsa Tamez’ important contributions to liberation theology. That she worked as a Protestant woman in Latin America made her doubly worth hearing. Trinity had the privilege of hearing her voice live at our Trinity Days celebration last September, and many present said how anxious they were to read the tightly packed presentations. We have decided to print both lectures in one issue because of that demand and because they are timely and important. We are grateful to Dr. Tamez both for her willingness to join us and for her speedy editing of her spoken words to allow publication in our journal.

Many Trinity people receive information from Skip Cornett, Trinity’s Continuing Education guru. Skip has been doing serious academic and practical work relating to the troubled situation in the Middle East, and has provided a written version of presentations he makes throughout the church. Those not already expert in the intricacies of that situation, and by implication in the relationship of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Jewish community, will find the article informative and challenging.

Three years ago we paid tribute to Dr. Bernhard Hillila, former Dean of Hamma Divinity School, distinguished academic and poet, who died November 2006. Now we face the loss of Herb Brokering (died November 2009), who was admired and reviewed by Dr. Hillila, and well known to most in the Trinity community. Herb was notable as a writer (over 40 books published so far), inimitable speaker, poet and writer of hymns (four in ELW, three in WOV). Herb was one of the strongest champions of Trinity Lutheran Seminary, his school, serving on the Alumni Council, recently penning a musical alma mater for us, and writing regularly to express his appreciation for this little Review. We miss him deeply, and include his poetry for this issue, including the poem last received from Herb.

Tim Huffman, editor

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

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Through spaces we have yet to know
through times our eyes will never see
You came to Sea of Galilee
to mountain heights and there bestow
what only saints and angels know.

From farther than all shuttles fly,
beyond all distances of sky
there came a first-born infant cry
whose name God gave Emmanuel,
for God is with us; all is well.

I am in you and you in me,
All we are one and more than three
ture members of one majesty;
tue God of daughter, God of son,
All, all together in the One.

Yes, I am with you through the end;
I raise you up and I descend,
then I will come as I have been,
for I am far and I am near.
Be of good cheer for God is here!

— Herbert F. Brokering, 1926-2009
Pastor, author of over 40 books,
lyricist, hymn writer and speaker
† November 7, 2009

* Herb Brokering, well-known poet/hymn writer and Trinity alumnus, composed this hymn as a response to Professor Brad Binau’s Trinity Days lecture from September 28, 2003, printed in the TSR Volume 25 #1.
Greed and Structural Sin

By Elsa Tamez*

The Economic Crisis

The photograph below was chosen by the jury of the World Press Photo as the best of the year 2008. It reflects the drama of the mortgage crisis that continues not only in the United States but in many other countries. The picture shows an armed policeman in a house in which the occupants were evicted for not paying their mortgage.

I want to begin by showing this picture because it seems to me to be an x-ray of today’s world. The evicted are being seen as bandits. They were evicted (legally) because they could not make the monthly payments. They could not pay because they had no money, because they had also lost their jobs. Thousands of families now live on the streets, many begging in homeless shelters, probably in churches.

They lost their jobs because business needed to reduce costs. They were losing profits because the unemployed could no longer buy things, much less expensive things like cars. Businesses need much money to reactivate the economy, but the banks are not lending. They can not lend because they have lost liquidity because they wanted to earn more with

* Elsa Tamez is emeritus professor of Biblical Studies at the Latin American Biblical University in Costa Rica, a translations consultant at the United Bible Society and a theological advisor for the Latin American Council of Churches. Article translated by Gloria Kinsler. Photo used with permission by World Press.
other investment practices, such as hedge funds. They didn’t consider the catastrophic consequences. The maximization of profits was not seen to be wrong because since the 1990’s greed has been considered a virtue. Some became irresponsibly blinded by the desire for dishonest profits.

Banks and large businesses need a lot of money. The United States has set aside thousands of millions of dollars to reactivate the economy. The governments of Germany and Spain have done the same, but the economy continues stalled, generating failure at many levels but above all in unemployment. This has affected the whole economic market system, which was created precisely for people to buy, especially by credit. People are not buying and not paying off their debts. They can’t. The system cannot function without selling. The crisis affects not only the United States but many countries around the world because almost all countries are tied into this market economy system with “free market” (neoliberal) policies.

But crises, says economist Wim Dierckxsens, can always be seen as opportunity. For that reason I believe that we are in an opportune moment (kairos) to rethink the social economic reality as Christians and as Church confronted with this crisis. As Christians, as Church, we are not economists, but we do have Biblical and theological criteria that help us judge what is happening because of the effects of the economy and to illuminate proposals of alternative lifestyles more in accord with the Word.

Can Paul, through his *Letter to the Romans*, say something to us about today’s crisis?

The letter to the Romans is very pertinent for the situation of our economic system. It is a letter written around 57-58 C.E. during the reign of Nero under his tutors Seneca and Burrus. He writes to a community of churches in Rome with economic problems, cultural conflicts, or different visions with respects to religious practices, living in the capital of the Roman Empire, where they are poorly received because of their ethnicity and religion. It was only six or seven years later that these Christians were persecuted by Nero, tortured, and burned alive.

This letter has commonly been used to lay the doctrinal foundation of the Christian tradition. It is usually forgotten that this is a letter written in a particular situation for a specific community. Because the first chapters of the letter discuss central themes for Christians, such as sin, salvation, faith, grace, law, election, etc., it isn’t difficult to enter into abstract discussions without relating it to its contexts. In fact the classical commentaries have helped to reinforce this decontextualized theology. It’s true that the second part of the letter contains very important concrete exhortations and situations. But it seems as if the first part, because of its theological weight within the tradition, eclipses this second part. Paul reads theologically the events in which he is immersed: be they conflicts or injustices.

Fortunately today’s academic studies are more often inclined to include the specific situation of the communities in Rome. This has led to a rediscovery of aspects that were left behind in the traditional theological readings. Examples of this valuable contribution we find in Neil Elliott, Richard Horsley, and Robert Jewet. In this lecture I am going to relate Paul’s message to the reality of imperial Rome and to our reality today.

The majority of scholars consider that the thesis of the letter is God’s justice given by faith and not by following the law. This justice is for all, there are no preferences: therefore all peoples are sinners including those who follow a just and holy law. All equally have the possibility of receiving as a gift, the justice of God. In Pauline terms, this is a liberating justice, because it liberates from sin, from the law, and from death.
Today we do not have the problem of the Mosaic Law nor circumcision. But I believe we can reread the letter in the light of today’s other problems by analyzing the way in which Paul confronted those problems.

Before going ahead it is important to clarify a problem of language. The translation of the Greek dikaiosynē tou theou is translated in Spanish in all Bibles as “the justice of God.” This is a much more ample term than “the righteousness of God.” The translation of the Greek as “justice” leads one to see dimensions that are not present in “the righteousness of God.” We see the same thing in the Greek adikia “injustice” a term translated in English as “wickedness.” These English translations lead one to think in a private and moral dimension rather than in terms that include the moral, social, and political, as conceived in the Greek. So when I refer to these terms I will use the Greek to be more precise. For the purpose of this presentation I will not be focusing on the justice of God (dikaiosynē tou theou), but on the reality of sin which makes God intervene with God’s justice. Paul does not speak of God’s justice or God’s grace without speaking first about sin, because the justice of God or justification through faith is a response to the reality of sin. This alternative of God’s justice is not given in a vacuum but as a proposal for a situation that seems like a dead end street.

My interest here then is to deepen the notion of sin and, in what I consider a fundamental part of the construction of sin, I refer to greed. I am going to alternate the rereading of the text in its First Century context with the context of our Twenty-first Century.

Greed and Structural Sin that Leads to Death for All

Various scholars in Latin America as also here in the United States since the 1990’s have begun to relate The Letter of Paul to the Romans with the reality of the Roman Empire. In fact, the terms used by Paul, which today we consider profoundly theological, were used in ordinary language. We know that the words Gospel, Saviour, faith, Son of God, and Lord, were words used for the Emperor, who was considered to be from divine lineage. The coins were inscribed with jus et fides (justice and faith). These terms were used by Paul in his letter but he applied them to Jesus Christ. I am sure that his readers immediately made the connection.

I say this because I want to relate the manifestation of sin with the way that the economic model of the neoliberal market has been constructed. That is, I want to read and judge theologically today’s reality in the light of Paul’s affirmations in his letter to the Romans.

I insist that Paul’s fundamental theme in this letter is not sin but God’s justice; but he does not speak of justice until speaking of sin. Sin is the reality that cries out for the justice of God.

So then, we have to give content to the word sin. It doesn’t mean sins or faults but sin in the singular (hamartia Romans 3:9). It is that which dominates and enslaves human beings and their relationships. Sin has to do with a structure that in some way makes people hate each other, kill each other, betray and deceive each other. They exploit others and make others fall; all of which means that they do not know God and are far away from God, because according to the prophetic tradition, to know God is to do justice. Did Paul have in mind this conception of sin? In Romans, chapter 1:29-32, after explaining how people were changing their practices, moving away from the knowledge of God (1:23-28), Paul describes this reality, referring above all to Gentiles:

29. They were filled with every kind of injustice (adikia), evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they...
are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. They know God’s decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die – yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them.

Paul returns to speak of sin in Romans 3:10-18, after speaking of the behavior of people who have good and holy laws but whose practices coincide with the Gentiles. Citing various Psalms (14:1; 53:1; 5:9; 140:3; 10:7; 36:1) and a text from Isaiah (59:7ff), precisely after affirming that the Jews as well as the Gentiles are under sin, he writes in Romans 3:10-18:

10. “There is no one who is just (dikaios) not even one;
11. there is no one who has understanding,
there is no one who seeks God.
12. All have turned aside, together they have become worthless,
there is no one who shows kindness, there is not even one.
13. Their throats are opened graves, they use their tongues to deceive.
The venom of vipers is under their lips.
14. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.
15. Their feet are swift to shed blood;
16. ruin and misery are in their path,
17. and the way of peace they have not known.
18. There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Of course there were good, pious, honorable persons, but within a corrupt system dominated by sin these were being swept along by sinful logic; the good intentions and laws remained impotent. In the next presentation we will refer to this reality of impotence generated by sin and legitimated by law.

How do we see this today? The economist Amartya Sen, the 1998 recipient of the Nobel Prize in Economics, affirms that today’s challenge is the inequality both within countries and internationally because of the bad distribution of wealth in terms of opportunities for good health, education, housing, social and political participation. This is because the economic system of the free market is more focused on amplifying the domination of market relations than basic needs. When there are no controls or regulations in this natural logic of the globalized market, the consequences are mortal: the gap between rich and poor; the global sale of arms which aggravates conflicts; laws on patents that prohibit the use of pharmaceuticals against mortal sickness; unequal commerce between the rich and poor countries, etc. It is not exaggerating to speak of structural sin when we read the official statistics: only 1 percent of the world population possess 40 percent of the world’s riches; 10 percent possess 85 percent, and 50 percent of the population possess 1 percent. This is scandalous because of the consequences: in Latin America 190,000 children die each year because of preventable sicknesses; in the world 4,900 children die every day for lack of potable water.

I believe our world is crazy because of structural sin. We know that wars and conflicts feed the globalized arms business. How do we understand that world leaders, the G8, members of the United Nation’s Permanent Security Council, sell 87 percent of all the arms in the world? Of these, the United States sells 50 percent of all the arms sold in the world, in which 68 percent are sold to countries of the Third World. I believe there are three aspects that make possible this reality of sin: the logic itself of the unregulated system; greed; and lack of
controls, and this has to do with the lack of ethics. The economist Bernardo Kliksberg, in his book *Primero la gente* (People are First) shows that “orthodox neoliberalism has expelled ethics from the economy.” This has generated a free terrain for anti-values: unleashed consumerism, crushing the other in order to advance, the permanent manipulation of people, the legitimation of corruption if it is cleverly done. As a Christian, I believe that the lack of ethics corresponds to the lack of true knowledge of God, the lack of the fear of God. If there is a lack of the fear of God or if God is separated from business, a space is opened for delinquent behavior. In a Christian conscience there is no room for the saying “business is business” because the life of people always comes first.

This is the sin that I find in the Letter to the Romans. This concept is key to understanding the system enforced in the First Century under Imperial Rome and in today’s current system, which is bringing ruin to the majority of people, not only the poor. Suicide, to which some have resorted, is an extreme example of this reality which can be called theologically, sin.

Let’s return to Paul. This is in order to arrive at the affirmation that the justice of God is revealed to all because it is given by grace. The first three chapters of his letter describe how sin is constructed, how it takes form, and who are the agents that produce it. The term sin, in Greek (hamartia), appears in singular and is personified (3:9). This appearance in singular has come to the attention of scholars. It is conceived as personalized power capable of enslaving and leading to death. Before speaking of sin, Paul summarizes it in 1:18, speaking of the total inversion of the world which is condemned by God: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and injustice (adikia) of those who by their injustice (adikia) suppress the truth.” To imprison the truth in injustice is to hide what is truly occurring, calling good bad and bad good. There are many examples. One that the whole world knows is the military invasion of a country stating that it is liberating their people, but behind the scene there are economic interests.

But another more up to date example is the mortgage debts that were the beginning of the financial crisis. What has happened with the mortgages called “subprime” has been considered as the largest swindle of the century. All that I have read about it is very complicated, but we can simplify it this way. (I am using the experience of part of my family who live in California. But all of you know this better than I do.) To the poor who did not have resources to buy a house were given loans with adjustable mortgages. Later the price of the mortgages became exorbitant and did not correspond to the real price of the house. At first everyone was happy, the bankers because they were receiving large interest and juicy bonuses according to their profits; the home owners because they believed they had an expensive house. However, because of greed, the bankers offered more and more mortgages, and overnight the home owners could not pay their mortgage, especially those who because of the crises lost their jobs. They soon found out that they owed more on the house than it was worth and were left with a huge debt, and the banks were losing money because the mortgages could not be paid, and all the bankers that before borrowed among themselves began to lose confidence.

Paul, after announcing the wrath of God because of the injustice (adikia) of human beings that suppress the truth in injustice (adikia), continues explaining in a slow rhythm from Romans 1:19 to 3:9 how sin is conceived. In 1:13, 24 and 25, humans change, invert reality by evil, and in verses 1:24, 26 and 28 God “gave them up” meaning “left them at the mercy” of “the lusts of their hearts” v. 24, “degrading passions” v. 26, or “a debased mind” v. 28.
Here I want to make a clarification with respect to verses 26 and 27 that speak of sexual relations between persons of the same sex. These texts have diverted attention from what Paul is really speaking about: practices of injustice that lead to enslaving sin. Studying these texts in their context, what I find is that Paul wants to show that sin is part of social relations, and therefore he touches on bodily intimacy itself. But as a homophobic person in a homophobic culture, he uses the example of personal same sex relationships as a metaphor of the inversion of society because he is speaking of the inversion of society caused by practices of injustices (“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and injustice (adikia) of those who by their injustice (adikia) suppress the truth.” 1:18). So verses 26 and 27 would be as a photograph of the inversion of society that imprisons the truth in injustice; for this reason it does not appear as a specific condemnation in the later texts that we read that define what is concrete sin. This issue deserves a separate study that is not pertinent here.

Wisdom literature sees the inversion in the fact that while the ungodly do very well, it goes very badly for the just. For Paul, following the wisdom tradition (Wis 13:1-9) and the prophetic tradition (Jer 22:13-16), this inversion is a rejection of knowledge of the true God and is the veneration of idols (1:23).11 As we can see, there is a relation between the practice of inversion and human greedy desires. The practices reveal a false knowledge of God because these practices are oriented toward egoistic and greedy desires.

Let’s stop here and explain the role of greed and egoism in the construction of structural sin. During the time of the Roman Empire greed had many forms, especially in the creation of wars of conquest to extract taxes from the dominated, in the collection of taxes, in the concentration of land by the elite, and in patronage. But greed did not restrain government functionaries, or individuals, for example, investors and speculators of popular housing of that time.

The Christian communities in Rome experienced greed every day, for example in the payment of taxes as well as the exploitation of private investors in the construction of housing. In the study of the insula where the Christians lived in the district of Trastevere we often read about the greed of the owners who rented out the apartments. There were elegant insula, in other neighborhoods with a higher social class, but the insula in poor neighborhoods where the majority of Christians lived, were buildings with apartments jammed together and very small. The investors, to take advantage of all the space, sometimes did not include interior patios, windows or halls, meaning that it was difficult to go from one to another because one had to pass through various apartments in order to arrive at one’s own. Owners, because of their greed, built with cheap materials, and because they wanted more profits, built up to five or eight floors, rather than the common three or four floors. This, of course generated building collapses. There were also many fires because the construction material used was wood and people used oil lamps for illumination. Fires and collapsed buildings were the major cause of death. Even before the time of Julius Caesar’s government (49-44 B.C.E.) they had to make laws to regulate these constructions according to height and construction materials (brick), but we still find investor corruption and speculation in Paul’s time. It is said that the fire in Rome, which Nero blamed on the Christians, was intended to be for the elimination of the insula, a slum, and the reconstruction of the city.

Today there is clearly uncontrollable greed. If in fact it was made visible by the sub prime housing mortgages, by being the spark that caused the explosion of the most profound world financial crisis in the last 79 years, it is present today in all parts of the world, in all
entities and institutions. The desire to gain easily, speculating, without ethical regulation is a disastrous course that is dragging all to ruin in some way or another. The fact that the great Wall Street swindler, Bernard Madoff, who for decades created an extraordinary financial lie which disappeared about 50 billion dollars, has been jailed, changes nothing.

One of the problems that brought us to this situation is that greed has been seen as something good. In the 1990's great corporations and the wealthiest people of the world saw greed as a virtue. Today we are suffering the consequences: exorbitant unemployment, eviction of families from their homes, insecurity, fear and suicide. For this reason, Paul Krugman, the 2008 recipient of the Nobel Prize in Economics, states very strongly, “This is one of those moments in which a whole philosophy has been discredited. Those that defended that [the idea] greed was good and that the markets should regulate themselves now suffer the catastrophe.” Speaking on the same theme of the financial crisis, the theologian Hans Küng said in an interview that “with greed humans lose their 'souls,' their freedom, their dignity, their interior peace, and with that, all that makes us human.” The economy of the free market has to have ethics. Controls are necessary, there is no doubt about that now, after suffering the crisis. Even the economist Fareed Zakaria, a guardian of capitalism, editor of Newsweek magazine, speaks of the need to begin healing the international system, national governments, and private firms. In his article “Capitalist Manifesto: Greed is Good” he adds between parenthesis “up to a certain point.” “We get exercised about the immorality of politicians when they get caught in sex scandals. Meanwhile they triple the national debt, enrich their lobbyist friends and write tax loopholes for specific corporations – all perfectly legal – and we regard this as normal.” But, he adds later: “Not everything is written down, and not everything that is legally permissible is ethical.”

I believe it is here that the participation of churches and honest Christians is fundamental – to be an ethical conscience of the market economy. Markets, by themselves, always tend to create injustices because the logic of economic growth is seen as the maximization of profits with the least cost and without considering circumstances, place or time. That is the logic of auto-regulation. But if the work of the economy were on a par with ethics, there would be the necessary control to guarantee a certain grade of transparency and control of greed.

Does that mean that by preaching against greed we solve the problem of the crisis? I do not believe so. We say that greed is a fundamental part in the construction of structural sin. However, we live under structural sin, not under greed coming from individual hearts. Therefore, we must be clear that the sin visible in the system where ethical values are inverted, takes over all the inhabitants. That is why it is structural and therefore making all of us victims and complicit, large and small, rich and poor, so that it is not sufficient to convince isolated hearts that greed is not good. Therefore, if in the systemic chaos greedy desires are a fundamental part, the solution is not the conversion of hearts, but in Pauline terms it is the proposal of a new creation coming from a new systemic justice: God’s justice. God’s justice is found in the Reign of God which is revealed to all, both victims and perpetrators. Because under sin (hamartia) or a sinful system, even those who believe that by their laws they can present themselves as just before God, can not. Their practice betrays them because they promote laws such as do not rob and yet they rob. (Rom 2:21). Paul elaborates this argument in Chapter 2 to make clear that the Jews, who feel they are free from sin because they count on the Law of Moses, are also under sin. Because of this, Paul goes beyond the wisdom literature when he conceives of sin as a personified power to which all human beings are subject, good and evil.
No one is free from the evil of greed, because those with good desires in their heart as well as those who have greedy desires form an intrinsic part of the human condition. Frequently, as Paul says, what he does not want to do, he does, and that he wants to do, he cannot (7:15). Nevertheless, the Apostle affirms that the Spirit can orient hearts toward good desires and convert them into good works (Rom 6:8 and Gal 5:22).

Romans presents structural sin as a morass in which there is no way out. The only solution is the intervention of a different justice, the justice of God. This for Paul means the call to a new creation; to die to sin and return to live for God, showing ourselves as instruments of justice (Rom 6). Along this same line, economist Wim Dierckxsens, confronting today’s crisis, confirms with hope that the collapse of the neoliberal system presents an opportunity to propose new forms of economic relationships and life styles.

To finish, I would like to allude to our responsibility as Church as well as Christians. Today’s economic crisis is profound, and the churches as well as Christians feel impotent to confront it. But our privileged book, the Bible, can give us light to discern reality and to illuminate our way. I find five fundamental lights from Paul’s perspective:

1) It is important to underline that greed is not a virtue, as since the 90’s the economy has wanted us to believe. It is this that has driven the robbery against neighbor, the lack of solidarity, and insensibility to the consequences of sin.

2) To see the effects that we are suffering and the structural sin in the deregulation of the free market system. If the churches become the ethical conscience of the market there would have to be constant regulation with the objective being to focus first on people and later on profits.

3) To announce hope to all the victims of the crisis. According to Paul, God can free us from the sin that leads to death. Paul’s proposal in Romans is not simply to reveal human sin and greed, but above all to propose a different life oriented by God’s justice. God’s justice does not require any merit to participate in the market, with no merit of color, class or gender because God gives freely as a gift. Justice is obtained through faith.

4) This crisis that we are experiencing obliges us to look at our own life in a mirror and invites us to a total renovation, to die to a consumerist life style and to exaggerated competition and to rise up to the way of being God’s creatures: free daughters and sons, not slaves of the market, or of debts because of consumerism. We need to free ourselves from this society that demands a kind of efficiency and competition that separates us from a life in solidarity with our neighbor.

5) Finally, the church is not exempt from participation in or from being complicit in sin. As institutions as well as governments, and as people, we are all complicit in some way. This is why the Church is called constantly to renew itself, to die to sin and to be raised by God. This manifests itself as a new way of being Church, credible and worthy of being the ethical conscience of the market.
The majority of these communities lived in the Trastevere district and in the Via Appia/Capena. Both, especially Trastevere were very unhealthy places where poor migrants came from everywhere, merchants and artisans. There were also a few Christians of a more comfortable class that were gathered in another region but they were a minority. Cf. Peter Lamp, *Die stadtromishen Christen in der ersten beiden Jahrhunderten*, Tübingen: JCB Mohr-Paul Siebeck, 1987; Elsa Tamez, *Contra toda Condena, La justification por la fe de los excluidos*, San Jose, DEI, 1990, pp. 109ff.


3 For example: his ecclesiology on the unity of the body in diversity (1 Cor ).

4 For example: justification by faith and sin (Rom 1-3).


8 Cf. Esteban Voth, “Justice and/or Righteousness. A contextualized analysis of *tsedeq* in the KJV (English) and RVR (Spanish)” in *The Challenge of Bible Translation*. Steven Voth, Glen Scorgie and Mark Strauss, eds. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.

9 Cf. the famous inscription of Priene 9 B.C.E. that praises the emperor who ended the war and ordained peace. According to this stone, for the world, the birth of the Divine Augustus was the beginning of the gospel of peace.


11 In the prophetic and wisdom traditions the terminology of sexual immorality or lustful passion is related to idolatry.


13 An interview for *El Pais*, March 15, 2009, Sevilla, by A. Gonzales and M.’A Noceds, Sevilla


IT IS I
Meter: 7777777

It is I, Lord, it is I.
Hear me, hear me in the crowd,
in the million voices loud.
Hear me, hear me in the sound
of your cities all around.
Hear me, hear me when I cry:
It is I, Lord, it is I.

It is I, Lord, it is I.
See me, see me in the night
where there is no sun or light.
See me, see me through the cloud,
through the battlefield and shroud.
See me, see me, God on High;
It is I, Lord, it is I.

It is I, Lord, it is I.
Know me, know me by my name,
where I am and how I came.
Know me, know me as your own
so I never be alone.
Know me, know me when I die;
It is I, Lord, it is I.

Hear the sound of ev’ry bird,
know each voice we ever heard,
feel each thought all people know,
see each road we ever go,
in the midst of ev’ry cry
It is I, Lord, here am I.

— Herbert F. Brokering, 1926-2009
Pastor, author of over 40 books,
lyricist, hymn writer and speaker
† November 7, 2009

* Herb Brokering, well-known poet/hymn writer and Trinity alumnus, composed this hymn as a response to Professor Brad Binau’s Trinity Days lecture from September 28, 2003, printed in the TSR Volume 25 #1.
Pauline Freedom and Market Freedom

By Elsa Tamez*

As we said in the last conference, the churches are challenged to be an ethical conscience of the market, to denounce sin and greed. However, I believe that those of us in the church have something more solid to contribute in this economic crisis. I firmly believe that we have Biblical resources, specifically Pauline resources that can contribute by giving criteria for a new economic model that would not produce inequalities out of its own logic. In this conference I want to concentrate on these criteria. I am going to do this by putting both proposals on the table: the neoliberal (free market) and the Pauline. This is very interesting because both of them have much in common in their terminology, but differ in their starting points and their horizons.

Both the philosophy of the neoliberal economists and the Pauline theology emphasize the importance of freedom, and both are against the law. Nevertheless, there is a huge difference between the proposals. Where is the difference? One has the potential of achieving a better quality of life and the other leads to inequality.

I will contrast the concepts of Friedrich A. Hayek, the well known free market ideologue, and the Apostle Paul, well known for his critique of the law and affirmation of freedom.


I. Neo-Liberal Freedom
   Freedom, Its Necessary Platform and Its Implications

Hayek defines freedom as absence: the absence of coercion – coercion being an authoritarian pressure that forces a person to act “in disaccord with one’s own coherent plan and to do so in accord with the purposes of a third party,” meaning other people.

Thus a free being is one who exercises freedom in accordance with his or her own interests and objectives, based on one’s own personal knowledge, and independent from the will of a third person.

For Hayek, laws that seek to organize and plan society are obstacles that limit the individual. We cannot speak of freedom if we know beforehand the goals and objectives toward which we are obligated to aim. Freedom must allow us the possibility to choose

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* Elsa Tamez is emeritus professor of Biblical Studies at the Latin American Biblical University in Costa Rica, a translations consultant at the United Bible Society and a theological advisor for the Latin American Council of Churches. Article translated by Gloria Kinsler.
what to produce, what to consume, and how to do it. Any law that is external to the will of the acting subject, that seeks to lead one to a particular end, is interference that must be rejected. It must be rejected because it does not respond to the person’s own goals but rather to those of a third party (even those goals clearly in favor of the majority). So then, the free market rejects laws that control the market or the individuals within it.

It is clear, however, that we cannot live together in society without laws. For freedom to unfold, a system is needed. Hayek alludes to general, abstract laws in the context of respect for the freedom of the individual in the private sphere. These laws are not specific, concrete mandates, but general laws that have come into being by tradition and custom throughout history. They are abstract because they do not refer to concrete mandates, particular circumstances, in explicit places or times. These are laws that do not stem from the aims of a third party; rather the free individual uses them as a tool for his or her own ends. With this, it is affirmed that laws govern and human beings do not.

For Hayek, this law does not subject one to serfdom or slavery, rather it gives a platform for all individuals to exercise their freedom guided by their personal interest.

The private interests of each and every one, according to his or her social condition, enter into play without taking into consideration the complete picture or the possible results, only the particular circumstances of each person and his or her own consciousness. These form a spontaneous order without regulations. Hayek calls this *cosmos* or *nomos* as opposed to that which is consciously organized, which is called *taxis* or *thesis*. Only certain contributions are expected from one’s colleagues. Any external interference is considered a limitation of freedom.

This is where the ideal of the free market comes in. The platform is free competition to produce the greatest amount of goods at the lowest possible cost. Freedom implies risk, luck, and responsibility – the risk of winning or losing (in competition); responsibility for one’s actions, whether they lead to success or failure; and luck in all kinds of circumstances that create better conditions for competition, such as inheritance, education, or skill.

Thus Hayek recognizes that in a society of free competition inequality is inevitable. He begins with an unequal world and generates more inequality through the logic of the market itself. Merit or effort does not count in the compensation that the individual receives. What counts is the result, whether a person succeeds or not, regardless of merit. Someone may invest great effort in trying to accomplish a task, but if it fails there is no compensation. If our goal is an abundance of goods at the lowest cost or merit possible, merit is expendable.

**The Problem with the Promulgation of Laws**

Hayek affirms that laws passed by third persons to control the market restrict individual freedom. These are taxiological laws – those that establish the organization and planning of a society and economy. They are mandates for achieving specific goals. They are oriented by a *telos* (aim). But while the cosmic law (*nomos*) of self-regulation creates open societies that are ready for the unexpected, these restrictive laws create closed societies. The authorities dictate and the subjects obey. This type of law restricts individual
freedom. Since it tries consciously to reorganize the inequalities, it demands the redistribution of wealth. These laws lead to serfdom because individuals in the society, over time, become slaves to a totalitarian state.

Historically, societies oriented by this type of law have failed. The distribution of wealth inhibits the progress of the society. To speak of a just society is meaningless, for behind it hides the envy of “have nots” towards the “haves.” For Hayek, the discontent created by inequality in a society is nothing more than the envy of its members toward each other.

Laws must help individuals develop plans of action that have the possibility of being carried out. The primary role of the law is to protect the individual from unpredictable interference. This is the necessary condition for individual freedom.

In opposition to these laws (taxis) we have the general or abstract laws (nomos - cosmos). The latter, in which laws and not human beings rule, are the laws that are valid for the exercise of freedom, and there is no threat to this freedom. It is the rule of law because the law governs and not human beings. Every individual is free to be guided by his or her own interest. When the nomos rules, the cosmos functions without interference in the spontaneous, de-regulated order in which everyone competes guided by personal interests and not by previously acknowledged goals.

The Cost of Freedom

The exercise of freedom in a society of free competition has a cost, sometimes a high cost. Since what is most important for this freedom is the possibility of choice (what to produce, what to consume, and how to do it) and not obtaining a goal established by the laws of third parties, we must be willing to run the risk: success or failure. We must take responsibility for failure as individuals. In a society based on freedom of competition, says Hayek, “most things can be had at a price. It is often a cruelly high price. We must sacrifice one thing to attain another.”

The State could insure a minimum subsistence level for the poor, but freedom of competition must not be interfered with.

II. Pauline Freedom

Freedom, Its Necessary Foundation and Implications

Paul, like Hayek, speaks of freedom (eleutheria) and its absence. We could say, based on Galatians, that freedom is the experience of liberation from any condition of slavery, be it from the law (nomos), from the power of sin, from “the weak and beggarly elements” of the world (stoicheia) or any other type of alienation or subjugation. The event of liberation is caused by a third party (God, Christ or the Spirit), and the free person has the freedom to choose to continue in that freedom or submit once again to the yoke of slavery. “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1).
The foundation necessary for the event of liberation is the grace of God, manifested historically in the Christological event, to which we will refer later. Freedom, therefore, is a gift that God gives freely, according to God’s mercy and faithfulness to God’s creatures.

Paul contrasts the law with faith. The works of the law obeyed blindly do not make freedom possible. It is faith (in the Mediator Jesus Christ). The way to freedom is by walking in faith (pistis) or in the Spirit and not by following of the mandates of the law (nomos). Paul emphasizes the dimension of faith as the foundation necessary for the event of liberation granted by a third party (Jesus Christ). Faith, independent of the law, is the condition necessary for the exercise of freedom.

This does not mean that human beings are born slaves by nature and that God frees them by God’s grace. The law made possible the condition of slavery by impeding the intervention of the ethical conscience when the law is not in favor of life, and the law captivated by sin condemns one to death. (Rom 7).

There are concrete implications here for those who have been freed. The act of living by faith, for those who are freed by grace, is counted as just (dikaios). The practice of justice, or of doing justice, therefore, is intrinsic to the freedom of persons: We are free and we are just. For Paul the basis for freedom is faith which acts through love (Gal. 5:6) and not through one’s own interests.

On the other hand, the faith dimension (the necessary foundation for being free) brings human beings closer to the author of freedom, who is God. Those who adhere to faith receive the Spirit. Thus, Paul says that where the Spirit is, there is freedom (2 Cor 3:17).

The Spirit operates differently from the mechanisms of the law. The law follows a path that is known and given, without surprise or novelty, but it takes no responsibility for the aims each person has according to his or her personal interests. What matters is obeying the law, and not the particular situation of the person. The Spirit, on the other hand, is guided by discernment of the circumstances and is open to surprises along the way, but also is well aware of its ultimate goals: justice, peace and life (Rom. 8). Moreover, the fruits of the Spirit become visible in daily life, as do those of the flesh. People do not have to wait to achieve the goal. This is because, in Christian freedom, the concrete life of human beings is what is important, not faithfully following the mandates of the law.

Upon being set free from the law (nomos), the person becomes a free being and has the liberty to use this freedom in accordance with his or her own interests (those of the flesh) or according to the interests pertaining to the life of all human beings, including self-interest (Gal 5:13). The person who is guided by the welfare of all (his or her own and that of others) acts in concert with the logic of God, which is grace. This is what Paul calls Christian freedom. Having been set free, people cease to be slaves by the intervention of God through God’s grace, and because they receive the Spirit of God or Christ, this Spirit, crying “Abba, Father,” transforms human beings from slaves of all kinds of laws into free children and heirs of God.

The implications of freedom are that when people choose the way of faith, they can intervene freely to overcome any logic that tends toward human submission. Concrete
Christian freedom is manifest in serving one another in love. If freedom is used as an occasion for the flesh, guided only by self-interests, people are outside the law of love and outside the realm of the Spirit. This use of this kind of freedom will necessarily mean, sooner or later, self-destruction for all. Paul says “For you were called to freedom; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love be servants of one another” (Gal 5:13).

Freedom then, is a gift that must be maintained with firmness and discernment in order to avoid falling back into slavery.

**The Christological Event, the Price of Freedom**

Paul does not talk much about freedom itself, but about the gift of freedom that must be received in Christ. He emphasizes the importance of not falling again into slavery expressed in blind obedience to any law. For this reason he refers, time and time again, to the Christological event of redemption or liberation.

For Paul, the historical mediation of the liberating event is the gift of God’s very self. God’s epiphany is named Jesus, the Messiah (Jesus Christ). God gives God’s self in Jesus Christ, who freely takes on human history to “deliver human beings from the present evil age” (Gal 1:4). Because of the injustices of human beings, this history had brought condemnation. Because of injustices, all society was turned upside down (Rom 1:18), and sin, as a powerful enslaving force, subjugated all human beings to its service, thus eliminating all possibility of self-liberation. According to Paul the law was usurped by sin and therefore it became a mortal weapon for human beings. Fulfilling the law was committing sin, even if one was not aware of it (Rom 7). In this situation the law is incapable of bringing life (Gal 3:21) or justice (Gal 2:21).

For there to be freedom from the law, God in Jesus subjects Godself to the law and is killed by the law. This is the price of freedom. Paul refers to this act with the formula “who gave himself for our sin” (Gal 1:4), “who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20); “but when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children” (Gal 4:4-5).

**The Problem with the Law**

It would seem that for Paul the fundamental problem with the law is not the precepts of the law itself, but rather the results of fulfilling the law without the involvement of a third party to discern the consequences of this law. The ultimate consequence to which the law can arrive is the death of the innocent. For Paul this truth is revealed in the crucified one. The precepts that are established for the benefit of human relationships are good, just, and holy (Rom 7) because they seek the common good and in some way regulate selfish personal interests. In this sense, for Paul the law of Moses served as a custodian until the coming of faith (Gal 3:23), a dimension that includes the possibility of breaking or intervening with the law (any law) when it goes against the life of human beings.
In Paul’s reasoning concerning the law we find an understanding that transcends the judicial law and extends to any logic or system that does not allow for the intervention of the human conscience in discerning the results of obedience. In Galatians he reminds his readers that previously they lived in fear, as slaves, subjected to the “elemental spirits” (stoicheia) (Gal 4:9).

Paul finds that to act according to faith, independently of the law, is the way toward the exercise of true freedom. It means acting according to grace or “the Spirit that is in me.” Christian freedom, therefore, becomes visible when God is present in the body and mind. The product of human actions, as well as the actions themselves, then becomes a verifiable reference of the “new creation” in favor of both our personal interests and those of our neighbors.

The law (that is carried out regardless of the good or bad results) is contrasted by Paul with another law, without specifying concrete names and places, which serves as a framework for acting according to faith or grace. It deals with loving one’s neighbor as oneself. This is the concrete guide that will assure the ultimate objective – the new creation. With this law a bridge is formed that unites the explicit ultimate objective (new creation) and whatever means are used at any particular time or place. The guidance of the Spirit that is open to the unexpected does not ignore the totality of the law summarized in love for self and neighbor. Here we may speak, like Hayek, of an open society, with the fundamental difference being that in the Pauline open society there is no room for exclusion, because it is one that starts with the excluded.

It is clear then that Pauline thinking about the law and freedom, the means (faith working through love) and the objective (Justice of God for all, or new creation) are expressed as hope or utopia. Indeed, in spite of all his criticism of the law, for Paul, once all is said and done, the concrete lives of human beings are what is most important, with or without the law. Concerning the means, he says in Gal 5:6 “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love…” and in 6:15 “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.”

III. Hayek and Paul: Divergent Proposals

Both Hayek and Paul contrast the law and freedom. They have two different concepts concerning the law, one positive and one negative.

The law (nomos) that Paul rejects is the law that enslaves and dominates the human being, the law that is above human beings, that becomes an order in which there is no intervention by the human conscience and one which is followed blindly, ignoring situations, places, and times and ignoring the love of neighbor. It is a rule of law because it demands that the law as such be obeyed. There are no guiding criteria such as the life of people. This is the law that goes hand in hand with structural sin. This law (nomos-cosmos) is present in all logic, tradition, institutions, and culture that are followed without human discernment. This is the law of the self-regulated order of which Hayek speaks favorably.
The law (in the sense of *taxis*) that is established to regulate human relationships for the common good is good, just, and holy. But once it is placed above human beings it is absorbed by sin and can also become negative.

Hayek, on the other hand, rejects the law (*taxis*) in which third parties intervene, plan relationships, and allude directly to concrete circumstances, time and place. It is law in which the law itself does not govern, but rather is written with specific objectives in mind (example – distribution of wealth or social justice). For Hayek this law is against individual freedom.

The law or order (*nomos-cosmos*) that Hayek proclaims is that which emerges spontaneously and which is above human beings, going beyond concrete circumstances and specific place and time. It is a self-regulated order that must be followed blindly. This is the rule of law that Paul criticizes.

The other law Paul alludes to, of a spontaneous nature, is the law of the Spirit that moves where it wants and is guided by grace. It comes from the heart of those who are not blindly following a law but rather living according to a conscience or a law that is clothed in the Spirit.

This rule, also called the rule of faith or grace, has clear objectives and means. The objective is the Justice of God for all, or the New Creation. Paul says that the tendencies of the Spirit are peace, justice, and life (Rom 8). Although the goal is clear, it is an unregulated order; it follows the law that governs human relationships only when that law affirms the life of all. Those who are guided by this law are free subjects, with a conscience and a sense of belonging. Those who are guided by this law are not slaves to the laws of the market.

This law does not legitimize any exclusive competition, because its followers are guided by grace, love for neighbor and for self. This spontaneous order is free of any of the patriarchal, racist, classist, or sexist ideology that is present in all cultures, traditions and institutions.

Perhaps Hayek and Paul would both say that in Christ (Paul) or in the market (Hayek) “there is no Jew nor Greek, man or woman, master nor slave” (and we can add poor and rich, white and black, homosexual or heterosexual…). The difference is that to Hayek they are free to participate in the free competition, but at the end the strong would win.

Hayek’s starting point is the inequality of the individual and the inequality of opportunity to compete, guided by self-interest. The consequence would be greater inequality, an unfettered struggle for winning without regard to one’s neighbor. The free market knows nothing of mercy or grace.

In Pauline theology, on the other hand, the starting point is equality by the grace of God and love for neighbor and self. The consequence of being guided by this logic would be the establishing of new human relationships. In this case we would seek not only a better quality of life for all on a material level, but also the dignity of all human beings. Self interest is still present, because the law is summarized in love for neighbor as for self.
In conclusion, following Hayek’s concepts of the law and freedom, we may argue that the goal for him is perfect freedom for competition, without taking account of the consequences.

For Paul the grace of God for all, the New Creation, is a promise, but it is also today’s task that has to be shown through the love for neighbor.

For Hayek, the way to achieve perfect free competition is to follow personal self-interest pursuing the rule of the market law. For Paul, it would be the guidance of the Spirit or faith that works through love. The fruit of this life can be measured. For Hayek, the losers must responsibly accept their failure, whereas for Paul, love for neighbor and self is an integral part of living according to the gift of grace.

The predictable consequences of these proposals by Hayek are: more profit, the concentration of goods in few hands, lack of solidarity, exclusion, dehumanization, slavery, alienation of a self-regulated order, lack of sensitivity to the problems of the environment, and deep crises when auto-regulation is carried to the extreme.6

The predictable consequences for Paul’s proposals would be a more balanced distribution of goods, solidarity, humanization, responsible freedom for the other. This is because one’s conscience oriented by the Spirit of the Resurrected One is always ready to discern what is happening and interfere when the system goes against people’s life. Paul learned this from the teachings of Jesus when he said that the Sabbath, that is to say the law, is to serve humankind and not the other way around (Mk 2:27).

Conclusion

I believe churches have much to contribute in order to overcome this crisis. Paul is tremendously important by referring to a critique of the law if we contextualize it. His contribution gives us as Christians criteria to bring to the public debate, a reconsideration of the neoliberal philosophy the consequences of which have worsened the structural sin of which we are witnesses. Besides that, we are seeing that a society tied to the market has no more to give; it is exhausted, in spite of all the money that has been injected. We have not been born for buying and selling or to be objects of the ups and downs of the market. We have been created to continue becoming better human beings, free from laws that make us into objects and prepackage reason. We have been redeemed to irradiate the grace of God and God’s mercy to all, especially the poorest of the poor, the unemployed, those who are now suffering the effects of free market policies.

It is time to take theology out of the academy and the churches and into society, into the secular world. By doing that, I believe, we contribute to the expansion of God’s Reign of grace.
1 Chicago: University Chicago Press, 1944.


6 Paul Krugman shows how the failure of regulation to keep pace with the increasingly out-of-control financial system set the United States and the world up for the greatest financial crisis since the 1930’s (*The Return of Depression Economics and the Crises of 2008*. NY: Norton, 2009).
LORD, GIVE US A TENDER HEART

Lord, give us a tender heart.
Let us do loving things that surprise even ourselves.
Let us stop daily to talk to people who need a good word,
Mend what is broken, and touch what needs to be loved.
Make us more aware of the tiny surprises
that are scattered like secrets all around us.
Let us notice such things we have forgotten,
and those persons of whom we have grown weary.
May we see them in a new way,
so that we have a new word for them.
As we busily set out to do the large tasks,
may we find more time for small celebrations.
O Christ, give us the grace
to live out each day as though it were a gift.
Oh, Spirit, surprise us often.
Then let us show our great surprise.

– Herbert F. Brokering, 1926-2009
Pastor, author of over 40 books,
lyricist, hymn writer and speaker
† November 7, 2009
Jewish-Christian Relations:
The Dark History, a New Beginning, and Current Tensions

By Skip Cornett*

The movement called Post-Holocaust theology emerged soon after World War II, when the involvement of organized Christianity in the Nazi Holocaust forced a new interpretation of the Christian narrative in relation to Judaism. The recognition of Christianity and the New Testament as a source of anti-Semitism was made clear in 1947 when the newly created International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ) drafted the Ten Points of Seelisberg. This thesis sought to reinterpret for Christianity the validity of Judaism as the people of God’s promise and Torah as the manifestation of God’s love.

International Council of Christians and Jews
The 10 Points of Seelisberg
An Address to the Churches – Seelisberg, Switzerland, Aug. 5, 1947

1. Remember that One God speaks to us all through the Old and the New Testaments.
2. Remember that Jesus was born of a Jewish mother of the seed of David and the people of Israel, and that His everlasting love and forgiveness embraces His own people and the whole world.
3. Remember that the first disciples, the apostles and the first martyrs were Jews.
4. Remember that the fundamental commandment of Christianity, to love God and one’s neighbor, proclaimed already in the Old Testament and confirmed by Jesus, is binding upon both Christians and Jews in all human relationships, without any exception.
5. Avoid distorting or misrepresenting biblical or post-biblical Judaism with the object of extolling Christianity.
6. Avoid using the word Jews in the exclusive sense of the enemies of Jesus, and the words ‘the enemies of Jesus’ to designate the whole Jewish people.
7. Avoid presenting the Passion in such a way as to bring the odium of the killing of Jesus upon all Jews or upon Jews alone.

* Skip Cornett, Director of Continuing Education at TLS, completed an MA in political science and international relations at Virginia Tech in December of 2008. The title of his Master’s thesis was “Israeli West Bank Settlements: Perversion of Realism and Obstacle to Peace.”
It was only a section of the Jews in Jerusalem who demanded the death of Jesus, and the Christian message has always been that it was the sins of mankind which were exemplified by those Jews and the sins in which all men share that brought Christ to the Cross.

8. Avoid referring to the scriptural curses, or the cry of a raging mob: “His blood be upon us and our children,” without remembering that this cry should not count against the infinitely more weighty words of our Lord: “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”

9. Avoid promoting the superstitious notion that the Jewish people are reprobate, accused, reserved for a destiny of suffering.

10. Avoid speaking of the Jews as if the first members of the Church had not been Jews.

The Ten Points of Seelisberg was considered a revolutionary approach to Judaism and was very progressive in the context of Christian biblical theology.

The ICCJ, headquartered in Heppenheim at the Martin Buber House, near Frankfurt, Germany, continues today as an umbrella organization for 38 national Jewish-Christian dialogue groups around the world.

A major step in the process of repentance and reconciliation by Christianity toward Judaism was Nostra Aetate (In Our Time). It was the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions proclaimed by Pope Paul VI in 1965 as part of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. Nostra Aetate was directed to a number of historic understandings in the church that resulted in the teaching of contempt toward Jews. Over the years, it has precipitated a range of ecclesial documents that further refine Rome’s new appreciation of Judaism. Writing for the International Council of Christians and Jews, Philip Cunningham has summarized well the long-term consequence of Nostra Aetate:

The Second Vatican Council’s 1965 declaration Nostra Aetate inspired a series of official reappraisals of church teachings about Jews and Judaism that continues to the present day. Vatican commissions, national conferences of Catholic bishops, and Pope John Paul II issued numerous statements concerning Christian-Jewish relations. Although only partially internalized among Catholics worldwide, these documents have developed over four decades into a complex system of interlocking ideas that becomes difficult to chart even when restricted to only Vatican materials. It is no exaggeration to suggest that these texts, together with their counterparts in other Christian communities, represent an unprecedented Christian affirmation of Judaism’s positive theological significance for the church — a constructive endeavor that has not been seriously pursued since New Testament times.²

A number of significant understandings from Roman Catholic documents are specified. First is the recognition that Jewish people cannot be held collectively responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus; they are not doomed by a divine curse to wander the earth without a homeland, living on the margins of (Christian) society. Anti-Semitism is “opposed to the
very spirit of Christianity.” The history of Israel did not end in 70 C.E. It continued, especially in a Diaspora, which allowed Israel to carry to the whole world a witness, often heroic, “of its fidelity to the one God.” Biblical interpreters must “avoid absolutely any actualization of certain texts of the New Testament which could provoke or reinforce unfavorable attitudes toward the Jewish people.”

Some of the critical teachings of the ecclesial documents inspired by *Nostra Aetate* can be summarized into a few main points. First is the recognition of the historic Christian sinfulness toward Jews:

There can be no denial of the fact that from the time of the Emperor Constantine, Jews were isolated and discriminated against in the Christian world. There were expulsions and forced conversions. Literature propagated stereotypes; preaching accused the Jews of every age of deicide; the ghetto which came into being in 1555 with a papal bull became in Nazi Germany the antechamber of the extermination. For Christians, the heavy burden of conscience [for the collective behavior] of their brothers and sisters during the Second World War must be a call to penitence. At the end of this Millennium the Catholic Church desires to express her deep sorrow for the failures of her sons and daughters in every age. This is an act of repentance (*teshuvah*), since, as members of the Church, we are linked to the sins as well as the merits of all her children.

The church, the Vatican in this case, has clearly worked hard at the process of repentance, reparation and reconciliation with the Jewish community over the history of discrimination and exclusion of Jews, and the church’s complicity with anti-Semitism and the Final Solution implemented by Hitler in World War II.

Many Christians in our churches today are generally not aware of the church’s long-standing role in the marginalization and mistreatment of the Jewish people. One of the little-known but particularly reprehensible artifacts of European Christian culture was cornices of European cathedrals “adorned” with the horrific and derogatory *Judensau* (Jewish pig), a graphic depiction of Jews suckling on pigs, or engaging in other demeaning and dehumanizing acts. This portrayal of Jews was displayed in the most public of places in Europe: as many as 30 or more cathedrals and churches displayed these images in such places as Regensburg, Frankfurt, and Wittenberg, Germany; Basel, Switzerland; and the Uppsala Cathedral in Sweden.

One of the worst of the ongoing attacks on Jews was the allegation of “blood libel” that resulted in the deaths of many Jews. The myth that circulated repeatedly over many centuries alleged that Jews killed Christian children in order to get their blood to be used in the making of matzos. Reportedly, one of the first instances of blood libel occurred in 1144 C.E. when a rumor began in eastern England that:

Jews had kidnapped a Christian child, tied him to a cross, stabbed his head to simulate Jesus’ crown of thorns, killed him, drained his body completely of blood, and mixed the blood into matzos (unleavened bread) at the time of Passover. The rumor was started by a former Jew, Theobald, who had become a Christian monk. He said that Jewish representatives gathered each year in Narbonne, France. They decided in which city a Christian child would be sacrificed.
The boy involved in the year 1144 hoax became known as St. William of Norwich. Many people made pilgrimages to his tomb and claimed that miracles had resulted from appeals to St. William.5

Incidents of Blood Libel continued across Europe even into the 19th century.

The other major act of discrimination perpetrated against the Jews involved pogroms. A pogrom is essentially a riot directed at a particular people, an ethnic attack. Pogroms against the Jews were widespread in the Russian empire and occurred repeatedly across Europe, the most notable one being Kristallnacht (the night of broken glass) on Nov. 9 and 10, 1938. Many Jewish homes, businesses and synagogues were destroyed and Jewish property was confiscated. Kristallnacht is often thought of as a marking point for the beginning of the Nazi “Final Solution” or genocide planned for the Jews.

The depth and breadth of anti-Semitism that was prevalent across Europe over the centuries cannot be overstated. The ideology of anti-Semitism had its origins in the New Testament, in Roman Catholicism and the teachings of the church, but soon took on a life of its own in the church of the 16th century Reformation, essentially because anti-Semitism was so deeply embedded in the Christian culture of Europe.

Heiko Oberman said that Europe in the 16th century made a hesitant but significant step into the modern age. The voices for human rights, toleration, and religious freedom multiplied. Three leading figures each contributed in their own way to this changing situation: Johannes Reuchlin, Erasmus of Rotterdam and Martin Luther. This progress in human rights was, however, tailored for the needs of a Christian society. Oberman argues that the advancement of human rights and religious toleration was realized at the expense of the Jewish population in northern Europe and Germany where the social and legal status of Jews deteriorated. The movement from the darkness of the Middle Ages into the liberation era of the Renaissance and the Reformation was disjointed and incomplete because it excluded the Jews.

Reuchlin, Erasmus and Luther also contributed to these disparities, each in his own way.6 Reuchlin’s role in the history of anti-Semitism is complicated. It is sufficient to note that he reflected the attitude of Christians of that era: that “repentance, conversion, and signs of improvement” were required of Jews, and “for the obstinate, there remained expulsion.” Erasmus of Rotterdam, known by 1514 as “the prince of humanists” had a vision for a renovated Europe, which meant for him a Christian Europe free of Jews. This, of course, reflects the Christian supercessionist theology that has prevailed down through the ages, the view that Christianity replaced Judaism as the recipient of God’s promises and Judaism was no longer relevant or valid.

Of the three individuals identified by Oberman, the one who stands out most is Martin Luther who late in his life wrote one of the worst examples of anti-Semitism, an unfortunate legacy that Lutherans must live with today. Luther’s voluminous writings are invaluable to understanding the Protestant movement and Lutheranism. However, one item in his teachings that has been obscure is his essay “On the Jews and their Lies,” published in 1543. Luther had earlier written appreciatively of the Jews and Judaism, with the expectation prevalent in the medieval church, that in time they would convert to Christianity. His diatribe against the Jews stands as one of the most graphic and vile attacks upon Jews written by a church leader. The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), in a bold and historic move adopted a statement on April 18, 1994 repudiating the earlier anti-Semitic writings of Luther.
In the long history of Christianity there exists no more tragic development than the treatment accorded the Jewish people on the part of Christian believers. Very few Christian communities of faith were able to escape the contagion of anti-Judaism and its modern successor, anti-Semitism. Lutherans belonging to the Lutheran World Federation and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America feel a special burden in this regard because of certain elements in the legacy of the reformer Martin Luther and the catastrophes, including the Holocaust of the twentieth century, suffered by Jews in places where the Lutheran churches were strongly represented.

The Lutheran communion of faith is linked by name and heritage to the memory of Martin Luther, teacher and reformer. Honoring his name in our own, we recall his bold stand for truth, his earthy and sublime words of wisdom, and above all his witness to God’s saving Word. Luther proclaimed a gospel for people as we really are, bidding us to trust a grace sufficient to reach our deepest shames and address the most tragic truths.

In the spirit of that truth-telling, we who bear his name and heritage must with pain acknowledge also Luther’s anti-Judaic diatribes and the violent recommendations of his later writings against the Jews. As did many of Luther’s own companions in the sixteenth century, we reject this violent invective, and yet more do we express our deep and abiding sorrow over its tragic effects on subsequent generations. In concert with the Lutheran World Federation, we particularly deplore the appropriation of Luther’s words by modern anti-Semites for the teaching of hatred toward Judaism or toward the Jewish people in our day.

Grieving the complicity of our own tradition within this history of hatred, moreover, we express our urgent desire to live out our faith in Jesus Christ with love and respect for the Jewish people. We recognize in anti-Semitism a contradiction and an affront to the Gospel, a violation of our hope and calling, and we pledge this church to oppose the deadly working of such bigotry, both within our own circles and in the society around us. Finally, we pray for the continued blessing of the Blessed One upon the increasing cooperation and understanding between Lutheran Christians and the Jewish community.

The adoption of this statement stands as a critical turning point for the ELCA, laying the foundation for a major initiative to promote the importance of Jewish-Christian relations: The ELCA Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations. Members of the panel are appointed by the presiding bishop of the ELCA in order to enhance awareness and provide consultation on Lutheran-Jewish relations in this church. One of the outcomes of the work of this panel has been the publication of resources for Jewish-Christian relations, including a set of “Talking Points: Topics in Christian-Jewish Relations” which has been expanded into a publication for congregational study entitled *Covenantal Conversations: Christians in Dialogue with Jews and Judaism*. Covenantal Conversations includes a DVD of interviews and conversations with the writers, to be released in 2010.
Christians and Jews have joined forces for reconciliation and renewal between the faith communities, with a real desire to find common ground and mission for serving the world. Jewish-Christian relations in the last 25 years has encouraged a “cottage industry” of scholarship, publications, institutes, joint programs and common agreements. All of the activity around this new engagement has clearly enriched and strengthened both communities of faith and created a range of new programs that foster Jewish-Christian exchange. It is worthwhile to identify a few of these initiatives to get a sense of the richness of Jewish-Christian relations in the latter part of the 20th century:

Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding, Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, CT est. 1992
Center for Christian-Jewish Learning, Boston College est. 2001.
Institute for Jewish Christian Understanding, Muhlenberg College, Allentown, PA est. 1989 (the primary institute in the ELCA)
Institute for Christian & Jewish Studies, Baltimore, MD
International Council of Christians and Jews – ICCJ Heppenheim, Germany, est. 1947
Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, IL, John Pawlikowski, O.S.M. Professor of Ethics and Director of Catholic-Jewish Studies Program, Rabbi David Fox Sandmel, Crown Ryan. Professor of Jewish Studies
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops – fulltime staff professional in charge of Catholic-Jewish relations
Evangelical Lutheran Church in American – Consultative Panel for Lutheran-Jewish Relations
Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, OH, Promise for Life Holocaust Memorial – A major art sculpture on campus that serves as the umbrella for conducting Holocaust education and Jewish-Christian relations

There are many institutes and joint Jewish-Christian study programs, scholars who have crossed boundaries, and interfaith initiatives involving the Christian and Jewish communities all across the United States.

Shifting Currents in Jewish-Christian Relations: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

In the midst of this long, curious journey between Christians and Jews is another major source of tension between Judaism and Christianity: serious disagreement over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The churches of the mainline denominations are simply “at odds” about Israeli treatment of the Palestinian people under the occupation of Palestinian territories, and what the churches identify as Israeli intransigence regarding their unwillingness to resolve this conflict. That tension is played out on a regular basis, most prominently in the North American context because of the perceived power wielded by the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the Jewish lobby, and the organized Jewish community. What has been a serious engagement to find common ground and reconciliation between Christians and Jews has evolved into a delicate balancing act in some sectors of the church and the Jewish community. The balancing act is between forces and ideals for reconciliation and renewal between the two faith communities, on the one hand, and forces for righting the wrongs that some Christians and the church leadership see being perpetrated upon Palestinians by Israel.
In addition to a concern for the plight of the Palestinian people living under Israeli occupation, the other dimension of this situation is the problem presented by Christians in the Holy Land. Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and the larger Holy Land is the home of indigenous Christians, mostly Arab or Palestinian Roman Catholic and Orthodox who have been there for close to 2000 years. The other significant presence in Israel and the Palestinian territory is the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL). Lutherans have been in the Holy Land since the mid nineteenth century, along with the Anglicans. The ELCJHL has four Palestinian Lutheran congregations in the occupied West Bank territory, a congregation in Jerusalem, and one in Amman, Jordan. They also administer four schools in the Palestinian territory, and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) sponsors Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem. Its primary focus is serving the medical needs of Palestinians.

A major concern for the mainline denominations is the continuing decline of the Christian population in the Palestinian territory. According to the World Council of Churches, Christians in Israel constitute only 2% of the total population of 7.2 million; in the West Bank and Gaza it has declined to 6% of the a population of 3.9 million. Christians are mostly in the West Bank rather than Gaza. According to Charles Lutz, the Christian population in the Holy Land was around 20% of the total in the early 1900s. He also reported that as many as 300,000 Palestinian Christians have now left the Israel-Palestine region and what is left is a Christian remnant. The numbers and percentages vary depending on the sources, but it is sufficient to say that the Palestinian and Israeli Christian population is in serious decline.

Deal Hudson addresses the question of why Christians are leaving the Palestinian territory in an article in “Catholicity: The Catholic Church Simplified.” Hudson discusses the issue with Bernard Sabella, Palestinian Roman Catholic and former sociology professor at Bethlehem University. When asked whether Palestinian Christians are leaving due to a Muslim threat, Sabella indicates there have been tensions, but that generally relations between Christians and Muslims in the West Bank have been good. According to Sabella’s summary, there are three basic reasons to explain Palestinian exodus from the Holy Land, specifically the West Bank:

1) lack of an economic and cultural future under Israeli occupation;
2) increased security measures since the 2nd Intifada starting in 2000 – the security wall, more Jewish settlements and Israeli-citizen-only roads in the West Bank; and
3) the lure of joining already-departed family members in other countries such as Brazil, Canada, and the United States.

The other factor is the recognition that Palestinian Christians, in contrast to Muslims in that region, are generally better educated and well-traveled, and have more family connections in other parts of the world. Especially important for this discussion is the second point in Sabella’s list, which acknowledges that Palestinian Christians, like others, are burdened by the increased security measures imposed by Israel since the 2nd Intifada in 2000. In simplest terms, Palestinian Christians are not distinguished in any way from their Muslim counterparts when it comes to Israeli security measures. They also suffer from the economic consequences; they must go through security check points just like everyone else; and their movement into the Jerusalem job market is greatly hindered by the security wall that separates the occupied West Bank territory from Israel. Given the resources available to Palestinian Christians from family and friends in other parts of the world, it is a very natural inclination to go elsewhere if the opportunity arises.
The question raised by a number of different writers concerns the real possibility that in time there will be very few native Christians left around the most significant Holy sites in the Christian tradition. Christian tourism is also a problem because tightened security measures have had a detrimental effect on tourism in Bethlehem and the West Bank. The security wall is an ominous prison-like barrier in the approach to Bethlehem and it is now necessary to pass through a major checkpoint to get into Bethlehem. With Israel’s erection of the security wall, tourism has declined significantly in Bethlehem and had a major impact on the local economy. Vendors selling religious crafts whose livelihood depended on tourism are now desperate for customers.

Ironically, many in the U.S. are hardly aware of the problem of the growing isolation and declining economic prospects of Bethlehem. However, the leaders of the global and the American Christian communions identify the declining Christian population in Bethlehem and the West Bank as a serious problem, and like the residents of Bethlehem named in a 2006 Zogby poll, name the security wall blockade and associated Israeli security measures as the primary source of the problem.

The declining Christian population in the Holy Land is only one of the grievances that the mainline Christian denominations have with Israel and the American pro-Israel Jewish community. As a matter of justice, in the U.S. and globally, the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant communions have developed strong programs in opposition to the Jewish community’s unequivocal support of Israel. These programs are particularly focused in the Lutheran and Episcopal churches that have taken a strong activist role in regard to the occupation.

The celebration of the 60th anniversary of the declaration of the State of Israel (May 14, 1948) prompted increased discussion about the Palestinian’s side of the story of the creation of Israel. What Jews and Israelis see as Yom Ha’atzmaut (Independence Day) the Palestinians know as Nakba Day: “day of the catastrophe,” which is the commemoration of the Palestinian exodus from their homeland. The reality of the 1948 exodus has been well-documented by the respected Israeli historian Benny Morris in his latest work on the 1948 war, The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited (a sequel to an earlier work on the topic). He states clearly that the war of Israel’s independence was also the beginning of the Palestinian refugee problem. Morris says that “over November 1947 – October 1950, an estimated 600,000 to 760,000 Palestinian Arabs departed their homes, moving to other parts of Palestine, (i.e. the West Bank and Gaza Strip) or abroad, primarily to Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.” Today, there are approximately four million Palestinian refugees.

Jewish-Christian dialogue about the overall issue of Israel-Palestine should begin with acknowledgement of al Nakba. The next major recognition is that the Six Day War (1967) resulted in the Israeli occupation of the West Bank (Palestinian territory), creating a host of issues, which has culminated in the overarching issue of today: the burgeoning growth of Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

Settlements began with what appeared to be a simple visit into the West Bank area of Hebron in April of 1968 by a group of about 70 Israelis who only wanted to celebrate Passover and then return to Israel. They did not return to Israel. Today, there is an Israeli settler population of close to 500,000 people living illegally (according to international humanitarian law) in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Several factions, including the very conservative Haredim (Ultra-Orthodox), with the complicity of the government, military, and commercial interests, have engaged in the systematic process of creating “facts on the
planting settlements with the idea that once they are there, with the accompanying infrastructure, it will be virtually impossible to remove the settlers.

Israeli settlements in the West Bank grow at a rate of over 5% per year, occupying close to 40% of the landmass of the Palestinian territory. The infrastructure consists of a whole set of separate highways, bridges and tunnels set up exclusively for Israeli travel. Palestinians are not allowed on them. Israel has also claimed large swaths of Palestinian land, naming them as “nature preserves.” Palestinians are generally not allowed in the nature preserves. Retired US Ambassador Philip C. Wilcox, Jr. writing for the Foundation for Middle East Peace, contends:

At best, Israel now offers the Palestinians a truncated statelet and no part of Jerusalem. At worst, it would cede only fragmented, scattered West Bank enclaves. Either option forecloses a viable Palestinian state and promises periodic violent Palestinian rebellion. Israeli leaders’ claims that security needs compel them to act unilaterally and that Palestinians have not shown that they can be trusted often conceal a higher priority: continued control and settlement of the land.

The other problem with Israeli settlements in the West Bank is the matter of security of the settlers, necessitating the large presence of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). The IDF’s job is to provide safety and security for Israel and the Israelis in the occupied territory. One of the ways they do that is by maintaining an elaborate system of checkpoints on the Palestinian roads. The estimate is that there are 600 to 700 security checkpoints in the West Bank territory that Palestinians must navigate everyday. This represents a huge imposition on the daily life of the average Palestinian, who on any given day may end up sitting in a long line in his/her automobile waiting to be cleared through another security check. Daily travel for Palestinians, whether by automobile or on foot, is therefore an unpredictable and often time-consuming excursion.

The World Council of Churches Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) is one of the church’s most powerful actions on behalf of Palestinians, and is part of a broader peace initiative. According to their web page, EAPPI “seeks to support local and international efforts to end the Israeli occupation and bring a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a just peace, based on international law and relevant United Nations resolutions.” Their mission is to accompany Palestinians and Israelis in non-violent actions, to carry out advocacy efforts to end the occupation, and to monitor and report violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. Specific areas of monitoring include checkpoints and barriers, and observation during times of military action or public demonstrations. Participants in the program are generally graduate theological students, active and retired clergy, members of congregations, and secular human rights activists. Participants in EAPPI come from countries around the world and are normally committed to staying in Israel and the West Bank for 3-month terms.

Two other problems stand out as major issues for churches’ involvement in the Israeli – Palestinian conflict. One is the growth of the so-called “security fence” or barrier that has been constructed ostensibly to separate Israel from the Palestinian territory. However its route only partially follows the Green Line, often deviating to surround settlements in the West Bank, dividing Palestinian farmland and separating Palestinian towns from other Palestinian towns. The rationale for the “fence,” (which in many areas is a concrete wall up to 8 meters high) has been protection of Israelis from militant attacks from the Palestinian territory.
Arguably the security wall has served a temporary purpose of significantly diminishing the number of militant attacks in Israel. Over the long term, it is another major disruption in the lives of Palestinians, hindering their travel into Jerusalem for work, and in many places keeping Palestinian farmers from their fields and limiting their ability to plant and harvest their crops. As noted earlier, the security wall is also a major imposition on religious tourism to Bethlehem. The ELCA has made a clear statement about the problem of the Israeli security wall by the title of the Middle East strategy: “Peace, Not Walls.” The program title suggests that focusing on building the security wall rather than pursuing the option of peace through negotiation and diplomacy is simply unwise and counter-productive.

Another practice of the Israeli government that has raised the ire of many in the church community is the demolition of Palestinian homes. B’Tselem, the Israeli Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territory, keeps a running tally of Palestinian house demolitions by Israel. According to their data, from 1999 to 2004 Israel destroyed 1049 houses and other structures in the West Bank. As recently as 2008, twenty-nine (29) Palestinian homes were demolished by Israel. The most common type of home demolition in recent years has been “administrative,” meaning that Palestinians have built or enlarged existing homes without permits. According to B’Tselem, the problem is that Israel engages in a policy of planning, development and building that restricts construction by Palestinians but makes large expanses of land available for settlement expansion. The result is that Palestinians are unable to get permits to build on their own property, but go ahead and do so anyway because of the pressing need for shelter. Israel then uses the situation as the rationale for demolishing the home.

The mainline Christian communities have been working to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for many years. That work has taken a variety of different expressions, including a strong focus on educational and legislative advocacy. Although each denomination has its own operations in this area, over the years Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) has played a significant role in organizing the churches across denominational lines. Established in 1984, CMEP conducts an annual conference on Middle East peace for church activists and it has a number of grassroots organizers around the country who provide leadership in education and advocacy in congregations. CMEP identifies itself as “a coalition of 23 public policy offices of national churches and agencies – Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant.” The Churches for Middle East Peace web page includes an extensive archive of documents and resources on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The mainline Christian community is not the only faith community that addresses Israeli practices and policies in the occupied territory. There has been long-standing concern and resistance within sectors of the American Jewish community and also in Israel about the continuing occupation. Groups such as Peace Now in Israel and Americans for Peace Now, the Israel Policy Forum, Rabbis for Human Rights, Brit Tzedeck v’Shalom (which is now an ally of J Street, the relatively new progressive pro-Israel/pro-Peace Jewish lobby) are actively engaged in advocacy for a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Many of the Jewish groups also work in collaboration with the mainline Christian denominations on the challenge of bringing peace to the Middle East. The ELCA Middle East strategy “Peace, Not Walls: Stand for Justice in the Holy Land” web pages identify a number of these Jewish organizations as Inter-Religious partners. A recent article in JTA, the Global News Service of the Jewish People, highlighted the Jewish pro-peace groups and also noted their work with the mainline Christian community. The article stated that it is a
loose coalition of organizations working across faith boundaries and into the secular political community. According to Warren Clark, retired US Ambassador and executive director of Churches for Middle East Peace, who is cited in the article, the work is “informal and it’s based on personal relationships that we’ve developed over the months and years.”

Most in the pro-peace Jewish and mainline Christian communities aspire to the same thing: the realization of a two-state solution with Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in relative safety and security. Some will go so far as to argue that Israel and a newly created Palestinian state can even form a strategic alliance, that they need each other as mutual trade and security partners. Realization of such a vision is some distance away given the destructive forces at work in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict today. But it does not hurt to dream.

Meanwhile, given the history of anti-Semitism that is rooted in Christianity, the post-Holocaust movement toward reconciliation and renewal between these two religious traditions that are so integrally related to one another, it is important to acknowledge that there is some Jewish-Christian common ground of faith-based peace-making on behalf of Israel and the Palestinians within sectors of the Jewish and Christian communities. The Institute for Christian & Jewish Studies produced a very fine little publication a few years ago aptly entitled Irreconcilable Differences? A Learning Resource for Jews and Christians. The intent, as is evident in the title, is to debunk the historic underlying assumption that Christians and Jews are somehow separated by their respective traditions. Yes, there are differences, but they are not irreconcilable. The same may be said of differences over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The resources are there in both traditions for engaging in a more full and forthright conversation. For Jews, it is Tikkun Olam, a guiding principle in Jewish ethics and self-understanding, the idea that Jews are called to repair the world, to make it a better place, and to be a blessing. Christians understand the concept of faith active in love, the working out of agape in the context of relationships and the world. Christians also understand clearly the fundamental teachings from Matthew 5:9, “blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” Numerous resources are available in both traditions for working collaboratively on finding a way toward peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is in the best interest of everyone, and God’s call to all people is to be about the work of repairing the world.

3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., “Ideas Expressed Positively.” This represents a summary of teachings of the various ecclesial documents reviewed and excerpted by Cunningham.
7 Ibid., p.31.


18 B’Tselem: The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territory, Planning and Building, Statistics on demolition of houses built without permits in the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem). http://www.btselem.org/english/Planning_and_Building/Statistics.asp


20 Churches for Middle East Peace - About us http://www.cmepr.org/AboutCMEP.html http://www.cmepr.org/ the main web page for CMEP.


Faculty and Alumni Publications


In the midst of a dizzying array of ways in which Christian churches and individuals respond to the increasingly pluralistic nature of our communities, Numrich proposes that engagement with those of other religions is most fruitful when the focus of conversation shifts from mutually exclusive and competing truth claims to considering strategies for cooperation for the welfare of our communities. Numrich, who is the professor of World Religions and Interfaith Relations at Trinity Lutheran Seminary and holds a similar chair at the Methodist School of Theology in Ohio, presents the reader with a series of case studies of Christian congregations and pastors, all in the greater Chicago area, which illustrate the various ways in which such Christian groups have responded to the ‘other’ in their midst over the last several decades. It is, as Numrich acknowledges up front, not an introduction to the differing faith traditions themselves, but rather holds up a mirror for those Christians among us to see ourselves as we and our communities struggle with issues relating to the fact that the United States is now one of the most pluralistic societies in the world.

Numrich front-loads his case studies with those of more evangelical or exclusivist attitudes who regard the increased presence of Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist worshipping communities with suspicion, anxiety, or even fearfulness, or who regard the presence of such communities as an opportunity for aggressive evangelization. As the case studies unfold, however, the conversations become more nuanced and a variety of attitudes is revealed, from those who regard other religions as intolerable to God to those who accept and celebrate religious diversity for one reason or another. Among those more accepting, there seems to be a distinction between two attitudes. On one hand are those more radical inclusivists who embrace diversity in belief and worship practice because only diversity itself can fully express the nature of God. On the other hand are those more cautious inclusivists who embrace diversity because, while not yielding their core convictions, it can enrich their own confession and faith. Numrich does not suggest at all that any specific Christian communities have fixed attitudes regarding non-Christians in their midst. In fact, some of the more interesting case studies involve disagreements between members of the same congregation or group. As a good rhetorical device, Numrich concludes his study by returning to the group with which his study began in order to see how the passage of a couple of decades affected attitudes. While a certain panic and anxiety present at first gave way over the years to a sense that the presence of the ‘other’ is ‘no longer an issue’, the fundamental conviction that their presence represented ultimately a fertile field for conversion had not changed. What had changed was a sense that the differing communities might be able to form a common cause to address specific social problems.
In the end, however, Numrich seeks to move away from the ‘typologizing’ of such responses around the labels of ‘exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism’, commonly represented in the literature today. Such typologies, he argues, result from a fixation on religious truth claims. In his case studies Numrich found that, where the most meaningful dialogue was taking place, it was not focused on such confessional distinctions — indeed, such conversations often focused upon community or societal issues, such as those generating the ‘Million Man March’ in Washington, D.C., in spite of admitted confessional distinctions that would distract from the common witness to a perceived community-wide issue. So Numrich poses the question, “But what if we shift the focus away from religious truth claims and consideration of Christian doctrines?” Numrich advocates for the style of “friendship evangelism” found in several of his case studies, where confessional difference and even the urge to evangelize is suspended for the sake of a commitment to the gospel message about providing hospitality, love and compassion to the neighbor in need. As long as ‘the other’ is a religious truth claim, typologies such as ‘exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism’ can be helpful. When ‘the other’ becomes a neighbor in need, however, then the ‘otherness’ of their religious truth claims becomes a secondary consideration.

I appreciate Numrich’s investigative study because it puts feet on the ground in the question of interfaith dialogue. His conclusion echoes those of others who suggest that confessional issues might best be suspended in such dialogues and a focus be found instead in forming a common cause within the community itself. As a theologian and Biblical scholar, however, I find it equally important to understand our own identity as communities, and that can only be achieved by clarifying our own histories of theological and textual interpretation. It seems to me that the suspension of conversations regarding core religious convictions will not bring us to the point of mutual understanding. Self-transformation for its own sake is a shameless exercise in narcissism. But genuine social transformation requires that we know who we are, that we know who the other is, that we share with one another our deepest theological and spiritual convictions, that we listen as well as speak, that we celebrate the faith we hold in common, and that we encourage the other to take seriously the best principles of their own faith.

Professor of Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures

Rodney R. Hutton


In the third installment in his “When God Speaks Through…” series from Alban, Craig Satterlee offers a beautiful vision of worship as the place where “God carries out God’s mission” (p. 5) in the world. Satterlee, a professor at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago and the Dean of Augustana Chapel, approaches this task not as an academic discourse but as a series of stories from congregations he has served as pastor. Stories form the heart of the book. Those stories are not merely anecdotes strung together, but carefully chosen incidents intended to provoke discussion and reflection among readers. As such, the book is perfect for congregational worship committees, and it would be particularly helpful to those in the midst of the worship wars. The book would also serve pastors and seminarians well, as an introduction to or reminder of the place of worship in the life of the church.
In the midst of the stories, Satterlee models various ways of helping congregations to understand the centrality of worship and to engage in deepening its meaning in the local congregation. His principle “explanation follows participation” (p. 23) finds its roots in ancient Christian practice, but Satterlee describes its worth in contemporary congregations, particularly in those struggling with the frequency and practices of Holy Communion. He takes a different tack in facing candle rituals in congregations, offering a mystagogy on the theme of light that cuts to the root of what candles might best mean as part of worship. Satterlee also writes eloquently of being wounded by worship, in the case of a hymn that equates hatred with blindness, a disability with which Satterlee lives. He uses that instance to encourage readers to explore how God can be present even, and sometimes especially, in worship that makes participants uncomfortable. Satterlee helps pastors to remember the many ways in which they can assist congregations in navigating the planning and practice of worship.

While these methodologies weave their way through the book, the book’s core remains stories that aim to provoke readers’ own stories. Many of the stories, such as the weekly prayer circles in one congregation and another congregation’s closing, make real the core claim of the book that God comes to God’s people through worship. Even though each chapter can stand on its own, as a whole the book helps readers to see past their own tastes and preferences and instead to look for God in worship. This can be a refreshing reminder for pastors, worship committees, and any worshiper.

Perhaps most importantly, Satterlee’s book offers a refresher course on worship for everyone who might be caught up in the busy-ness of ministry. In beautiful, lovingly told stories, Satterlee reminds his readers that God has always been the one at work in worship and helps readers to watch and listen for God’s presence in worship.

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
York Springs, Pennsylvania

Benjamin E. Leese

Bible


In the introduction to her book, Rhonda Burnette-Bletsch, Lucy H. Robertson Professor of Religion at Greensboro College in Greensboro, NC, makes two claims that provide the rationale and purpose for her book: 1) “Appeals to biblical texts and precepts are commonplace on both sides of current debates about appropriate gender roles, reproductive rights, gay and lesbian rights, criminal justice, ecological issues, and public education” (p. ix and 2) “this textbook is intended to serve as a traveling companion and guide for readers who are bold enough to undertake [a journey into unfamiliar territory]” (p. ix). In her treatment of the Old Testament as “an anthology of religious texts,” Burnette-Bletsch both acknowledges that the Bible has had tremendous influence on Western civilization and challenges common perceptions about the Bible, as well as the interpretations that flow from such perceptions.

Like many Old Testament surveys, Studying the Old Testament is ordered according to the commonly accepted three-fold division of the Old Testament (Torah, Prophets, and Writings), with the first chapter containing information on issues such as canonization, transmission,
translations, geographical and historical contexts, and common methods of interpretation. However, rather than summarizing the contents of the Bible for the reader, as other introductory surveys do, Burnette-Bletsch’s discussions compel the reader to grapple with the Bible closely and in large chunks to grasp the significance of her interpretations. In addition, it is clear for the experienced reader that Burnette-Bletsch is competent in multiple interpretive methods. For example, in her discussion of the Exodus narrative, she uses literary criticism to focus on the nature of God in the story because “the exodus story functions as a vehicle through which Yahweh is made known to Israel, Pharaoh, the Egyptians, and the world” (p. 68). She pays close attention to the movement of the plot in Exodus, especially God’s actions and words. Yet she also utilizes form criticism in the chapter on the latter prophetic books and source criticism in her discussion of the historical books (former prophets).

In a series of “interludes,” or chapter interruptions, Burnette-Bletsch highlights several important issues that are relevant to the chapter content. For instance, in the middle of the chapter on the Torah there is a discussion of the Documentary Hypothesis, and interrupting the chapter on the former prophets is a conversation about the Deuteronomistic History. While these interludes are informative, they might be somewhat intrusive and confusing for the beginning student. Even so, the interludes represent Burnette-Bletsch’s attention to the historical circumstances of God’s people throughout the Old Testament and her commitment to connect the theological aims of the Old Testament with the historical contexts in which the texts were written.

What makes this book uniquely refreshing is the accompanying CD, which is well done and invaluable as a resource, particularly for the beginning Bible student and/or for those leading an adult Bible study. Within the textbook, at the end of each section, references to relevant portions of the CD are listed to help the reader navigate the supplemental material. The CD is compatible with both Windows and Macintosh systems and contains a wide variety of resources, including maps, study helps, reading exercises, test questions, charts, excerpts from the Bible and other primary texts, and lists of video and internet resources. Especially interesting are the “Special Topics,” in which Burnette-Bletsch discusses how interpretation of a particular biblical text influences the debate on a contemporary issue. Some of these Special Topics are: “Liberation Theology”, “Homosexuality in Genesis 19”, “Is God Male?”, and “What is Sheol?”

This book will find a home in a wide variety of settings, such as an adult Bible study, a college classroom, or a pastor’s study group. Throughout, it remains true to its stated rationale and purpose and it is insightful, contemporary, and relevant to a diverse audience; it is definitely a “must-read.”

Newberry College
Newberry, South Carolina


Addressing pastors, theological students, upper-level undergraduates, and educational leaders within churches, volumes of the Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries invite readers into “informed and critical engagement” (p. xv) with biblical books without presupposing the readers’ mastery of the Hebrew language or the technicalities of academic debate. Each
volume in the series includes an introduction to the book as a whole and sections of literary, exegetical, and theological and ethical analysis for each literary unit of the biblical book. The daunting task of welcoming readers into the ancient Israelite world of blood, fat, semen, scale diseases, and animal hooves falls to Timothy M. Willis, Professor of Religion at Pepperdine University and author of previous academic books on Deuteronomy.

In a very brief survey of historical context and redaction of Leviticus, Willis offers only the general conclusion that most of the instructions in Leviticus must derive from a period after Israel’s settlement in Canaan, and some passages exhibit post-exilic editing. More important to Willis is the canonical placement of the book. Following the narrative of the completion of the Tabernacle in Exodus — symbolic of a new creation in Willis’ view — Leviticus continues with instruction on how Israel can repair the creation, broken by humanity’s sin in the garden, and maintain the commitment to God in everyday life. Willis labels the two parts of Leviticus: Chapters 1-16, “Establishing, Maintaining, and Renewing Cultic Purity”; and Chapters 17-27, “Holiness in the Land” (pp. xix-xx). Central to his discussion of purity and holiness is his adoption of the common view that the key to understanding the ancient concepts of holiness/purity and impurity is the contrast between life and death. In Willis’ view the purpose of Levitical laws fits with the gospel goal that the faithful “may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10 quoted in Willis p. 207).

Readers tempted to skim the “tedious” literary analysis on the way to discussion of theological and ethical significance will miss the strongest contributions of Willis’ commentary. With judicious decisions and creative insights Willis finds order in the chaotic miscellany of instruction, which on the surface appears to be full of repetitions, contradictions, gaps, and non sequiturs. Notable are his sensible judgments about the rationale for repeating the instruction on Aaron’s offering of a bull for the priests’ sin on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16) and about the five-chapter gap between the narrative of the sin of Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10) and its remedy (Lev. 16). Many of his suggestions on the structure of the literary units show attention to the way the form itself contributes to meaning. Perhaps the best example is Willis’ analysis of the apparently haphazard collection of various laws on blasphemy and personal injury in Leviticus 24. Recognizing a chiastic pattern in 24:13-23, Willis sees that balanced phrases hinge around a statement of the lex talionis so that “the narrative style . . . reinforces the legal principle that lies at the heart of the unit” (p. 201). Ironically, the sections which will likely attract the greatest interest among readers — the exegetical and theological/ethical analyses — are, in my view, most problematic. Willis’ suggestions regarding the continuing theological and ethical relevance of Levitical instruction sometimes distort his exegetical analysis. One example is Willis’ commentary on the laws regarding bodily discharges, particularly the law, “If a man lies with a woman and has an emission of semen, both of them shall bathe in water, and be unclean until evening” (15:18). While Willis concedes that “most interpreters infer from this that intercourse renders a couple temporarily unclean” (p. 135), this rather straightforward interpretation runs contrary to Willis’ contentions that impurity is related to death and that the enduring theological/ethical principle of the chapter is “the sacredness of sex between a man and a woman” (p. 137). Therefore, in his exegetical conclusion on the meaning of 15:18, he offers this rather vague and forced suggestion about the redundant language of the verse: “Perhaps ‘has an emission of semen’ refers to something other than what normally occurs during intercourse” (p. 135). If one accepts the more straightforward meaning that all intercourse — even ordinary marital relations — renders both partners temporarily unclean, the passage
more likely gives evidence of an ancient Israelite concern to separate sexual activity from the realm of the sacred. Furthermore, this and many other examples of things rendering a person unclean — eating shellfish or pork, bearing a child, etc.— argue against the life/death dichotomy as the underlying principle of purity laws.

In the theological and ethical analyses the slide between the world of ancient Israel and the modern Church seems too smooth and generalized. The shocking death of Nadab and Abihu for offering “unholy fire” becomes a critique and warning that the “religious leaders [of any age] can focus on their rights and privileges as leaders, while neglecting the proper exercise of their responsibilities. The fire that blesses can also consume” (p. 99). The Israelite prohibition against sparing a human who has been “devoted to destruction” (*herem*) dissolves in the summarizing comment, “[T]he message is that the Lord cannot be bribed to compromise” (p. 234). Laws prohibiting the sacrifice of children to Molech or wearing garments of mixed fabrics and commanding “circumcision” of trees are stripped of their specificity with the generalizing description of the content of Leviticus 18-20 as concerns about “everyday moral and ethical behavior” (p. 151). The distinctive ancient Israelite worldview too quickly fades into generalized moral commentary about the need to live holy lives in any time and place.

Also problematic for the theological and ethical analysis is the absence of a careful, sustained discussion of the relevance of Levitical instruction for Christians. Willis emphasizes the important point that Leviticus does not distinguish between moral law and purity law. Since the Israelites were committed to following *all* the teachings from Sinai, there was no need to distinguish between the two. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (19:18) sits comfortably beside “You shall not let your animals breed with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; nor shall you put on a garment made of two different materials” (19:19). Both Paul and Jesus recognized the Levitical command to love the neighbor as part of the “canon within a canon” for all followers of Jesus (Rom. 13:10; Mark 12:28-31 and parallels). Apparently the early Church *did* make distinctions between moral laws, written even on Gentile hearts, and purity laws, to be rejected by Gentile followers of Jesus. Therefore in a commentary offering discussion of the theological and ethical relevance of Leviticus for Christians today, one would expect a sustained discussion of how the Church distinguishes moral law from purity law, even though such a distinction is absent from Leviticus itself. The most relevant conclusion might be the *irrelevance* of much of Leviticus for Christian ethics.

Wittenberg University         Barbara Kaiser
Springfield, Ohio


As Wilken states in his “Series Preface,” the purpose of this series is “to make available the richness of the Church’s classical tradition of interpretation for clergy, Sunday school and Bible class teachers, men and women living in religious communities, and serious readers of the Bible” (p. x). Toward this end, Wilken and his associates (Angela Russell Christman and Michael J. Hollerich) have translated and compiled a prodigious amount of material, covering forty-five of
Isaiah’s sixty-six chapters. Each chapter of the volume begins with a translation of the Septuagint version, followed by brief editorial comments that identify and discuss major features of the classical exegesis of the particular chapter in Isaiah, and then comes the material from the classical commentators themselves. Regularly represented are the four complete commentaries on Isaiah by Eusebius of Caesarea, Jerome, Cyril of Alexandria, and Theodoret of Cyrus. But over fifty other interpreters are represented by way of their partial commentaries, homilies, and other types of writings, including Origen, John Chrysostom, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Athanasius, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Thomas Aquinas.

The compilation of Isaiah commentary is preceded by two introductory essays, “Interpreting the Old Testament” and “Introduction to the Christian Interpretation of Isaiah,” in which Wilken orients the reader to major features of classical interpretation. To be sure, as Wilken helpfully points out, the early Christian and medieval commentators demonstrate admirably the importance of using Scripture to interpret Scripture; and their insistence on discerning a theological claim in the text is important and instructive. But what concerns me is Wilken’s suggestion that a primary value of classical interpretation is to demonstrate, in contrast to modern biblical interpretation, that the Old Testament is “a book about Christ and the Church” (p. xiii; see also pp. xi, xx). Well – yes and no! To be sure, Isaiah can be (and should be) read by Christians in conversation with the New Testament to enrich our understanding of Jesus (and especially our understanding of what we mean when we say that Jesus is the Christ), as well as to deepen our understanding of the character and mission of the Church. But to read Isaiah’s prophecy as a prediction of the Incarnation, or as containing direct references to Jesus, the Church, and the sacraments (as the classical commentators regularly did), is misleading, at best, and at worst, is anti-Jewish. Wilken clearly recognizes and admits that the anti-Jewish polemics of the classical interpreters “do not make for edifying reading today” (p. xxv), and he has intentionally omitted much of their direct criticism of the Jews. Even so, it seems to me, the failure to provide a fuller and more nuanced accounting of what it means that Isaiah is a “book about Christ” may impugn the integrity of the Old Testament witness and may unintentionally foster an anti-Jewish perspective. Thus, while this volume contains a wealth of interesting, instructive, and useful material, it should be used carefully and critically by clergy, teachers, and others of its intended audience.

Eden Theological Seminary
Webster Groves, Missouri


Kaminsky, Professor of Religion at Smith College, seeks to foster study of the cardinal but neglected topic of election theology in the Scriptures by writing a fresh and accessible monograph in a manner designed to woo others into the discussion. His aim is to lay the groundwork for the articulation of a post-Enlightenment understanding of biblical election (and subsequent theology), as well as a reconception of the manner in which interreligious dialogue should be conducted. It’s an ambitious but worthy agenda, given his understanding of what is at stake for the worldviews of Judaism and Christianity. He thinks that neither
tradition can sidestep, marginalize, or jettison the topic without severing its connections to its biblical roots, thereby impoverishing or destroying itself (p. 10).

In Section 1 (Ch. 1-4), Kaminsky successfully demonstrates how a holistic reading of the four main Genesis sibling/family rivalry narratives reveals a larger framework of themes, motifs, word patterns, and wordplays that prepares hearers for the later, more abstract musings on election theology in the Torah. What is adumbrated in the first narrative is shown to be progressively deepened and filled out in the subsequent narratives, in which the notions of promise and covenant are strategically broached prior to the explicit theological use of the Hebrew word bachar (to choose). Kaminsky's analysis is finely nuanced, and his conclusions are both exegetically sound and instructive for today. In wrestling with the evidence regarding the relationship between Divine Providence and human response, for example, he clearly demonstrates that the authors of the Hebrew Scriptures themselves wrestled to give both aspects their due, while duly emphasizing one or the other. In his closing theological reflections, he rightly emphasizes the dynamic interplay of divine initiative; mysterious rationale; complex human response, participation, and flaw; and the upsetting of human expectation in God's orchestration to bring divine plans to fruition. He also highlights how the biblical sense of undeserved chosenness militates against self-aggrandizement, imperialism and triumphalism, and motivates humble, yet exalted, divine service that benefits the elect (Israel) and non-elect (the Nations) alike.

In Section 2 (Ch. 5-11), Kaminsky reveals how other prominent motifs such as promise, covenant, and commandment are inextricably intertwined with the fact of Israel's election. While the scholarly tendency is to speak of conditional (e.g., Sinaitic) and unconditional (e.g., Abrahamic) covenants, Kaminsky's careful, diachronic reading of the Scriptures proves this to be yet another false dichotomy. Coupled with this proof is a rich discussion of the dynamic interplay of God's interminable love, unconditioned grace, and righteous wrath; holiness and law; obligation and failure; and Israel's special status and the fundamental dignity of all humans. Richer still is Kaminsky's circumspect analysis of the complexities associated with the relationship between the elect, the non-elect, and the anti-elect (Ch. 7-8). Here he successfully achieves his goal of clearing up numerous widespread misperceptions, including the erroneous idea that election theology inherently leads the elect to devalue or mistreat the non-elect. In the antepenultimate chapter, he helps to clear up further misperceptions associated with the terms 'particularism,' 'universalism,' and 'nationalism.' Here, he invokes Jon Levenson's wondrous observation that biblical particularism evidences a universal horizon, but one that always maintains Israel's particularistic election. In the final chapter, Kaminsky concisely, though masterfully, explores the NT and Rabbinic adoption and adaption of the Hebrew Bible's elective notions.

If this book has a weakness, it would only be the need for a more exhaustive treatment of 'mission' and the binary opposition of the 'saved' and the 'damned' in light of the Hebrew Scriptures, late apocalyptic literature, and the NT. Otherwise, Kaminsky has brilliantly achieved his agenda. This book is mandatory reading for scholars, students, and the general public. It is a model for how to hear Scripture on its own terms and apply its lessons to contemporary contexts, in an effort to penetrate problematic paradigms and properly respond to God's mysterious, inscrutable, salvific plan for Israel and the Nations.

Trinity Lutheran Seminary
Columbus, Ohio

Henri L. Goulet

Those who pick up this book will likely be seized by the title and captured by the cover art. Just as likely, the final impression for Lutheran readers will be that the author has grasped for a worthy subject, but caught only its tail feathers.

Who, exactly, is seized by the truth? The object of that strong word is never identified quite clearly enough. The first two chapters leave the distinct impression that the book is autobiographical, that the author is the one seized. Identifying himself as located “in the evangelical wing of the church” (p. 70), the author speaks with an almost surprised delight about hermeneutical insights that many would take for granted. The Bible was shaped by the Church, and is properly read in its ecclesiastical home. Well, yes.

The title intends, of course, that the community of the Church is seized by the Truth when it reads the Bible as Scripture. And yet, where Lutheran readers will see every opportunity to cap off the argument of this book with the bold claim that the Holy Spirit creates faith through the preached Word (that is, the Spirit does the “seizing”), the author instead cannot quite get beyond an invitation to the reader to “embrace God” (p. 18) or to “choose sides” (p. 170), so that the powerful promise of the title is never quite achieved.

Joel Green is Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, and he orients his approach from within a Methodist tradition (p. 143). He affirms the central place of Scripture, but allows that Wesley did not have a systematic way of asserting how that is so. A striking example of this approach may be seen in the author’s own evaluation of the creed’s direct movement from Jesus’ incarnation to his suffering as a “lacuna that has repercussions both for Christology and for discipleship” (p. 84). Lutheran readers will likely wonder how the creed’s systematic theology of incarnation, passion, death, resurrection, ascension, and promise to come again does not provide an adequate Christology, and will just as likely not dwell very much on the question of discipleship.

Green’s own five-point “creed” of valid interpretation of scripture (p. 138), however, is a helpful guide to the reading of the Bible as Scripture. Green argues that an interpretation of Christian Scripture can be said to be valid when it:

- accounts for the text in its final form;
- accounts for the text as a whole;
- accounts for the cultural embeddedness of language;
- is “ruled” by its canonical boundaries and the “rule of faith”; and
- is put into play within the community of God’s people.

In the final chapter on Authority, we hear strong claims (refreshing in today’s hermeneutic environment) that the Bible as Scripture does stand over against its readers. “The Bible, when granted the status and role of Christian Scripture, is not an object to be examined or an extension of our own personalities or a container of the cultural presuppositions that I and people like me share. Scripture is subject (in the sense of its performative capacity to speak to and shape us) and other (in the sense of situating itself as partner in discourse)” (pp. 156-157).

The book assumes rather strong familiarity with the Biblical text, but stops short of rigorous intellectual examination of the title concept. In the end, it may be best suited for use in a
classroom of a religiously affiliated college or university, or perhaps as the very first introduction to hermeneutics at the seminary level.

Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania


Charles Puskas and David Crump have produced a concise work which gives a good introduction to the Gospels – Mark, Matthew, Luke, John – and Acts. However, there is substantial information in this volume to introduce readers to the discipline of New Testament Studies to “open their eyes to the breadth of opinion throughout the discipline rather than focusing on only one way of thinking” (p. viii). Puskas and Crump take the position that “this approach will better serve the purposes of education as opposed to indoctrination” (p. ix). This carefully constructed overview of the Gospels, Acts, and New Testament history endeavors to appeal to a broad audience which includes “undergraduate students at public, private, secular, and religious (mainline or evangelical) institutions, as well as seminary students, pastors, teachers of religion and bible courses, and interested laypersons” (p. ix). This volume includes maps of the 1st century (CE) Mediterranean World and charts which outline the development of the Gospels and Acts as well as seven chapters which take the reader into the historical setting, literary criticism methods, and the document composition of each Gospel and Acts.

Chapter one discusses the historical context in which the Gospels and Acts were written. The coauthors point out that “Christianity was born to a parent religion called “Judaism” (p. 16) and developed in [an] environment of cultural exchange, increased mobility, political stability, philosophical pursuits, and religious diversity” (p. 16). Since the Gospels and Acts were written in Koine Greek, “a vernacular Greek” (p. 2), this made for quick and easy communication of the Christian message of the Gospels and Acts.

In chapter two the coauthors discuss literary criticism methods used to examine the Gospels and Acts – source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism – for examining periods of “… oral transmission, … the transcription of oral traditions, and … their incorporation into complete narrative books” (p. 41). They also take note of some conclusions drawn from using literary criticism methods to conclude that the Gospels and Acts are not just documents of facts “but reflect various sociological and religious concerns, different contexts, and different literary purposes” (p. 42).

The discussion of the Gospels and Acts begins in chapter three with “Mark’s” Gospel which dates from the mid 50s to shortly after 70 (p. 86). The coauthors suggest that Mark’s Gospel is “a collection of independent sayings and stories grouped together by literary and thematic devices, placed in a geographical scheme for the specific religious purposes of the author” (p. 87). “Matthew’s” Gospel, discussed in chapter four, would be composed later using Mark’s Gospel as a framework along with “Q” and “M” sources “toward the end of the first century” (p. 101). Luke-Acts, discussed in chapters five and six, would also be composed later by “Luke” using Mark’s Gospel as a framework and the “Q” source coupled with his (Luke’s) “L” source (to compose Luke’s Gospel) along with “… a diary of Paul’s travels, … early traditions about Paul,
Puskas and Crump have produced a concise book, packed with information, introducing the Gospels and Acts in a non-technical fashion that, as intended, appeals to a broad audience. Regardless of what position on the Gospels and Acts each reader may hold, each will be challenged by this book’s objective, thought-provoking presentation.

Columbus, Ohio

William Turns


The Gospel of Matthew is the latest commentary published as a part of The New International Commentary on the New Testament (NICNT). The purpose of the complete set of commentaries as stated by Gordon D. Fee, the general editor, is “to provide earnest students of the New Testament with an exposition that is thorough and abreast of modern scholarship and at the same time loyal to the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God.” This word “infallible” immediately raised my concern as I opened the pages of this Matthew commentary wondering if infallibility prescribed some sort of agenda at work in the NICNT series. Although I did not find that to be true in this particular volume, France hints at his conservative approach in his introduction. He insists that the Matthew stories have a solid historical basis and believes that they are not the result of fictional characterizations designed to fit into Old Testament prophecy and presuppositions as some other scholars have argued.

France states that this volume on Matthew was written to be an exegetical commentary. It is not a commentary on commentaries, but rather a well documented stand alone exegesis of the text. France’s approach is to comment first on an entire section of the Gospel, then the pericopes within each section, and finally each individual verse within a pericope, so that commentary readers can “look at the woods before focusing on the trees” (p. xviii).

In my days as a seminary student I would pore over commentaries searching some exegetical insight or nuance that would distinguish my analysis of a biblical text from that of others. Now, as a preaching pastor, who must stand up each Sunday delivering a message that will be both faithful to scripture and meaningful to the daily lives of parishioners, the value of any commentary, for me, is in its ability to provide information and insight that “will preach.” It is from this perspective that I undertook the somewhat daunting task of reviewing this 1169-page volume.

France makes no apologies for his rather short (22 pages) introduction, often citing his previously published articles and books for an in-depth analysis of the traditional topics covered: structure, date, authorship, setting, themes, and relationships to the other Synoptic Gospels. France’s evaluation of the “Synoptic Problem” leads him to an independent view of how the author of Matthew uses Mark and the “Q” tradition (France finds the idea of a unitary “Q” document improbable). I found that his short introduction provided sufficient information for understanding the “Sitz in Leben” (setting in life) of the Matthean community within which and for which the author wrote his Gospel.
Rather than using one of the more recognized English scholarly translations, e.g., the NRSV or NIV, France chooses to provide his own translation as the starting point for his exegesis of each pericope. These translations are accompanied by extensive footnotes explaining France’s rationale for his choice of words. However, to fully understand the decisions incorporated into his final translations requires a nearby Nestle-Aland Greek NT, and a fluency in Koine Greek that would certainly challenge most parish pastors. For my preaching purposes, I found the translation discussions thorough and scholarly, but of limited use in sermon preparation.

I confess that I did not read this volume in its entirety. However, I reviewed France’s commentary on one of the five Matthean discourses, the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), and on three pericopes from Matthew that I selected from the three year lectionary. I read each with an eye toward how useful France’s exegesis and comments would be in sermon preparation. There are certainly some sermon nuggets to be mined from the extensive research and analysis that France offers. However, the reader must be willing to find such nuggets amidst the extensive information provided, information which might provoke a heated scholarly debate but would most likely put parishioners to sleep. For example, the significance of Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Messiah at Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16: 13-20) must be unearthed from 17 pages of detailed comments that include the geography of the region and a discussion of Peter’s name.

In defense of this volume, France makes it clear in his preface that his primary aim in this commentary is to provide information so that the reader can understand and fully appreciate the text of Matthew. This is not a commentary filled with the author’s homiletical reflections. For someone interested in a thoroughly researched exegesis and analysis of the Matthew text itself, well documented, and containing an extensive bibliography, this book would be a fine addition to a library shelf of scholarly works. For the parish pastor who is chiefly interested in interpreting and preaching the text for modern believers, the book fares less well.

Centerville, Ohio

Tom Batterman


Paul Barnett teaches at both Moore College in Sydney and at Regent College in Vancouver. This book is the second in a three-part trilogy After Jesus, the first titled The Birth of Christianity and the third planned as Finding the Historical Jesus. The present volume offers a thoroughly challenging fresh perspective on Paul.

Barnett does not set out to provide a full-scale introduction to Paul’s life and theology. What the author does do is to examine Paul from a quite fresh and revealing angle: interpreting Paul by examining the chronology of his life. He organizes the book in twelve chapters around the several distinct periods in Paul’s pre-Christian and Christian career, drawing conclusions from each period about Paul’s theology and mission.

Two key insights emerge when Barnett traces Pauline chronology from Paul’s letters themselves (with Acts as a secondary source). The many years that Paul spent in Jerusalem – as a student, as a Pharisee, as one who resided there during Jesus’ ministry, and in the earliest years of the post-resurrection Jerusalem community – bring new understandings as to how Paul became the “missionary of Jesus” to the Gentiles. Also, the fourteen years spent by Paul in the Levant
prior to his missionary activity westward from Antioch should not, says Barnett, continue to be known as the “lost years”. The fundamental outline of Paul’s apostolic vision remained constant from his Christophany on the road to Damascus to his final journey to Jerusalem.

Several strengths characterize the book. Barnett first of all is rooted in the primary Pauline texts. Second, he brings a thoroughly scholarly critical approach to his study. Barnett knows the critical options whether drawing conclusions from the special sources of each of the Gospels or dealing with the continuity and discontinuity between Paul’s own letters and the Book of Acts (he takes a high view of its reliability). Third, the author fully utilizes the contemporary literature on Paul. His footnotes provide an educational tour of today’s critical positions on key issues in Paul. Fourth, the language and style are clear and direct. Finally, there are several helpful appendices on controversial Pauline topics.

What are some of the critical positions Barnett takes within current Pauline studies, including the curiously-named forty year old “new” perspectives on Paul? On two of the key “new perspective” questions Barnett offers no direct commentary. First, did Paul falsely attack the Judaism of his day? Barnett’s approach presupposes that Paul did not misrepresent the first century Jewish tradition in which he was schooled. Paul knew well that the whole of Judaism was not a religion of legalism, though like Jesus he also knew that “covenantal nomism” in Judaism, as in Christianity, could also turn grace into legalism. Again, was justification at the center of Paul’s theology, the traditional Lutheran view? Barnett does not address the question directly. Indirectly, Barnett seems to suggest that Paul centered on God’s saving act in Christ for all nations, justification being one of several themes expressing that good news.

Perhaps the central affirmation of this book is that there is no wall of separation between Jesus and Paul. He cogently argues his case in Chapters 2 and 7. Barnett does marshal evidence from within Paul’s writings – and from Paul’s Jerusalem years – that Paul knew much about Jesus’ life and sayings. Further, the missionary approaches of Jesus and Paul are similar. Jesus’ apostolic intentions “to-the-Jew-first-and-then-to-the-nations” is a pattern repeated by Paul as “the missionary of Jesus.” Thus Barnett makes the cautious but confident conclusion that Paul is an authentic interpreter of Jesus “within historically reasonable limits” (page 22; cf. p. 116).

I would have liked Barnett to bolster his affirmation of the essential continuity between Jesus and Paul in two ways. One way would be to ask how Paul’s shattering of walls between Jews and Gentiles might also be rooted in the unquestioned inclusiveness of Jesus in inviting “outsiders” into fellowship. Another line to have followed would be to have noted the strong links between Jesus and Paul to be seen in their respective core sayings about strength-through-weakness. The great reversals in Jesus of conventional human assumptions over and again find parallels and echoes in Paul – lose life/save it; greatest is servant/child; humbled self/be exalted; life through death; and others.

Far too often it seems that the lectionary epistle texts, Pauline and others, are ignored in preaching and, similar to what frequently happens to OT pericopes, often go unread during Sunday worship. The best remedy is for pastors to immerse themselves in the letters of Paul themselves. Next best would be to read current secondary studies such as the book reviewed here. Barnett’s positive and disciplined work will help fire appreciation for Paul in Christian history and as an interpreter of Jesus for life today.

Bloomington, Minnesota

James A. Bergquist
It has been just over five years since I left seminary and entered the priesthood. Five years to read more deeply into theology and spiritual practice. Five years to hone my reading knowledge of Greek and Hebrew. I haven’t done any of that, except the priesthood thing.

Some of you reading “TSR” might resonate with what I’m saying. I have not kept up with my studies as I would have liked and, when I do have a moment to pick up something more challenging than *Christian Century*, I often feel I’ve lost the scholarly side of myself. Thus, in reading Ben Witherington’s *Letters to Philemon*, et al, I struggled a bit.

This is not to say that it’s a bad book by any means. Witherington is an able scholar and his premise is quite interesting. He argues (1) that Philemon, Colossians, and Ephesians are all legitimately Pauline, (2) that they interconnect, and (3) that they use Asiatic epideictic rhetoric. Epideictic rhetoric, for those of you like myself who haven’t been keeping up, “was the rhetoric of display and demonstration, of praise and blame in dramatic tones” (p. 7). It is not a style that focuses on a particular life-change but enhances, encourages, and excites the hearer. Witherington would say that it is a “recreation of aesthetic revelation” (p. 7), that is, it shows a new audience the joy, fear, and excitement of a God-experience rather than tells them arguments to convince them of it. “In general what one would expect from epideictic rhetoric is more use of metaphor, use of the more elaborate, euphonious, elegant, or attractive words when choosing among synonyms, and the arrangement of words that ‘sounds’ better” (p. 9). This epideictic rhetoric is evident in three levels of moral discourse, according to Witherington:

1. Colossians speaks to an audience who are familiar to the speaker but whom the speaker has not yet addressed, an ‘opening gambit.’

2. Ephesians, an example of the second level, builds on the previous addresses, is more familiar, more specific perhaps, is an ‘elaboration.’

3. Philemon addresses a close friend, an intimate and is even more complex, more interconnected (p. 11).

You may well note that all my references thus far come from early in the book. Witherington’s introduction, from which all of the preceding information comes, is dense but fascinating. It is in that introduction that he lays out his reasons for the Pauline authorship and the details of epideictic rhetoric. The bulk of the book is an intense commentary of the three letters arising from the main points he makes in the introduction. The press release for the book notes that it is “scholarly and engaging”—scholarly, yes; engaging, not as much. Thus, if you’re interested in only his basic point, check the book out from the library and read just the introduction. If you’re looking for a well-thought-out and off-the-beaten-path commentary, buy the book.

Lutheran Campus Ministries at UC
Cincinnati, Ohio

Alice Connor

Denis R. Janz, general editor of the seven-volume A People’s History of Christianity, says that the goal of this series is “rescuing the Christian people from their historic anonymity” (p. xviii). While many church history textbooks have focused on the great deeds of great men, this series is intended to study “the voiceless, the ordinary faithful who wrote no theological treatises, whose statues adorn no basilicas, who negotiated no concordats, whose very names themselves are largely lost to historical memory” (p. xvii). Janz writes: “It is church history, yes, but church history with a difference: ‘church,’ we insist, is not to be understood first and foremost as the hierarchical-institutional-bureaucratic corporation; rather, above all, it is the laity, the ordinary faithful, the people” (p. xv).

In Volume 4, Medieval Christianity, twelve authors treat a wide range of topics such as parish life; death and burial; women’s experience of the sacrament of penance; and interactions among Jews, Muslims and Christians. The authors approach their topics using a variety of methodologies. For instance, Bonnie Effros (Chapter Two, “Death and Burial”) uses mortuary archeology — the study of sarcophagi, gravestones, burial inscriptions, and grave goods — as a window into people’s experiences and beliefs about death. She notes that Christian epigraphs deal more extensively with the afterlife than do the pre-Christian examples she has studied. Richard Kieckhefer (Chapter Four, “The Impact of Architecture”) uses architecture as a lens for studying the laity’s experience of the liturgy. By examining the variety of individual experiences and local variations, he dispels romanticized notions of the “pious solidarity” of the medieval worshipping community while also challenging the alternative telling of the story which claims that “lay people comprehended the Mass only faintly” (p. 109).

The authors of these essays endeavor to explain how the people themselves understood their faith. R. N. Swanson (Chapter Twelve, “The Burdens of Purgatory”) studies wills and bequests to get a sense of people’s views about purgatory. Grado G. Merlo (Chapter Eight, “Heresy and Dissent”) explores the motivations, beliefs and experiences of people involved in controversial movements such as the Cathar heresy and the Waldensian movement. Virtually all of the essays, including Bornstein’s excellent introduction, discuss the complexity of the historian’s challenge to find and assess the sources needed to understand a “people’s history” — especially since most people have left no record whatsoever.

The volume is beautifully rendered, with generous margins for note-taking, helpful maps, numerous black and white illustrations, and several color pages filled with medieval art depicting various aspects of medieval life. Sidebars contain excerpts from medieval sources such as prayer books, chronicles, legends, wills, and church laws. The volume is seasoned with fascinating anecdotes and glimpses into the religious experience of ordinary Christians. For instance, Yitzhak Hen (Chapter One, “Converting the Barbarian West”) discusses the Christianization of a pre-Christian ritual called the barbatoria, a rite of passage for young men on the occasion of their first shave. Liturgical books regularly included prayers for the lad on this occasion, and sometimes the young man might offer his first shaved whiskers to the tomb of a saint! Kieckhefer tells us that, because the churches lacked fellowship halls, parishioners would set up tables in the nave for church fund-raising suppers. Less worthy — and
presumably unauthorized — uses of the nave included cockfights (p. 142). In Diana Webb’s “Domestic Religion” (Chapter Ten), we learn that a housewife, when awakened by the pre-dawn matins bell, should say her prayers in bed and go back to sleep (p. 310). André Vauchez (Chapter Six, “Clerical Celibacy and the Laity”) includes an anecdote about a Swiss bishop’s discovery of a century-old priest who had lived with his concubine for fifty years “without giving anyone any grounds for gossip” (pp. 192-93). Vauchez comments (p. 193): “Perhaps struck by such touching fidelity, he let the priest off with a reprimand. Obviously, in this case it was far too late to make a show of enforcing the rules!” In his treatment of “Medieval Revivalism” (Chapter Five), Gary Dickson wryly observes that medieval hermits “had a love affair with crowds” (p. 170). In Roberto Rusconi’s “Hearing Women’s Sins” (Chapter Seven) we learn of diocesan concern for the chastity and reputation of female penitents and their male confessors. Official legislation forbade priests to hear women’s confessions before sunrise or after sunset or when a priest and woman were alone in the church (p. 208).

The essay on each topic normally uses a particular methodology (e.g., architecture, mortuary archeology, etc.) or focuses on a limited time period or geographical area. For instance, Teofilo F. Ruiz’s nuanced chapter entitled “Jews, Muslims, and Christians” (Chapter Nine) deals only with Spain, and Katherine L. French’s excellent essay on “Parish Life” focuses on England. Thus the collection is more like a “sampler” than some readers might wish for in a series that is likely to occupy library reference shelves or serve as a textbook supplement for introductory courses. However, since twenty-first century church historians are less inclined than their scholarly forebears to weave together “grand narratives,” this “sampler” approach may be an instructive window not only into medieval life but also into the current state of the field of church history.

Bergener Professor of Theology & Religion
Trinity Lutheran Seminary and Capital University

Joy A. Schroeder


To see glory in the naked Christ hanging powerlessly upon a cross is folly to the world. But Christians are drawn to that cross, holding fast to the claim that God is up to something truly glorious in the life and death of this one who lived out the power of love instead of selling out to the love of power (p. 11).

If you are looking for a fresh and refreshing text around which to study and discuss everyday challenges concerning life and death, this book should be one of those at the top of your list. Pastor and Professor Philip Ruge-Jones sees himself as story-teller and theology as story-telling. The book is filled with fascinating and depth-plumbing narratives that open up Biblical and divine narratives in which God encounters and embraces us. At the heart of that encounter with God is the story of Jesus and the cross. Within this story we experience a broken and shattered world, the pain and suffering of humanity, everyday people struggling for life and hope, and the tragedy of powerless, marginalized people who are buried in poverty and oppression. Within that shattered world, the Gospel proclaims that God incarnate in Jesus is identified with our suffering world, is in solidarity
with that world and is intent upon healing and restoring that world. “I have come that they might have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

Philip Ruge-Jones presents a series of wonderful stories or narratives which embody the story of God’s radical “cross-presence” in the world. God is here but sometimes so imbedded in the tragedies of life that God appears to be absent. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). The author begins with Paul’s letter to the Corinthian church and the vision, contrary to the world’s wisdom, that Christ crucified manifests the power and glory of God. Then Ruge-Jones moves to the Gospel of Mark. In contrast to the power of Imperial Rome Mark paints a new vision of crucified persuasive suffering love rather than crushing violence of marching Roman legions. Using creative fiction, Ruge-Jones then leads us into Luther’s world through the eyes of Hans and Marie, two servants in a bishop’s court. We hear their conversations as they are impressed by Luther’s denunciation of the Church as a wealthy, exploiting religious institution offering forgiveness of sin and liberation from purgatory through the selling of indulgences. They hear Luther’s call for a Church in which members in love share the pain and joy of one another and they are lifted up by Luther’s meditation on Mary’s Magnificat in which the rich and powerful are pulled down and the poor are lifted up as the priority of God. We then travel through the author’s own life as a member of the congregation where his father and mother carried on a sensitive, compassionate ministry. It is here where the author first experienced the transforming love found in the Gospel. It was embodied for the author in his mother who persistently loved and persuaded a tough, anti-church young man (Ruge-Jones’ father) into a new life in Christ. “I learned from my parents’ relationship that the power of love is invitational not coercive. My mother did not force my dad to be what she wanted him to be; she accepted him as he was. She won over my father’s heart and in response to her love for him he grew into the man he is today” (p. 61).

The book concludes and climaxes in two narratives from the international church, one from Chile where Ruge-Jones served as an intern and one from a Salvadoran refugee congregation in the U.S.A. where he served as pastor. The gracious power of unconditional grace is portrayed in contrast to the violent destructive power of Latin American states supported by the military power of the United States of America. Ruge-Jones tells the story of Daniel who took up his cross to follow Jesus. As a young Lutheran in El Salvador Daniel felt compelled to follow Jesus in seeking help and justice for the victims of a civil war. As a consequence he was charged by the political authorities as a subversive.

The strength of this conviction was tested when Daniel was arrested and tortured without trial. His captors drenched him with water and applied electric shock to his most sensitive parts. They tried to convince him that they were the gods he should obey. But Daniel refused to renounce his faith in Christ Jesus. In the midst of excruciating pain, he found consolation and strength in knowing that Jesus, too, had endured torture and death. Just as his Lord suffered before him, Daniel suffered for his commitment to a just cause. His horrific story is woven into the broader narrative of God’s commitment to the world that is revealed in the incarnate word of the cross. In the end, resurrection and life will have the final word – even in war-torn countries (p. 77).
I believe this little book has a powerful message of Jesus and the Cross. It is a creative message of a radically transforming love that infiltrates the world as leaven in a loaf. You probably will not find here what you would traditionally expect from an orthodox Lutheran theologian expounding the theology of the cross. However, I assure you it is much, much better than that.

Shorewood, Wisconsin

Mark W. Thomsen


Empire and the Christian Tradition is a commendable anthology of Christian thought addressing empire and government. Editors Kwok, Compier, and Rieger each contribute introductory chapters before giving way to short essays by others on 32 theologians from St. Paul to Mercy Amba Oduyoye, pioneer of African women’s theology. Despite the book’s imposing total length, each essay is readable in the space of an hour and written in language accessible for congregational study. Each includes a brief historical sketch, summary of the featured thinker’s political theology, and implications for our Christian thought and action today.

The list of 32 key figures is widely drawn and ranges from major pillars in the tradition such as Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin and Barth to lesser known voices such as Theodore the Studite, Byzantine abbot; Sister Juana Ines de la Cruz, 17th century Mexican writer; and Indian Protestant M. M. Thomas. Also notable is the inclusion of political thinkers and philosophers with specific reference to theology in their work such as Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Frederick Douglass.

The list of essay contributors is varied as well, representing a diverse collection of scholars from around the world and setting up interesting author-subject contrasts. Lutheran readers might be interested specifically in feminist theologian Deanna Thompson on Luther, Methodist David Field on Bonhoeffer and Lutheran theologian Larry Rasmussen on Reinhold Niebuhr.

The editors helpfully frame this long and varied tradition by describing how the term “empire” has evolved from a strictly geographical term to encompass coercive and indirect factors, especially cultural patterns and economic markets. They also jointly note that there are differing opinions about the historical relationship of Christianity to political strategies for empire; everything from outright benefit to the faith (i.e. official status) to its total compromise as a mere function of empire (i.e. endorsement of European colonial efforts).

From a perspective that Christianity has been compromised by relationship to empire-building, Joerg Rieger asks the reader to analyze the contributions for a “theological surplus” — a term he describes as any energy or identity left within Christianity to produce hope for those oppressed and to speak prophetically in our time.

Kwok Pui-Lan distinguishes “imperialism” and “empire” and argues that because of the social coercions necessary for modern “empire”, the church should rehabilitate its “social imaginary” — a term borrowed from others but meaning an ability to envision a different global community instead of falling prey to the individualist pietism that has come to define much of Christianity.
Don Compier offers a reader’s guide to this lengthy compendium by suggesting the careful selection and then close reading of one thinker at a time, and by urging caution when drawing (what might be necessary) conclusions for current witness and ministry. His purpose is to preserve the integrity of the historically-bound readings but also to open up our tradition for us and to appreciate “how radical appeals to tradition can be, in and of themselves” (p. 34). Compier asserts that both the “modern myth of progress” and the “individualistic anthropology” of modern consumer societies work against the need and purpose of making reference to a communion with the past (p. 35).

This last point is especially relevant for Lutheran readers who were taught to memorize catechisms as a test of individual piety, while not being led to Luther’s longer explanations of the Commandments or the Lord’s Prayer wherein he sketches a constructive and expansive social ethic and a theology of government as God’s gift to us when it works for good order and the common good.

Too often, Lutherans have either completely separated our faith from public life or have backed into it through a highly individualized sense of vocation. Even a cursory ramble through these collected texts, however, reveals a much bolder public theology to be claimed and rehabilitated in the face of hunger, migration, and climate change crises — all calling forth a public response from Christians and all related to current efforts at “empire.”

Director of Advocacy, ELCA
Andrew D. Genszler
Washington, D.C.


As a lifelong Lutheran growing up in the Augustana Synod, I keenly anticipated the opportunity to read and review The Augustana Story. I tell you with enthusiasm that this was an enjoyable, illuminating and memorable experience.

I brought several pressing questions with me before reading this engaging Lutheran Church history volume: How do others describe the Swedish piety which shaped my spirituality as a youth? Why were so many of the Augustana Synod leaders invited to our Trinity Lutheran congregation in Minnesota to preach and teach? Pastor Wilton Bergstrand baptized me; how did he make such a significant contribution to the national Luther League and the centrality of youth ministry for Augustana? Why was the visitation of missionaries from Africa and China such a constant piece of congregational life and financial support? What was the academic life for students and faculty at Augustana Seminary in Rock Island, Illinois? What was the role of the Augustana Synod in the 1960s mergers and the latest merger in 1988? Gratefully, the authors Erling and Granquist’s extensive research and patient detailed scholarship have yielded answers to my questions and offered many more levels of relevant investigation with crucial findings.

Throughout this book the reader can appreciate the focused approach which Erling and Granquist use to integrate archival pieces, church leader’s correspondence, official minutes and reports to enhance and nuance the issue, or the debate under discussion.

The authors, both seminary historians, take us skillfully through major cultural and societal realities in American society and in the world, showing the reader how the events of the Depression, two world wars, and the arrival of the 20th century left their mark on the matrix shaping this Swedish-American church body. The history journey begins in 1860 with a gathering of nineteen Swedish and Norwegian pastors meeting with twenty laity in the Norwegian Church in Jefferson Prairie, Wisconsin, to fashion and become the Scandinavian Evangelical Augustana Synod and the journey concludes with the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in Columbus, Ohio, in 1988.

It is not possible in this present format to give an adequate summary of the broad content of *The Augustana Story*. However, I want to accent two chapters which I found to be especially helpful and noteworthy.

In Chapter twelve, “Reconnecting with the Church of Sweden,” the authors write that between 1893 and 1925, there were four significant occasions for exchange visits between the Augustana Synod and the Church of Sweden. Americans hosted two Swedish leaders, Bishop Knut von Schéele and Archbishop Nathan Söderblom. Von Schéele came to America three times; 1893, 1901, and again in 1910 for the 50th Jubilee anniversary of Augustana. Often in his remarks, Bishop Knut von Schéele applauded his visits to Bethany College in Lindsborg, Kansas, for the vibrant and progressive manner that the American pioneers “had come of age!” The bishop reiterated that the church colleges had promoted the study of the Swedish language and culture. He expressed his deep hope that Swedish music, hymnody, and literature would continue to flourish in America.

Because of World War I, it was 1923 before Archbishop Nathan Söderblom was able to finally come and enjoy the long-standing invitation of the Augustana Synod. He and his wife, Anna, had an exhausting speaking tour in America which included university lectures, ecumenical audiences, sermons at church colleges and in congregations, and visiting in the home of pastors. This ecumenical pioneer loved seeing “where the Swedes had gone.” Augustana people knew well his reputation as an ecumenical leader, a noted world religion scholar, and an Archbishop with a lasting commitment to Christian unity. The Archbishop’s reflections, upon visiting the Swedish-American Augustana Synod he so admired, bear repeating:

a) The energetic involvement of lay leadership;

b) Augustana’s motivation of men and women into church life;

c) Sunday Schools, church choirs and musical events; and

d) The spirituality of Augustana’s congregations – treating the communion table as the center of worship.

These dimensions appealed to him and he hoped to emulate these positives upon his return to the Church of Sweden (p. 213).

The church exchanges broke down with Congress passing the Johnson Reed Act in 1924 which stipulated very strict quotas limiting all immigration – a sad happening.

In Chapter twenty, “Augustana’s Legacy,” the earnest authors, having made a strong case in their text, advance these final major dimensions of the Augustana legacy:
1. People in congregations were well informed (600,000 baptized);
2. A deep reservoir of trust existed within the Synod;
3. A strong relational network existed between pastors (a single seminary helped build relationships which endured);
4. An enthusiasm for extending the work of Missions;
5. A church body peopled with leaders who were deeply devoted to the church that shaped them (pp. 343-345).

I cannot add to the book’s closing assessment given by the authors, Erling and Granquist: “[Augustana] always thought big, thought national, thought of itself not only as local congregations, but as part of the wider church” (p. 345).

Betzel Professor of Stewardship, Emeritus Paul S. Fransen
Trinity Lutheran Seminary


I am not normally attracted to books which have portions written by different authors, but this book is a pleasant surprise. Each of the eight authors (seven individuals and one group) makes a unique contribution to understanding the tapestry of Lutheran social ministry. Rather than disappointment, the reader has the sense of examining a jewel’s many facets, and comes away with deeper appreciation and understanding.

Lutherans are more visible in social ministry than any other protestant denomination. The combined income of the 304 Lutheran Social Ministry organizations in the U.S for 2008 totaled $16.4 billion, approximately the size of Google, one of the nation’s Fortune 200 companies. Lutheran agencies used those resources to provide direct service to one in every 50 people in the U.S.

How does this witness come to be? That is the subject of this book, ably edited by Foster McCurley, Old Testament scholar. Writing the first chapter, he not only identifies the roots of social ministry in the Hebrew Scriptures, but brilliantly describes how the God of the Hebrews was profoundly different from any other god at that time. Pastors and lay people alike are likely to find a new understanding of the uniqueness of their faith.

Samuel Torvend, Chair of the Religion Department at Pacific Lutheran University, continues the thread by painting clear pictures of Christian life in early and medieval times. He describes how the early church’s sharing of food and caring for the sick and dying was widely recognized. Of particular interest was his account of how Gregory, as Bishop of Rome, implemented his social justice beliefs into the government of the day.

Of course, Martin Luther held that worship of God and love of neighbor were inseparable, citing the “liturgy after the liturgy.” Carter Lindberg, Professor Emeritus at Boston University, keenly describes Luther’s practical theology and the “compass points” which orient Lutherans to social ministry. His condensation of the fundamentals of Luther’s teaching will be of assistance to many pastors, teachers, and others committed to social ministry.

Following the reformation, the influence of Pietism and the inner mission movement in Germany and Scandinavia kept social concern in the forefront of Lutheran faith and life.
Eric Gritsch, Emeritus Professor of Church History at Gettysburg Lutheran Seminary, describes how these movements evolved and came to America. A number of Lutheran agencies today have their roots in the Inner Mission movement, and still reflect those values.

Carl Uehling, former parish pastor and Lutheran magazine editor, portrays how Lutheran social ministry adapted to the dramatic social changes in the U.S. between 1800 and 1945. A Civil War and two World Wars broke down ethnic identities, changed social standards and created dramatically different social needs. Over this time, for example, orphanages established to serve only Norwegian Lutherans began to serve all faiths, to accept public money to survive, and began to see the day when their once-needed services would no longer be required.

The evolution of Lutheran Social Ministry following WWII saw many small organizations grow or consolidate into fewer and larger agencies, struggling to survive and grow while remaining faithful to mission. These developments are chronicled by Robert Duea, himself a retired CEO of a large Lutheran Agency. Some services valued early in the period (adoption) have dramatically changed, others (orphanages) have disappeared and still others, (health care) have grown exponentially. The book concludes with an article on the future by current leaders of Lutheran Agencies and a concluding chapter by Lutheran theologian and writer, Martin Marty.

I commend this book to anyone with an interest in Lutheran Social ministry. It is readable, yet packed with information and new perspectives. I predict it will increase the reader’s appreciation for the Lutheran tradition of social ministry as a vital and necessary response to the Gospel.

Columbus, Ohio

Ministry / Leadership


Buy this book! Buy this book! All right, I’ll behave like a proper dog-faced reviewer now. But buy this book! Part of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies Series (reduce that to an acronym), Professor and Pastor Craig Barnes’ book weaves pastoral anecdotes, theological reflection, and Biblical reflection around a central image for the pastoral vocation: that of “minor poet.” Distinguished from the vocation of “major poet,” occupied by Biblical figures such as Elijah and expressed in the words of Scripture, the vocation of “minor poet” is offered in contrast to corporate-marketing-entertainer images often forced on pastors by society and sometimes by well-meaning congregations. The vocation of pastor as “minor poet” assumes first that our basic Christian identity is given by God, not constructed by us. The minor poet’s task then is to “look beneath even the [congregation’s] desperation to recover the mystery of what it means to be made in God’s image” (p. 18).

As Barnes himself acknowledges, his image of the pastoral vocation draws on that offered by Walter Brueggemann in Finally Comes the Poet. But while Brueggemann focuses on the poet as proclaimer, Barnes focuses as well on the pastor as the poet who sees and uncovers the transformative meaning of Scripture within the daily life of the congregation and within the
lives of individual congregations. While not neglecting the poetic function of proclamation (indeed, much of the book’s second half is devoted to the homiletical task), Barnes emphasizes that preaching with poetic force requires pastoral care that uncovers the “subtexts” – the pathos and the faithfulness to which Scripture speaks good news.

While the book’s image of pastor as poet may be too foreign for some readers to take seriously, the book’s thoughtful, evocative and elegant writing on topics such as pathos and gravitas – both congregants’ and the pastor’s – makes attempting the conceptual leap worthwhile. The pressure of other destructive visions of pastoral identity also makes attempting the leap worthwhile. So – buy this book! Expect to read with pencil in hand for underlining.

Kingo Lutheran Church
Shorewood, Wisconsin

Wendy Wirth-Brock


Paul Santmire is one of the premier environmental theologians but his has been no narrow focus on ecological matters. He has shown equal passion for social justice and pastoral ministry as a parish pastor (lastly at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Akron) until retirement. His latest book brings all these concerns together.

The title of **Ritualizing Nature** shows its connection with two of the author’s earlier books. *The Travail of Nature* (Fortress, 1985) argued that Christianity had focused primarily on a “theology of ascent” in which nature is to be transcended and is not valued properly. *Nature Reborn* (Fortress, 2000) pointed to more positive views. The present work sets out a coherent vision of how Christian worship can express and ground theology and practice that recognize God’s purpose for “all things.”

As the subtitle says, this is a “time of crisis” for nature. Global warming, deforestation – the familiar litany is lengthy. Political and economic entities that exacerbate these problems can be seen, Santmire argues, as manifestations of “powers” like those embodied in the Roman Empire that the first Christians confronted. And, he continues, just as early Christian worship expressed the counter-cultural thrust of the faith at that time, so now it can express hope and support action in the face of the powers that endanger our world.

The idea that liturgy can be effective against the forces that threaten nature may at first seem quixotic. Santmire argues, however, that “the liturgy is the assembly’s mode of identity formation” (p. 80). And when the core of that liturgy is considered carefully, its affirmation of nature over against the powers is clear and strong.

The problems discussed in those earlier books, however, have to be dealt with. In particular, the dominance of theologies of ascent must be overcome. The antidote, in solidly Lutheran fashion, is a theology of descent: God comes to be with us in the world. The Word made flesh is the most powerful statement of this co-presence of God but it characterizes all the divine work. God is no absentee landlord. “If,” Luther says, “he is to create or preserve [something], he must be present and must make and preserve his creation both in its innermost and outermost aspects” (p. 110). Santmire affirms one of Luther’s (and the
Formula of Concord’s) claims that embarrasses even some Lutherans: The risen and ascended Christ is present in his humanity to all creation.

“Ritualizing nature” here does not mean developing a miscellany of environmental ceremonies. It has to do with the regular worship of the assembly and implies “standing within the cultural world of Christian worship and seeing what one can see as one contemplates the world of nature from that standpoint” (p. 4). Baptism, Proclamation, Offertory, Eucharist and Sending are explored in detail in Chapters 7 and 8 in ways that should be helpful for all who are involved with planning and leading worship. The focus is on traditional liturgy but Santmire criticizes and suggests revisions at points where he feels that traditional practices and language obscure the vision of God’s creative and salvific presence with us and all of nature.

The liturgy ends by sending us into the world and Chapters 9 and 10 speak about “habits” of lives in the world that the liturgy should help form. These habits of awe toward, serving of, and partnering with nature are explored with particular reference to the Genesis creation texts.

*Ritualizing Nature* is not just a scholarly study of environmental and social issues and liturgical theology. It is permeated with the author’s extensive experience of the natural world and of Christian worship in different settings. Of course questions can be asked. Is, for example, the metaphor of “ascent” so flawed that we should not speak of “all things” — not just human souls — being taken up in God? Serious discussion of relationships between worship and world are needed, and this book will repay reading by all who are concerned about the state of the world and the promise of Christian worship.

Tallmadge, Ohio

George L. Murphy

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[Adapted with permission from review published in *The Hymn*, Vol. 60, Summer 2009]

*The People’s Psalter*, a psalmody collection based on the psalms in the three-year lectionary cycle, is a welcome and noteworthy addition to the psalmody repertoire. Hal Hopson, composer, arranger, and church musician, with over 1,000 published works, demonstrates his ability to illuminate the message of the psalm texts in this Psalter containing 117 different psalm settings intended for the people. Known for his accessible music settings, Hopson couples metered texts (poetry) with global and folk tunes drawn from over twenty-five different countries. The psalm verse texts range from seventeenth-century English poet John Milton to present day poets.

The psalm refrains, intended for congregational singing, are simple, direct, easily understood, and singable. Some of the refrains are original music, and some are fragments from well-known hymn tunes, with new text added. For example, Psalm 46 uses four measures of the tune HOLY MANNA as the refrain. Other familiar folk tunes include SLANE, LAND OF REST, SIMPLE GIFTS, ASH GROVE, SUSSEX CAROL, Nettleton, Noel Nouvelet, and KEEP YOUR LAMPS. Tunes from around the globe include Argentine, Hasidic, Russian Orthodox, and Ukrainian chants and tunes.

These hauntingly beautiful melodies can be learned easily by the cantor, are memorable for the congregation, and lend themselves to instrumental embellishment. Such melodies are
also easily learned and remembered by children, and are an ideal teaching tool for children to learn the psalm texts, sign melodies from around the globe, and gain a heightened awareness of the richness of psalmody. To experience the psalm texts in memorable and meaningful ways for children can plant seeds for lifelong appreciation of the Psalms.

These hymnic psalm settings might lend themselves to an occasional use as Hymn of the Day in the Lutheran tradition, particularly on occasions when the psalm figures prominently in the sermon. Rather than reading the psalm or singing the psalm to a simplified tone, these sung hymn renderings pick up the critical themes of the psalms.

Some settings in *The People's Psalter* are noted to be spoken over keyboard harmonies, rather than sung. This may be an ideal way to introduce psalmody to congregations unaccustomed to singing the psalm. The psalm verses are spoken, sometimes antiphonally between leader and congregation; then all sing the refrain. Here at Trinity Lutheran Seminary and Bexley Hall Seminary, this has become an occasional alternative way to highlight a specific psalm text. Someone with a particularly resonant voice may speak the psalm from an adjoining room, at Trinity the adjoining Shalom Room, as if from out of nowhere, and then the assembly responds with the sung refrain. When this happens, we tend to hear the text in a different way.

A variety of accompaniments make creative use of piano, organ, handbells, percussion, and other instruments. This further deepens the character and meaning of the text and melody.

A contents page appears at the beginning of the collection. On this page, the psalm setting (with verse numbers) is listed, along with the page number where it may be found. Unfortunately that is the only index in the book. This seems incomplete. Additional indexes which would be helpful might have included an index of refrain texts, index of tune names or origins and an index of text origins. For non-liturgical users, a subject/use category would be of help. Perhaps additional indexes will appear in an upcoming edition.

On a very positive note, unlike other recent psalters, this is a one-time purchase; no further permissions or fees are required. The psalm settings, refrains, and instrumental parts are all reproducible. A CD inserted on the inside back cover includes the congregational refrains in PDF and TIF format. This spiral-bound edition, arranged in numerical order by psalm number, is user-friendly, and may be used across denominations.

Hal Hopson has provided a creative, practical psalmody collection for church musicians, worship planners, cantors, instrumentalists, and all seeking to bring life to psalmody. It includes many opportunities for instrumentalists, is accessible to musicians of many different skill levels, yet lends itself easily to further improvisation and interpretation. *The People's Psalter* would be a welcome addition to church libraries and especially useful for church musicians’ collections to help bring new life to music in the church services.

Director of M.A. in Church Music

May Schwarz
Trinity Lutheran Seminary


Can anything of substance be found in a booklet of less than 100 pages? If your skepticism leads you to overlook such writings, think again. These two veteran pastoral theologians
have written a book profoundly wise. With gracious humility, they lead us to think more deeply – yes, in less than 100 pages! – about how we might understand *sin* and *sacrifice* while avoiding the omission thereof, plus encourage us to engage in concrete practices of *paradox* and *wonder* that connect with ordinary daily life.

I’m not one to pick up a book about wisdom for daily living. Too often I’ve been disappointed by content that trivialized and moralized. However, having read previous works by both authors, I was intrigued … and not disappointed.

In his writing, Herbert Anderson, research professor of practical theology at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, deftly combines his pastoral and academic work. As an urban pastor, I especially appreciate the experience and wisdom that comes from his ministry in richly diverse, ecumenical contexts. If you haven’t read any of his extensive writings about the family, grief and pastoral care, you have a treat waiting for you. He writes with the cadence of a preacher and the insight of a scholar.

Bonnie Miller-McLemore is professor of pastoral theology at Vanderbilt University Divinity School in Nashville. Ordained in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), she is also a prolific writer in the field of practical theology, specifically on major cultural and personal issues such as work and family, women and children, spirituality and religious practice. In her writing, she peels the proverbial layers of the onion, with probing questions.

In this book, the authors suggest that every practicing Christian is a practical theologian, something both quite simple and quite complex. “To live faithfully in a pluralistic context with multiple, competing views of reality, one must be able to sustain a coherent and consistent connection between beliefs and practice” (p. 87). From an academic perspective, there’s plenty of good stuff to chew on in each chapter, plus it’s always linked to and illustrated by “wisdom for daily living.” I offer two samples:

- In the chapter “Embracing Ambiguity,” Anderson spells out how the perspective of paradox is the distinctive contribution of the Lutheran Christian heritage for practicing theology in the midst of diversity and uncertainty. In light of the increasingly polarized conversation in church and society, Anderson notes that whenever culture wars make neighbors into enemies, we are all the poorer for it. He continues with a helpful discussion of the inevitability of ambiguity and paradox and the wisdom needed for living in the midst of the ambiguity.

- In her chapter “Salvaging Sacrifice,” Miller-McLemore acknowledges that sacrifice has been the “fishbone” in the throats of Christians. Her extensive knowledge of and experience in working with women and children enables her to resurrect wisdom amidst the wreckage of the many destructive understandings that are still alive in contemporary culture. There is much grist for the discussion mill in her rescue efforts. “To salvage is not just a matter of revitalizing a tattered and lost asset. It transforms and redefines the recovered good” (p. 60).

This is a book I’d give to busy lay leaders, not those seeking simple answers to complex questions, but to those who like to ponder what faith has to say in an increasingly complex world. This is a book I’d use for a four week adult class, knowing that the “once over lightly” of the four key topics will leave participants asking for more. To that end, the authors offer
recommendations in “For Further Reading.” Or one could simply delve more deeply, spurred on by the authors’ probing questions for reflection at the close of each chapter.

Regardless, don’t fail to buy the book and savor its wisdom … and keep it on your shelf to relish again another time.

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Thomas von Fischer


In 1982 the World Council of Church Paper No. 111, entitled Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, was published. In this paper areas of convergence on the understanding and practice of baptism were reported. In 1990 Paper No. 149, Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry 1982–1990: Report on the Process and Responses, was published. Baptism Today gives us a current view of the status of the practical and theological place of baptism in a variety of church bodies.

The book contains a series of essays, each with its own footnotes, and almost all of them 6-12 pages long. The book is divided into five parts, Commentaries, Survey Articles, Signs of Recognition, Special Issues, and Baptismal Services. The essays in Part I report the practices in 18 specific faith traditions. They range from Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic to Salvation Army and African Instituted Churches. One discovers that there is great diversity and convergence in baptismal practices. The Lutheran article, “The Rite of Holy Baptism in the Lutheran Book of Worship,” was written by Jeffrey A. Truscott, an ELCA pastor (and Trinity Lutheran Seminary graduate) teaching liturgy and worship at Trinity Theological College in Singapore. His doctrinal dissertation studied the process that led to the initiation rites in the LBW. While we have moved forward with Evangelical Lutheran Worship, the rites contained therein reflect the theological impetus which underlies the LBW.

Truscott identifies four significant aspects of the LBW rite. First, baptism becomes more fully integrated into the cycle of congregational worship life. Second, attention is paid to ‘baptismal architecture.’ Third, baptism is considered as the rite that admits one to the Eucharist. Fourth, baptismal implications are seen in the other liturgies and rites.

Part II contains three essays which discuss the issues of convergence and separation. In “Toward Mutual Recognition of Baptism,” Paul Meyendorff, Professor of Liturgical Theology at St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary in New York, reflects on the growing appreciation of the place of symbol in ritual, and, therefore, in baptismal rites. He has also seen less polemical argumentation and the recognition that baptism is not simply about the individual, but about inclusion in a community.

James F. Puglisi, Fellow and Francis Joseph Cardinal Spellman Professor of Catholic Theology, and Director of the Centro Pro Unione in Rome, in “Unity in Diversity: Convergence in the Church’s Baptismal Practices,” sees more convergence on “what the churches do than on what they say they do” (p. 207). In his essay he discusses the anthropological roots to baptism as a rite of passage, how individuals are integrated into the life of a community, and the role of the Holy Spirit. While practices and theologies may vary, he still sees churches “expressing the same apostolic faith” (p. 211).
Finally, Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, Professor of Worship at Boston University School of Theology, offers her views in “Convergence and Divergence: Baptism Today.” Common understandings include 1) the link between baptism and evangelization, 2) that baptism is done in the name of the One confessed, and 3) that there is an ongoing baptismal life which forms and shapes the individual. Divergences may be seen in the areas of infant baptism, the baptismal formula used, the role of the Holy Spirit, the question of who can baptize, and the ongoing confusion about the meaning and purpose of confirmation. While most use water, there are some traditions which do not (a threefold shaking of hands is used in African Instituted Churches). However, the understanding of the integration of the baptized into the community has led to an increase in the frequency of the celebration of Holy Communion.

Part III: Signs of Recognition, recounts three examples of various traditions reaching some sort of consensus on Baptism. A document called “Christian Baptism” was signed by eleven churches in Germany on April 29, 2005. Eleven churches in Australia worked together to produce a common “Certificate of Baptism.” The Massachusetts Commission on Unity generated a document in 2001 called “Baptism: Baptismal Practice in an Ecumenical Context.”

Part IV: Special Issues reports on three unique situations in the Church of Sweden, Dalit Religion in India, and the African Instituted Church.

Part V is actual baptismal services. Thirteen services are included, among them the rite from LBW. The sampling of rites in Part V and the discussion in Part I make this a valuable and interesting resource. Any study of baptism today would benefit from this series of essays, whether the study takes place in a seminary or a congregation’s adult study group.

Indianapolis, Indiana

Rudolph W. Mueller


This book should be read by every ordained clergy and seminary student since the history of Christian clergy in America has never been published before. It was commissioned by Pulpit & Pew, a major research project whose purpose is to describe as comprehensively as possible the state of Protestant and Catholic pastoral leadership in the United States, and to examine the trends and issues that clergy face. The project also aimed to contribute to an understanding of excellent pastoral leadership and how it can be called forth and supported. Undertaken by Duke University Divinity School, the project was supported by a grant from the Lilly Endowment Fund.

The author, E. Brooks Holifield, is the Chandler Professor of American Church History at Emory University School of Theology. He is familiar to many readers as the author of Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War, which won the American Society of Church History’s Albert C. Outler prize. The book’s theme centers in the truth that over the long course of American history, from the seventeenth century to the present, few occupational groups have been more prominent in the national culture than the Christian clergy.
A continuing theme of each of the ten chapters is authority. This is supported by three arguments about the history of American clergy:

1. Clerical authority has assumed multiple forms.
2. The narrative of decline altogether fails to do justice to the complexity of clerical history.
3. The American churches and clergy have collectively decided – by virtue of their practices and their theologies – that the ministry is only partially a profession.

Americans decided in the eighteenth century to separate the church from the state and thus produced a confusing mosaic of norms and images for the ministry. The fluidity of practices and definitions of the early church permanently affected, and complicated, the attempt to define ministry in America. Thus the author had to deal with the heritage of ordination throughout the history of the Church, which this reviewer found extremely refreshing and edifying for reflection.

The title of the book comes from the terminology of colonial New England where ministers described themselves as “messengers and ambassadors of God.” This terminology was not used to elevate the pride of the officeholder, since shepherds of that day acknowledged their sinfulness, their lack of wisdom and their inabilities. These same clergy, despite colonial laws mandating church attendance, are estimated to have preached to less than half the population based on church buildings which averaged a seating capacity of 144.

In the eighteenth century, clergy were in high demand and short supply, even though this followed a period when clergy served long tenure in their parishes. Nearly 80% of the ministers served one congregation throughout their careers; while 8% served in two congregations. It was not unusual for a minister to serve twenty or thirty years in one congregation. This was also a time of an uneducated and ungifted clergy. Worse still were the fraudulent and imposter ministers. One reason for the founding of the Lutheran Ministerium was a desire to verify credentials for pastors. A good number of ministers of this period abandoned strong statements of the doctrine of election, accentuated good works, and suggested that human striving might contribute to salvation. During this time period, sermons were anywhere from forty-five minutes to two hours in delivery. Reliance on manuscripts became a common practice leading to an increasing practice of reading sermon manuscripts from the pulpit.

No religious tradition underwent a more profound transformation than the Roman Catholic Church, which grew inordinately, made up of clergy and members who were first or second generation immigrants. Significant documentation appears in each period of history about the development of the American Roman Catholic Church, in addition to its priests.

By 1950, sixty thousand Protestant ministers preached in the Protestant “establishment.” They enjoyed a social standing and a position of community leadership which set them apart. Roper Opinion polls ranked clergy in 1947 first as doing more good than any other group of professionals, but by 1967 only 45% of the polled public felt confidence in the clergy, as opposed to 74% who felt good about physicians or the 62% who spoke well of educators. Following these times and on into the 1970’s, clergy hastily pass into the professional era, specialization, conflicts, crisis, ecumenical impulses and finally into a divided vocation.
Dr. Holifield also addresses such questions as: are priests and ministers satisfied with their current calling, how are they dealing with authority, do they view the profession as in decline, and finally is ministry more difficult now than in past centuries and years?

This is a well-documented volume, masterfully written, dealing with the complex history and story of the clergy in this nation, alternating chapters between Catholic and Protestant clergy. The editorial staff has exercised exceptional skill in developing this volume. Holifield captures the soul of the minister; his serious theological reflections are Christ-centered and inspiring of our Triune God. If you want a balanced understanding of the achievements and disappointments of the American clergy read this book. Then share it with a colleague. Better yet, form a group of colleagues to discuss their learnings from the volume.

Akron, Ohio

Clyde A. McGee


The photo on the cover of this book gives the reader a clear visual message: you have the power to challenge, even defeat, your depression! Two hands are encased in red and white boxing gloves, the hands raised in a ‘victory’ stance. Once reading begins, the written words advance this view. Howard W. Stone, an experienced counselor, author, and professor emeritus at Texas Christian University, has been depressed himself. In the introduction, he shares some of his personal experience of depression, letting readers know that he has walked in their shoes. He has the credibility and authority to give a message of hope to those who are depressed, their family and loved ones — something can be done! More importantly, he empowers by giving detailed information about depression and what actions and behaviors can help overcome its life-sapping power.

The book is divided into three major parts. Part One asks the question “Is It Depression or Something Else?” The reader learns about how the term is used both in ‘popular’ parlance and as a clinical diagnosis. Readers can take a quiz to find out if they might be depressed. While the focus of the book is to provide help for those suffering from major depression, Stone makes the point that there are many times in life when people feel “depressed” or low, such as during grief and bereavement or during times of significant change or loss. Those people may find that the strategies suggested here are also useful for their healing process.

Part Two describes the “Four Faces of Depression” (physical, cognitive, behavioral and interpersonal) and gives many practical and concrete examples of what can be done to manage and mitigate the effects of depression in each area. He makes the point that there is no one ‘cause’ for depression, but multiple and interlocking causes. Likewise, there is no single ‘cure’ or treatment. Stone strongly encourages the reader to get help from a qualified therapist who is well versed in the most effective treatments for depression, but he just as strongly encourages the reader to take responsibility for his or her own mental and emotional health. He recognizes that low energy, lack of interest in activities, sad feelings, and other such characteristics of depression work against people taking action. He addresses this inertia ‘head on’ in a chapter entitled “Doing What Needs to Be Done”, and uses Garrison Keillor’s well-known phrase about Powder Milk Biscuits to drive home the point that taking action, even in small steps, moves depressed people toward life-giving energy.
Part Three is entitled “Help for Depression”. Here Stone discusses three important topics: suicide and its prevention; spirituality and depression; and how to seek help and find a qualified therapist. In all of these important areas, Stone speaks directly and candidly. Stone’s perspective is that knowledge brings options and choice, whereas avoidance of difficult realities out of fear leads to a greater likelihood of painful outcomes.

Stone is well aware that depression greatly affects the family and loved ones. Each chapter has a summary of ‘action steps’ at the end, one for the depressed person, and one for the family, and there are chapters specifically for family concerns. Stone straightforwardly addresses the challenge and pain of the family members living with a depressed person, and assists them in understanding that while there may be helpful support they can offer, they are not responsible for their loved one’s depression or their recovery process.

I hope pastors will buy this readable book to expand their own knowledge, but also for the parish library or resource area. I can well imagine a parishioner coming across this book and hurrying home to read it. I envision that reader feeling relieved that someone understands, and energized enough to try one of the many ideas offered. Thanks, Howard Stone, for providing hope, practical assistance, and encouragement toward action, for those walking this difficult journey toward more abundant life.

Columbus, Ohio

Hanci Newberry


“To remain silent is to support the continuation of hunger” (p. 165). Art Simon does not remain silent. And with him, readers will be inspired to speak out with their hearts and voices in favor of public policies that care for all of God’s children — particularly the poor and hungry.

This book is a small feast. Like the braided bread, challah, it interweaves the story of a remarkable life with the story of a citizens’ movement to end hunger. Art Simon is a Lutheran pastor, a prize-winning author, and the founder of Bread for the World. A bipartisan organization, Bread for the World engages Christians and others to advocate for effective policies that fight hunger here and abroad.

How did a shy young boy from small-town Oregon come to found and lead this country’s most influential anti-hunger lobby? In the first seven chapters, Simon recounts his adventures from youth to parish pastor and author. Serving a New York inner city church steeped in economic injustice he mobilized advocacy for low income housing.

Traveling through the rural south, Simon was struck by the invisibility of those who hunger in this country. He learned strategies from the civil rights movement as he fought for racial justice, and he absorbed the lessons of the political trenches while campaigning for his brother, Paul Simon.

Over time, Art Simon increasingly turned his attention to hunger. As he researched and wrote books on the issue, he became convinced that government was a neglected player with enormous impact. Since adequate resources exist to end hunger, the challenge is to
activate political will. Could the churches help? Although engaged in relief and development, “Christians were not being challenged to weigh in as citizens” to help shape governmental decisions that impact hungry people. (p. 75) Bread For the World was born with the idea that ordinary citizens speaking out of their faith convictions could influence public policy. Simon recognized that hunger would resonate emotionally and spiritually with Christians who knew of Jesus’ radical compassion for the poor.

Born on “a prayer and a shoestring,” Bread for the World experienced remarkable growth and impact. In chapters 8-16, Simon chronicles both the setbacks and successes through the lens of specific campaigns (e.g. child survival, grain reserves, international debt relief). He illustrates the strategic selection of issues, access to key leaders, and most of all, the power of ordinary citizens—one letter, one phone call, one visit to a representative. Striking anecdotes recount the moments when a constituent shed new light and changed a representative’s vote. Collectively, thousands of these voices are impossible to ignore.

This book is a delight to read on so many levels. It is not only the biography of a man and a movement, it is primer on hunger issues. Simon’s depth of knowledge is apparent as he addresses the root causes of hunger and describes the structural changes that foster self-sufficiency. He emphasizes investment in small scale farming, microfinance, appropriate foreign aid and education of girls. Those who are new to hunger issues and citizen advocacy will find this a welcome introduction, while those who are experienced will find their souls fed and their energy renewed.

Simon conveys a wealth of substantive information in an accessible style sprinkled with humor and theological gems. The book is suitable for pastors, reading groups, seminary and college courses addressing praxis, and anyone who wants the church to make a difference in the world.

This book arrives at an important time. After decades of improvement, the world is experiencing a resurgence in hunger. Fueled by global recession and high food prices, hunger has struck 100 million more people in 2009, so that now over 1.02 billion people do not know where their next meal will come from. The crisis of hunger affects 1/6 of humanity. Simon’s point is worth repeating: “To remain silent is to support the continuation of hunger” (p. 165). This book calls us to urgency, hope and action.

ELCA World Hunger Director
Chicago, Illinois

Nancy Arnison
APRIL 13-14    NELSON W. TROUT LECTURES AT TRINITY
The Rev. Dr. Cynthia L. Hale, Senior Pastor, Ray of Hope Christian Church, Decatur, Georgia

APRIL 23    HERE WE STAND—CHRISTIANITY AND EMERGENCE
Phyllis Tickle, Author of *The Great Emergence – How Christianity is Changing and Why*

APRIL 23    CHORAL EVENSONG

APRIL 27    HEIN-FRY LECTURE SERIES
*Hearing the Word: Teaching the Bible in the Parish (and Beyond)*
Dr. Rick Carlson, Glatfelter Professor of Biblical Studies, Director of Graduate Studies
Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg

May 22    TLS and Bexley Hall COMMENCEMENT

*For more information, e-mail: continuing_ed@TrinityLutheranSeminary.edu*

Trinity Lutheran Seminary
2199 East Main Street
Columbus, OH 43209-2334
Phone 614-235-4136
Fax 614-238-0263
www.TrinityLutheranSeminary.edu