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Prayer as Familiar Conversation*

Steven Chase

While yet a child, Abba Ephrem had a dream and then a vision. A branch of vine came out of his tongue, grew bigger and filled everything under heaven. It was laden with beautiful fruit. All the birds of heaven came to eat of the fruit of the vine, and the more they ate, the more the fruit increased.

Ephrem the Syrian¹

In the Beginning Was the Conversation

In the years preceding the Protestant Reformation, the early humanist scholar, Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, was deeply engaged in a project of translation that would be published just one year before Luther drew up his famous ninety-five theses and nailed them to the door of the Schlosskirche at Wittenberg. Following a fundamental tenet of the humanist movement, Erasmus had undertaken a systematic examination and new Latin translation of Greek manuscripts of the New Testament.² The translation was destined to update and replace the more than one thousand year-old Vulgate of St. Jerome. Arriving at the Gospel of John, Erasmus made an unconventional but telling translation of the opening words of John's first chapter. Instead of the conventional translation of John's Greek into the Latin—*In principio erat Verbum*, Erasmus translated instead—*In principio erat Sermo*.³ John's gospel, according to Erasmus, thus opens not with, "In the beginning was the Word," but rather, "In the beginning was the Conversation." The shift is subtle, yet it modifies centuries of traditional assumptions and consequent theology. As this essay will demonstrate, it has profound implications, not only for the creation and the process of the very "coming into being" of the world, but also for prayer.

Erasmus's new and telling translation makes the act of creation not a unific spoken word that in its singular and isolated way brings the universe into being, but rather a communitarian event based on a dialogic process. The implication of Erasmus's translation is that the act of creation was, and in a very real sense continues to be, an on-going conversation.

* The following essay is from a current work in progress: *Trees of Life: Models of Prayer in Christian Faith and Practice*, to be published by Baker Academic Press. Five models of prayer are proposed in the book: (1) Prayer as Conversation; (2) Prayer as Relationship; (3) Prayer as Spiritual Journey; (4) Prayer as Transformation; and (5) Prayer as Divine Presence. Relevant to several points in the essay is the introductory chapter, "Prayer as a Way of Life."

With regard to prayer, it is certainly not false to say that prayer is, in part, an act of speaking. Words are indeed an essential component of prayer. But prayer, as a relationship between God, God's creation, and God's people, is multidimensional. It is not simply words spoken at the one true God. Erasmus's opening translation of the gospel of John touches on a richer, dialogical meaning of prayer. Prayer is discourse; it is a conversation which includes not only words but also silences, not only periods of listening but also hearing, not only times of resting in God but also times of responding to God.

Hans Urs von Balthasar, a Roman Catholic theologian of the mid-twentieth century, echoes Erasmus's insight. Finding "conversation" to be the most powerful, true, and evocative image of prayer, von Balthasar concludes that prayer as conversation has its own language, vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and words. This language is God's language, yet it is completely reciprocal. Thus we participate in this conversation or we have no prayer at all:

Firstly, prayer *is* a conversation between God and the soul, and secondly, a particular language *is* spoken: God's language. Prayer *is* dialogue, not man's monologue before God. Ultimately, in any case, there is no such thing as solitary speech; speech implies reciprocity, the exchange of thoughts and of souls. . . . The better a man learns to pray, the more deeply he finds that all his stammering is only an answer to God's speaking to him. . . . God speaks to us from heaven and commends to us his Word, dwelling on earth for a while: "this is my beloved son: listen to him" (Matt. 17:5).⁴

More than simple words, prayerful conversation is spoken as well as silent, it issues as language from, as it were, God's lips, it is a dialogue, never a monologue, it is speech implying reciprocity. In prayer we participate in this conversation as "God speaks to us from heaven."

John Calvin and Familiar Conversation

Many people are surprised to learn that the longest chapter in John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is his chapter on prayer.⁵ In these pages Calvin emphasizes God's "kindness"⁶ manifested in the gift of prayer and especially the essential nature of prayer as "intimate" or "familiar conversation." To enter into "familiar conversation" with God, the mind and heart, according to Calvin, must be properly disposed. In language reminiscent of patristic and medieval teachers on contemplation, Calvin describes this proper disposition as a heart centered on "right and pure contemplation of God" and a mind that, "so far as it is possible, is lifted beyond itself." His intention is clear: for Calvin, proper disposition of mind and heart are essential for "familiar conversation" with God:⁷

Now for framing prayer duly and properly, let this be the first rule: that we be disposed in mind and heart as befits those who enter [familiar] conversation with God. This we shall indeed attain with respect to the mind if it is freed from carnal cares and thoughts by which it can be called or led away from right and pure contemplation of God, and then not only devotes itself completely to prayer but also, in so far as this is possible, is lifted and carried beyond itself.⁸

Calvin's Latin, here translated as "conversation," is *colloquium*, which can mean not only conversation but also a sharing of words, a discourse, or simple talk together. The deeper meaning of "familiar" conversation connotes acquaintanceship, intimacy, friendship, and ultimately the safe, shared, and loving conversation one might find within a family.⁹ "Conversation," as Calvin employs the term, implies two related ideas. First, it connotes turning around and toward some person or thing, and, second, abiding or living or dwelling with someone or simply passing one's life together with another.¹⁰ Prayer as familiar conversation carries both of these important meanings for Calvin. On the one hand prayer implies a turning around or revolution toward God, the world, or another. In this sense conversation means that we turn *from* ourselves *to* something else. This is not to say that we abandon ourselves. Prayer as conversation with God is the primary speech of the true self to the true God; in prayer we bring our *full selves* to God. But it does mean that we turn from narcissistic self-centeredness *toward* another. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly for Calvin, such prayerful conversation means that we come to live and dwell in a familiar, intimate, and loving way with God.

Brother Lawrence on Familiar Conversation

In Brother Lawrence, a seventeenth century French Discalced Carmelite, we find an example similar to Calvin's own heart-felt sense of prayer. Brother Lawrence advocated life-long "familiar conversation" with God as a simple spiritual practice of the full self turned toward God. A simple cook and shoemaker, conversation with God for Lawrence evolved into a way of life:

The holiest, most ordinary, and most necessary practice of the spiritual life is that of the presence of God. It is to take delight in and become accustomed to his divine company, *speaking humbly and conversing lovingly with him* all the time, at every moment, without rule or measure, especially in times of temptation, suffering, aridity, weariness, even infidelity and sin.¹¹

Brother Lawrence forgoes "formal" prayer with rules and set times. Instead he learns, as he says, to "converse lovingly with God all the time." His is not a

fleeting moment of divine awareness or revelation but a constant, simple conversation reflected in action and flowing from the center of the soul:

It is important, however to realize that this conversation with God takes place in the depths and center of the soul. It is there that the soul speaks to God heart to heart, and always in a deep and profound peace the soul enjoys God.¹²

As with John Calvin, prayer for Brother Lawrence is of a particular quality:

We do not always have to be in church to be with God. We can make of our hearts an oratory where we can withdraw from time to time to converse with him there. Everyone is capable of these *familiar conversations* with God.¹³

Brother Lawrence is, in fact, so habituated to Calvin's "familiar conversation" with God that for him, the simplest chores are prayer. In a concise statement of the intimate relations among prayer as conversation, daily activity, and awareness of the presence of God, he says:

We must continually apply ourselves so that all our actions become a kind of brief conversation with God, not in a contrived manner, but coming from the purity and simplicity of our hearts.¹⁴

Brother Lawrence, like Calvin, recognizes prayer as familiar conversation grounded in personal piety, liturgical celebration, or scriptural meditation. But for both men it is much more than that. Familiar conversation is a daily, even constant, devotion of a soul turned to God. Such prayer serves to destroy the false perception of an impregnable wall between the sacred and secular worlds. "God," as the seventeenth century spiritual director, Jean-Pierre de Caussade, puts it, "*speaks* to every individual through what happens to them moment to moment."¹⁵

Word and Silence in Prayerful Conversation

While conversation involves elements of listening, waiting, attention, hearing, connection, communication, presence, and response, the two primary modes of prayerful conversation are word and silence. As has been noted, word and silence are not oppositional, but rather relational and dialogical. They are partners in the play of conversation. A seventeenth-century German pietist, Philipp Jakob Spener, captures this partnership well when he notes that:

Prayer always occurs before those to whom the basis of our heart is open. Prayer is not only heard by those to whom we speak with our mouths, but also those to whom we open our hearts (Ps. 19:15). . . . Whenever we pray

with our mouths God looks at the same time not only upon our tongues but also on the base of our hearts out of which the tongue speaks.¹⁶

Put another way, for Spener, the words of the tongue speak the silence of the open heart.

In the context of prayer, silence and word have many shades and nuances of meaning. Silence, for instance, can be “heard” in a number of ways: as the silence of God; as the silence of the one praying; as a referent of mystery; as the real inability to find words for the divine reality in its fullness. It can be “heard,” as well, as an unfortunate reality of men, women, and communities who, through economic disadvantage or political repression or pathological, physical, or emotional challenges, have no voice. The silence of speech is the fundamental form of silence, but there are other silences as well. There is silence in the beauty of nature, silence in the kinetic body, and silence in the beam of a loving gaze. Silence comforts and refines the will and the senses. It gives wing to imagination, illuminates the memory, tempers judgment, and ignites longing and desire. Silence is a cousin to reason. Silence seldom takes place in a vacuum. Even the rhythms of our heart, the chemistry of our bodies, and the neurological wave patterns of our brain create an ever-present background “noise” within silence. All these forms of silence enfold the soul in prayer. In a similar manner word and language, in their own way, give compass to conversation in prayer. As language, “word” can be oral, written, spoken, signed, sung, and danced. It is most sought by the ear and voiced by the mouth, but can be seen with the eye, felt by a touch, or implied in a smell. “Word” can be spoken and heard by all, or it can be heard by many, or by few, or heard by none at all. It can dream through the years as a story, color and structure a memory, or give wing to hope. You are reading a word. A word can be translated, redefined, or given new life. In the same manner that silence can represent a form of oppression to the voiceless of the world, so too can word oppress, control, abuse, confine, prejudice, and even destroy. But words can also build up, free, empower, transform, guide, and give. As with silence, the gift of words can bestow empathy, compassion, or love. They write the “book of nature,” the “book of experience,” and the “book of the spirit.” And, as we are accustomed to thinking, word is also that which is from the beginning (John 1:1).

These represent the identifying natures of silence and word. But, of course, while identifiably independent, they are never functionally so. In prayer, word and silence are like partners in a dance. Scripture is full of images that evoke this necessary partnership between silence and word. Jesus’ disciples, for example, beg him to teach them how to pray, and he does so in words so keen and sharp that they have penetrated into our very bones and marrow to this day. The Lord’s Prayer is a prayer of words. Yet at the same time, Jesus models long

periods of desert silence, solitude, and listening. The Hebrew Bible is full of prophets, priests, and kings praying verbally to God; the Psalms are themselves 150 verbal prayers. Yet at the same time the Hebrew Bible also instructs us in silence, stillness, and waiting. We are urged to “be still and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10), while the Lord is in his holy temple, Habakkuk proclaims, “Let the earth keep silence before him” (2:20), and the voice of wisdom from Ecclesiastes says sagely, “There is a time to keep silence and a time to speak” (3:7). Scripture and Christian traditions insist that this dance of word and silence involve the whole person. It is not just a matter of ear, mouth, and tongue. Prayerful conversation is inclusive of gesture, posture, breath, mind, heart, body, and spirit.

In the thirteenth century Francis of Assisi, for example, enlightened his followers with a whole new metaphor for “word” in prayer. In fact Francis’s solution to the difficulty of communicating the depth of speech is so true to the verbal construction of prayer that it is not really a metaphor at all. As one of Francis’s followers, Thomas of Celano, describes it, Francis “made his whole body a tongue”:

He edified his listeners by becoming a living example of what he taught: He edified his listeners by his example as well as his words; “he made his whole body a tongue; more than someone who prayed, he had become prayer.” That is, his whole person had become the message he was trying to communicate.¹⁷

Francis *lived* speech; he *lived* silence. In the act of making “his whole body a tongue,” he *became* prayer.

Other images from the Christian spiritual tradition evoke the power of prayer as conversation in word *and* in silence. St. Bonaventure, also writing in the thirteenth century, reflects on prayer as a “fountain of fullness,” a language given by God inviting us to share in the abundant waters of divine conversation.¹⁸ In this image words are like droplets of water rising from a baptismal font of conversation with God. The words, like water, rise and fall continually back into the mother fountain of silence. In the fine mist of the fountain seen against a brimming sun, Bonaventure shares a glimpse of a rainbow, which he also equates with prayer, a rainbow with one arch rising from the gold of silence, the other from the gold of words. Mutually regenerating, baptismal, purifying, sacramental, covenantal, even Christological, in the image of the “fountain,” word and silence, for Bonaventure, partner the depths and the heights, the earth and the sky, our loss and our joy, our God and our selves.

Silence in Conversation

Of course the fact that silence is by its very nature immune to verbal representation has not stopped Christian writers from attempting to “communicate” its essence to the world. It seems that nothing loosens the tongue or sharpens the quill quite as much as an encounter with silence. Volumes and volumes, words upon words, have been devoted to the look, feel, taste, smell, sensuality, or experience of that which is wordless or ineffable. Simone Weil, a twentieth-century friend of God, comes *close* to capturing silence in words, however, when she says:

Everything happens as though, by a miraculous favor, our very senses themselves had been made aware that silence is not the absence of sounds, but something infinitely more real than sounds and the center of a harmony more perfect than anything which a combination of sounds can produce. Furthermore there are degrees of silence. There is a silence in the beauty of the universe which is like a noise when compared with the silence of God.¹⁹

But of course silence cannot be completely captured; it is not the “absence” of sounds. There are instead “degrees of silence,” and even the beauty of the universe is “like a noise when compared to the silence of God.” We can feel Simone Weil inviting us through her words to absorb silence and through its degrees to give praise to God.

Simone Weil’s degrees of silence also hint at implicit degrees of language. Silence and language both offer life through prayer in various and often contradictory ways. Corresponding to the silence of beauty, the silence of humanity, the silence of cosmos, and the silence of God are the voices of beauty, the voices of humanity, the voices of the natural world, and the voices of God.²⁰ To which silence are we listening? To which words do we respond? Whose voice do we hear? How do we decipher a language of silence? While these questions are ultimately questions of discernment, we should also be aware that the answers depend on the individuals, situations, and particular communities of conversation from which they arise.

Thomas Merton has said that scripture is like a lake that has no bottom. The same can be said of Christian prayer: it is as a lake that has no bottom. Today, in addition to the richness of the Christian verbal prayer,²¹ many have been blessed by the contemporary retrieval of various “communities of conversation” within the Christian contemplative tradition. Interestingly, the Christian contemplative tradition relies on body, gesture, posture, mind, heart, and spirit to practice and maintain an attitude of silence just as the verbal tradition relies on the same to maintain an attitude of speech with God. This essential complementarity of

verbal prayer and contemplative silence form a circle of conversation – a circle of intimate conversation with God.

It is no coincidence that the mysteries and paradox of Christian doctrine function formationally in a way similar to that of the paradox and mystery of conversational prayer. Both, in their refusal to fall to the axe of reason, compel us in experiential, sapiential ways to know ourselves in relation to God and world.²² The formational function of prayer is predicated not on human effort alone, but on the gift of divine grace. As it conjoins human effort and divine gift, formational prayer begins a reign of mystery, it enters into “the secret places of divine incomprehensibility”²³ where prayer moves easily and naturally from lofty pinnacles beyond our knowing to simple conversation between intimate friends. It moves from a prayer of mystery and paradox:

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness –
On them light has shined.

to a prayer of simple attribute and grace:

For a child is born for us,
a son is given to us,
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
(Isa. 9:2, 6)

Breath in Conversation: The Spirit of Word and Silence

From the early history of the church, teachers on prayer have recognized the unique position of breath in prayer. Searching for something as a kind of starting point for constant prayer, something that we all do without ceasing, yet over which we have some control, early fathers and mothers of the church focused on breath.²⁴ Breath is the essential mechanism in speech; without it there would be no words. Likewise, in silence breath is an aid to contemplative concentration and focus. In the former, breath links us to God’s initial acts of creation. In the case of silence the rhythm of breath unites us to other internal and external rhythms: heartbeat, brainwave, waves on shore, waves of various spectrums of light, seasons, music, the orbits of the heavens, birth and death.

Breath is so important to sustaining life that in many cultures it has been linked to the Spirit or life force. One contemporary writer has pointed out, “The divers

meanings of the word *ruah* in the Old Testament, which include “wind,” “breath,” “life,” “courage,” “mind,” as well as human and divine “spirit,” find their unity in the concept of divine action.”²⁵ The diversity of these elements in the context of the unity of divine action all empower life in that they make possible, even necessary, human response to divine action through prayer and action in the world. Breath in this sense is crucial to the existence of both word and silence; it is the very spirit of prayer and the life-force of awakening and transformation.

In the anonymous, nineteenth-century *Way of the Pilgrim*,²⁶ a godly pilgrim in search of “constant prayer” encounters and learns the Jesus Prayer (also commonly known as the Breath Prayer, the Prayer of the Heart, and by its technical name, Hesychasm, which means stillness). This prayer begins in learning how to coordinate one’s prayer to the rhythm of one’s breath. The pilgrim’s most treasured book, after the Bible, is the *Philokalia*, a book of instruction on this way of prayer. The *Philokalia* is full of advice and teaching on watchfulness in prayer, on proper prayer postures, on impediments to prayer, and of course instructive advice on coordinating the breath with prayer in a way that “cycles” the mind into the heart. It is instructive to learn from some of these ancient teachers the place of breath in a form of prayer at once verbal and silent.

St. Gregory of Sinai, for instance, gives detailed instruction on the Jesus Prayer. His teaching includes counsel on concentration of breath, which for St. Gregory helps to disperse distracting thoughts:

Sitting on a chair, bring your mind from the head into the heart and hold it there; from there call with your mind and heart, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me!” Regulate your breathing also because rhythmic breathing can disperse distracting thoughts. When you are aware of thoughts do not pay attention to them regardless of whether they are good or not. With your mind enter the heart and call on the Lord Jesus often and patiently and in this way you will soon overwhelm and destroy these thoughts through God’s name.²⁷

Another teacher, Nicephorus the Solitary, does not have his anatomy correct, but while the body is certainly essential in this prayer of the heart, perfect anatomical knowledge is not. These writers, in accessing the whole person, body, mind, and spirit (symbolized in a very concrete way by breath), touch the image of God within, leading to an embodied tranquility in prayer. Nicephorus says:

You know that breathing brings air into the heart. And so sit quietly and take your mind and lead it by the path of breathing into the very heart and hold it there; do not give it freedom to escape as it would wish to. While holding it there do not leave your mind

idle but give it the following holy words to say: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me!" And let the mind repeat them day and night. When it gets used to it, the mind will be happy and joyful to be there and it will want of itself to stay there.

Other writers from this tradition simply teach that the rhythm of breath is the simple key to prayer. Hesychius of Jerusalem says, "If you wish to cover the confusion of distracting thoughts and to guard your heart, let the Jesus Prayer be attuned to your breathing." And John Climacus phrases his advice in the form of a prayer, a prayer that culminates in adoration of Jesus as it links Christ, memory, and breath. Climacus says simply, "May the remembrance of Jesus be one with your breathing."

Breath in prayer then, at least in the Hesychastic tradition of stillness and peace, signifies and accomplishes a number of things. Breath is the spirit within the human person uniting mind and heart. It is our constant compass and thus the most precise instrument for mastering constant prayer. It is rhythmic, in tune to other rhythms of the body, nature, and the cosmos. It is a strongly incarnational element, especially when used, as John Climacus does, as the element which unites us to Jesus, the incarnated presence of God. It recognizes the presence of the Holy Spirit within, the "spirit of God [that] dwells in you" (Romans 8:9), who intercedes when we do not know how to pray as we ought "with sighs too deep for words" (Romans 8:26). Breath makes word possible, yet as an image of God's spirit within it also communicates with sighs too deep for words.

The Creation of Word in Silence

Conversation, like breath, has its rhythm; it cycles through word and silence. In the beginning was the conversation. The poet Rainer Maria Rilke imagines the act of creation as a song out of which animals, forests, humans, the cosmos are "created by silence." In the poem "Sonnet One to Orpheus," Rilke writes, "It turned out the reason they were so full of silence/was not cunning, and not terror,/it was listening."²⁸ The Creator, in the poet's memorable phrase, has created "a temple for them [the creatures] deep inside their ears," a temple for "hearing" their Creator both in word and silence. A contemporary writer, Barbara Brown Taylor, asks key questions of silence and words, questions that pierce to the heart of conversational prayer. She inquires, "How shall I break the silence? What word is more eloquent than the silence itself?" She answers in a tone not unlike Rilke's, saying that "in the moments before a word is spoken, anything is possible."²⁹ Prayer is born of silence, a silence out of which anything is indeed possible, from the pure growing of a "temple deep inside the ear" to expressions of ordinary needs, to divine grace, to utterances of beauty and eloquence. Prayer, meditation, and contemplation linger gently in those moments where anything is possible, even a word.

The fact is that every word is bracketed by silence. Our words are not only born from silence, they also die back into silence in perpetual rhythm. Having asked her questions about the eloquence of silence, Taylor finds a kind of answer in this very rhythm, saying, "Silence and speech define each other. One is the inhale. The other is the exhale."³⁰ Prayer in conversation with God is as close as the air we breathe.

The infinite possibilities of silence affect the form and nature of silence for the various "participants" in conversational prayer. In conversation, we ourselves can remain silent. God's silence can be very real. Or we may be forced into silence by the "unsayability" or mystery of God. That is, the truth we wish to utter to or about God may be too profound for words. All these color the silences of conversation that give birth to words.

Living in prayer guides us, over time, into each of these silent modalities out of which "all things are possible." William Johnston, in surveying the variety of forms of Christian meditation today, recognizes this guiding hand of prayer that leads us into silence. His examples are of the practice of silence woven deeply into conversational prayer:

For the fact is that everywhere we see Christians of all ages and cultures sitting quietly in meditation. Some sit before a crucifix or an icon in one-pointed meditation. Others sit and breathe as they look at the tabernacle. Others practice mindfulness, awareness of God in their surroundings. Others recite a mantra to the rhythm of their own breath. Others simply open minds and hearts to the presence of God. Others just talk to God.³¹

All these forms of prayer are intended to quiet the soul. Yet still, many people rely almost exclusively in prayer on words or, if words cannot be found, assume that they are not praying at all. The model of conversational prayer, again, teaches us otherwise. Silence is a natural part of prayer, as natural as breath. It is dynamic, organic, wide-ranging, and singularly appropriate. Thelma Hall equates silence in prayer with deepening love of the lover for the beloved:

There is an inner dynamic in the evolution of all true love that leads to a level of communication "too deep for words." There the lover becomes inarticulate, falls silent, and the beloved receives the silence as eloquence.³²

For many of us, silence lacks this "eloquence" because we simply have not listened to silence as closely as we have listened to and spoken our words. Yet

silence in prayer is vast, multidimensional, and polyvalent: it is the equal partner to word in the language of love; it is received as eloquence by God.

John Calvin on Silence as Conversational Prayer

Following Augustine, who had taught that prayer “consists more in groaning than in speaking, in tears rather than words,”³³ John Calvin is, perhaps surprisingly, clear that the best prayers are sometimes unspoken. Crucial to Calvin’s support of silence in prayer is his reference to Elijah, who “prays with his head between his knees.”³⁴ Calvin uses this image to illustrate the importance of body, posture, and gesture in prayer. All of the human person in any situation can be caught up in prayer. Body, gesture, and silence, as well as words, all participate in the “language” of conversational prayer.

Calvin then sketches his insights on silence in prayer by first listing three “rules of right prayer.” These aids to right prayer include: (1) reverence; (2) prayer with a sincere sense of want and with penitence; and (3) prayer in which we yield all confidence in ourselves and humbly plead for pardon.³⁵ Throughout his discussion on prayer Calvin also emphasizes a mind, body, and heart correctly focused upon God so that we might “meditate upon God’s kindness” and be led into a “right and pure contemplation of God.”³⁶ Meditation on God’s kindness and right and pure contemplation then lead into a disposition to “enter into conversation with God.” This is, again, for Calvin that very “familiar conversation” which integrates mind, heart (or “inner feeling”), word, silence, and gesture in intimate prayer:

We should hold that the *tongue is not even necessary for private prayer*, except in so far as either the *inner feeling* has insufficient power to arouse itself or as it is so vehemently aroused that it carries with it the action of the tongue. For even though *the best prayers are sometimes unspoken*, it often happens in practice that, when *feelings of mind* are aroused, unostentatiously the tongue *breaks forth into speech*, and the other members into *gesture*.³⁷

“The tongue is not necessary,” and the “best prayers are sometimes unspoken.” Conversational prayer, for Calvin, includes the body. It is of the heart as well as of the mind; it is at times spoken, and it is justifiably, at times, unspoken. In other words, for Calvin, the whole person prays. Packed into those two short sentences from Calvin’s *Institutes* is commentary enough to instruct and form a lifetime of prayer.

ENDNOTES

¹*The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. Benedicta Ward (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications Inc., 1984), 59.

² The Greek edition and accompanying Latin translation was published as *Novum instrumentum omne* by Froben of Basle in 1516. As a critical edition it would today be considered a “clunker,” but the translation was solid if at times idiosyncratic. Most importantly, with Erasmus’s approval, the Latin was translated and dispersed widely in various vernacular languages.

³ The Greek word Erasmus translates as “*sermo*” is λόγος.

⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 14-15.

⁵ Cf. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), III, XX, 1-52, 850-920.

⁶ Calvin goes out of his way to assure us that, while our prayers depend on no merit of our own, the God who hears and responds to our prayers is a God both “gentle and kind.” Cf. *Institutes*, III.XX.4, p. 852; 5, p. 854; 11, p. 864; 13, p. 868.

⁷ This does not mean, however, that Calvin believes that God listens and responds only to prayers of “pure intention,” which theologically and psychologically would account for precious few prayers indeed. Calvin recognizes our fallen nature yet exhibits his overriding pastoral compassion, noting that God “harkens to perverted prayer” as well. Cf. *Institutes*, XX.III.15, pp. 870-72.

⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.XX.4, pp. 853-54. See also *ibid.*, III.XX.5, p. 854, where through “great kindness” God invites us into “intimate conversation.”

⁹ Of course family conversation does not always reflect love. It can be self-centered, angry, confused, and full of bile and distrust. But so can prayer. Calvin’s essential point remains: openness and trust implied in the image of prayer as “familiar conversation” is prayer focused not only on self, neighbor, and world but also on God.

¹⁰ *Conversatio* has the dual meaning of frequent use and conversation; *conversio*, a turning around or revolution; the verb *converso* also carries the dual meanings of to turn around as well as to abide, live, or dwell with someone or to pass one’s life with.

¹¹ *Spiritual Maxims*, 2.6 in Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, OCD, *Writings and Conversations On the Practice of the Presence of God*, critical ed. Conrad De Meester, trans. Salvatore Scieurba (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1994), 36. Italics are mine.

¹² Brother Lawrence, *Letter 2* in *ibid.*, 53.

¹³ Brother Lawrence, *Practice of the Presence of God* in *ibid.*, 107

¹⁴ Brother Lawrence, *Practice of the Presence of God* in *ibid.*, 105.

¹⁵ Cited from Introduction by Richard Foster to Jean-Pierre de Caussade, *The Sacrament of the Present Moment* (San Francisco, HarperSanFrancisco, 1989), xiii.

¹⁶ “God-Pleasing Prayer,” in *Pietists: Selected Writings*, ed. Peter C. Erb (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 90.

¹⁷ Cited from William J. Short, OFM, *Poverty and Joy: The Franciscan Tradition* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 31.

¹⁸ The phrase, “generous fecundity,” is from Oliver Davies, *A Theology of Compassion: Metaphysics of Difference and the Renewal of Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 256-62. The phrase, “fountain fullness,” is from St. Bonaventure’s *Itinerarium in Mentis Deum* and is a translation from the Latin of “*fons plenitudinis*,” found throughout the *Itinerarium*. Cf. Bonaventure, *The Soul’s Journey Into God*, trans. Ewert Cousins (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

¹⁹ Simone Weil, “Forms of the Implicit Love of God,” in *The Simone Weil Reader*, ed. George A. Panichas (New York: David McKay Company, Inc, 1977), 490.

²⁰ Certainly scripture does more than hint at all of this. The God of Hebrew Scriptures is alternately vocal and (seemingly) progressively silent. Jesus of course both speaks and seeks periods of silence, solitude, and solace. Even creation alternates between wilderness quiet and, in its capacity as a “book of nature,” is in constant praise of the glory, goodness, and beauty of God.

²¹ The later portion of the chapter on prayer as conversation in *Models of Prayer* will focus on verbal prayer as it is commonly practiced, including prayers of adoration, confession, petition, lament, etc.

²² Cf. Ellen T. Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Doctrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 19 and elsewhere for an enlightening reassessment of the sapiential and what Charry calls “aretegenic” formational quality of doctrine.

²³ Richard of St. Victor, *De arca mystica* IV.vi, *Patrologiae Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne, vol. 196. For a discussion of mystery and the role of divine grace in prayer and contemplation see Steven Chase, *Angelic*

Wisdom: The Cherubim and the Grace of Contemplation in Richard of St. Victor (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

²⁴ Other “autonomic” functions, such as heartbeat or neurological activity are constant but by definition are self-regulating and beyond our “control.” Breath is semiautonomic: it can be controlled to a point yet also functions on its own. In the deep quiet of contemplative prayer, one can become conscious of one’s heartbeat, but again it cannot be stopped or started at will.

²⁵ Davies, *A Theology of Compassion*, 268.

²⁶ Cf. *The Way of the Pilgrim*, trans. Helen Bacovcin (New York: Image Books, 1978).

²⁷ The quotes that follow on the Jesus Prayer can be found in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, volumes I-IV, compiled by St. Nicodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, trans. Ware, et al. (London: Farber and Farber, 1979-1999). The *Philokalia* was compiled in the eighteenth century from Greek texts from the fourth through fifteenth centuries.

²⁸ “Sonnet One to Orpheus,” *Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke*, trans. Robert Bly (New York: Harper and Rowe Publishers, 1981), 195.

²⁹ Barbara Brown Taylor, *When God is Silent* (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1998), 3.

³⁰ Taylor, *When God is Silent*, 96.

³¹ William Johnston, *Mystical Theology* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), 134.

³² Thelma Hall, R.C., *Too Deep For Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 7. Hall’s title refer of course to Romans 8:26: “For we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.”

³³ Cf. *Letters of St. Augustine, Letter CXXX.19* in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 1, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 465: “To use much speaking in prayer is to employ a superfluity of words; but to prolong prayer is to have the heart throbbing with continued pious emotion towards God to whom we pray. For in most cases prayer consists more in groaning than in speaking, in tears rather than words.”

³⁴ *Institutes*, III.XX.3, p. 852. From I Kings 18:42.

³⁵ *Institutes*, III.XX.4-10, pp. 853-62.

³⁶ *Institutes*, III.XX.3; 4, pp. 852; 853.

³⁷ *Institutes*, III.XX.33, pp. 396-97. Italics added.

Being a Chaplain: Call, Conversation, and Charity

Jaco Hamman

Introduction¹

To be a chaplain is to be a clergyperson who is officially attached to a social institution that usually is not the church. Some chaplains serve in the Army, some the Navy; some work in the prison system; others work in a counseling center; and others work in a medical institution, an educational setting, or even the corporate or business world. As a person participating in the formation of the next generation of clergy, I pray that some of the students in my class will receive the call to become a chaplain, for chaplaincy is a core ministry of the church of Christ.

Chaplains, however, often find themselves alienated from the settings they serve. By definition, chaplains find themselves in a position of not belonging, a resident alien, and a guest in someone else's home. Often, before chaplains can create space for others to grow (emotionally, relationally, and spiritually), they have to create space for their ministries and for themselves. Rarely will the institutions in which chaplains serve create space for them in ways that answer to no other agenda but the establishing of God's reign on earth. Thus, working constantly towards belonging and resisting to remain on the outside is something chaplains need to keep in the forefront of their conversations, their thoughts, their actions, and their prayers.

Ironically, this truth about the isolation chaplains often experience in the contexts they serve is also true of their relationship with their brothers and sisters in the church of Christ. There too, chaplains frequently find themselves on the outside, experiencing the painful awareness that they do not belong and often are not invited to belong. Whether the feeling of not belonging is intrapsychic (as I will shortly argue) or due to the effects of church politics, chaplains moving on the periphery of church life affects the church of Jesus Christ adversely.

This essay invites its readers into an inner dialogue with their own call to the ministry, even as it beckons them to envision engaging the church in new and creative ways. I argue that chaplains are important to the church of Christ for at least three reasons. First, the church will not be able to understand the full meaning of what it means to be called to the ministry of Word and sacrament without engaging chaplains in this regard. Second, I argue that chaplains can teach the church the very important art of having a conversation. The Protestant faith's identity of proclamation is so secure that Protestant churches often do not recognize that they lack the basic skill of conversing, especially about difficult topics. Lastly, I argue that the church of Christ needs chaplains to teach it the

true meaning of charity, which I see as the essence of incarnational ministry. Without chaplains, the church might never discover the true meaning of what it means to be Christ's compassionate hands and feet here on earth. I want to be as bold as to say that, without chaplains, the church might not discover the true meaning of loving our neighbors with the unconditional love of Christ.

First, then, the church needs chaplains to understand the meaning of calling or vocation.

The Call to Enter the Ministry

Ever since Moses heard the call from God summoning him to be the person to lead God's people out of Egypt (Exodus 3), receiving the call from God to enter the ministry has been an exhilarating and often tumultuously discomfoting experience. To God's call, Moses at first responded with disbelief and from a deep sense of insecurity. Moses, with countless numbers of persons in the history of Israel and the Church of Jesus Christ, can witness that the call from God is both a safe shelter to find solace in and a dangerous path exposing one's vulnerabilities as one is invited into a bigger reality.

Writing on the call to the ministry, theologian H. Richard Niebuhr distinguished between four kinds of call that need to remain in dynamic tension with one another. The first call is the *call to be a Christian*, which comes to all believers. This is the call of faithful discipleship of Jesus Christ. The second call Niebuhr identified is *the secret call*, "that inner persuasion or experience whereby a person feels himself [or herself] directly summoned or invited by God to take up the work of ministry."² People speak of this deeply private call in terms of "wrestling with the call," "running from the call," "fighting the call," and ultimately, "surrendering to the call." One thinks of biblical figures such as Moses, Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:6), Peter (John 21:15), Paul (Acts 9), and others. The third call is the *providential call*, referring to that ministry that best supports one's gifts, graces, and temperament. The providential call implies that not all who receive the secret call will be effective as ministers of Word and sacrament, whether as a pastor of a congregation or as a pastor in specialized ministry. The fourth call Niebuhr identified is the *ecclesiastical call*. This call is the summons and invitation of a gospel community to engage in the work of ministry. It has a communal character, where a body of believers affirms a person who received the call to enter the ministry.

Etymologically, calling comes from the Latin word *vocare*. Hence the close relationship between the words calling and vocation. *The Oxford English Dictionary* shows two primary meanings for the word calling. First, "the summoning or inviting into a spiritual office or to the pastorate of a church," and second, "to call up a memory of the past," as in evoking a memory.³ This double

meaning of call “weirds life,” as Calvin—from Calvin and Hobbes fame—would argue.⁴ Calling implies not only a visionary look to the future, but also a careful look into one’s past. It requires of one to call on one’s self, even as one is called by God and called by a faith community. Calling requires discernment or “sober judgment,” to use the apostle Paul’s charge to the Romans (Rom. 12:3).

Discernment of call is a well-established Christian tradition. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407), a contemporary to Augustine, expressed much concern regarding the men who entered the ministry. He used the unflattering metaphor of a disease to describe some ministers:

We are no longer able to counsel those who are under our guidance, because we ourselves are possessed with the same fever as they. We, who are appointed by God to heal others, need the physician ourselves. What further hope of recovery is there left, when even the very physicians need the healing hand of others? . . . On the Priesthood: Tell me, where do you think all the disorders in the churches originate? I think their origin is in the careless and random way in which the prelates are chosen and appointed.⁵

Chrysostom’s view were later echoed by the church father John Climacus (c. 570-649), who wrote in his book, *To the Shepherd*, that some shepherds are wolves amongst the sheep, “agitating” and “destroying” souls.⁶ His assessment was that these pastors engaged in such destructive acts because their own souls were agitated and destroyed. The Reformed tradition followed this dialectic view of self and of call. John Calvin’s famous dictum that knowledge of God and knowledge of self follows the thoughts of Chrysostom and Climacus. “Nearly all the true and sound wisdom we possess . . .,” wrote Calvin in the opening lines of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, “consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”⁷ He continues: “For who in the world would not gladly remain as he is . . . as long as he does not know himself, that is, while content with his own gifts, and either ignorant or unmindful of his own misery?”⁸ The self-knowledge that Calvin sought—making knowledge of God possible—stretches much further than the categories of sin, repentance, and forgiveness, as can be seen in Calvin’s interest in education. The way he structured the primary schools in Geneva suggests that he saw a person holistically, requiring physical exercise from his students and forbidding excessive physical punishment from school principals.

The Reformed tradition has always made discernment between the personal and the ecclesiastical natures of the call to ministry an important task. The Presbyterian theologian, Seward Hiltner (1909-1984), wrote in his classic work, *Preface to Pastoral Theology* (1958):

We say that no [person] can have all the qualities in the needed degree. No shepherd can be perfectly understanding, accepting, wise, tender and loving. But recognition of one's own biases, ambiguities, and inadequacies can go a long way toward making one available to others in need. The shepherd need not be perfect. But the shepherd does need a certain kind of attitude toward [his or her] imperfection and inadequacy.⁹

In the mind of Hiltner, there are pastors who are not "available to others in need." It is ironic that pastors, many of whom are "always" available, might not be as available as they thought. Recognizing one's biases, ambiguities, and inadequacies is an important step as one wants to become available to others. But recognition is only the first step in keeping biases, ambiguities, and inadequacies from impinging on a minister's ministry. Cognitive knowledge is not the same as the emotional knowledge needed before one can be available for another person. A contemporary theologian who calls on ministers and prospective ministers to gain emotional knowledge about themselves is the African American pastoral theologian, Edward Wimberly.

In his book, *Recalling Our Own Stories: Spiritual Renewal for Religious Caregivers* (1997), Wimberly finds that one is called to enter the ministry by God *and* by one's family! What at first sounds blasphemous ends up being congruent with how Christians through the ages have discerned the call people receive from God to enter the ministry. Wimberly, an ordained pastor trained as a family therapist and pastoral counselor, states that in his work with pastors around their call to the ministry a dynamic tension surfaces. "Questions emerge from them," he writes, "whether their call to ministry has clearly come from God or from their families of origin."¹⁰ These pastors, in calling upon themselves, soon realize that their families gave them skills that seemingly prepared them for the ministry, but that leads them into being unfulfilled and not effective in their ministries. Soon, the pastors realize that the "gifts" they received from their families became their Achilles' heel.

I agree with Wimberly that chaplains receive their call to the ministry from God *and* from their families. Congruent with the nature of paradoxical statements, the tension in this statement cannot be resolved. If someone would say that she is called to the ministry only by God and not also through the relationships that formed her, it is a dangerous statement. And if someone would say that he called himself to the ministry, it would be ludicrous and reflecting of utmost narcissism.

To give a concrete example of how families of origin call their sons and daughters to the ministry, Wimberly identifies powerful personal and family

dynamics, which he calls myths. Myths are those “beliefs and convictions that people have about themselves, their relationships with others, their roles in life, and their ministry.”¹¹ These myths, imbedded in the stories of our lives, play an important role in the lives of people who receive Niebuhr’s secret call. The following myths, which can be understood as ways that one learned how to be in relationship with others (including with God), are especially common to chaplains:¹²

- *The myth of rejection*: The belief that one is unwelcome and unwanted in life.
- *The myth of powerlessness*: The belief that one has no real power or agency to affect one’s own life, the lives of others, or the world.
- *The myth of the loner and of sole responsibility*: The myth that it happens best when one does it oneself often functions as a defense against one’s fear of emotional intimacy.
- *The myth of the good girl*: This myth tells women to be good and gracious at all times, thereby disowning especially their agency and anger.
- *The myth of invulnerability*: This myth does not allow one to show one’s vulnerability.
- *The myth of self-sacrifice and unlovability*: The belief that if one sacrifices oneself, one will be loved.
- *The myth of the savior or the family mediator*: One’s role in life is to bring peace and tranquility to strained relationships.
- *The myth of premature adult responsibility*: One lives with the memory of having been a parentified child, taking on age-inappropriate emotional responsibility.

It seems that the vision of being in the ministry is accompanied by the illusion that the painful and grandiose memories pastors carry will be healed or honored. There is an unspoken and often unconscious complementary connection between the myths and ministry. Ministry is a place where one is accepted because of one’s role, or where one is expected to be the one who can make a difference in the context one serves. Painful is the awareness that the wounds chaplains have received in their families of origin and the defenses they developed to protect them against the wounds follow them into ministry. There, they are often re-wounded, leaving them to be either walking wounded or wounded healers, pending on how well they have called upon themselves. To quote Wimberly: “[The metaphor of the walking wounded] characterizes those of us who deny our vulnerability and woundedness and who, consequently, walk around as wounded people seeking to help others. Instead of achieving good enough empathy, we become dangerous to ourselves and those we seek to care for.”¹³ Walking wounded are “soul destroyers,” as John Climacus would have identified this group of clergy.

Who will be the “physicians” Chrysostom was seeking to nurture wholeness and health not only in the church, but also in the lives of ministers? Who will nurture the agitated and destroyed souls of clergy so that they do not become predators and perpetrators of sorts? Who will assist current and future ministers to integrate knowledge of God and knowledge of self? Who will empower and nurture the next generation of pastors as they discover their biases, ambiguities, and inadequacies? Who will assist future and current clergy to discern those family myths that come disguised in the voice of God? Who will help the church discern the relationship between the secret call, the providential call, and the ecclesiastical call of a person? To put it in other words, who will help the church discern who is fit for the ministry?

I find it alarming, but not surprising, that I have not met a single pastor or seminarian that doubted his or her fitness for the ministry. Surely, not everyone receiving the secret call is fit to become a minister of Word and sacrament! Some might be fit for the ministry only after they have done significant personal, spiritual, and relational work. Others’ secret call will never be validated by the faith community.

In the body of Christ, chaplains are a selected group who can assist the church with these questions. Chaplains can assist those who are called to the ministry to call on themselves. If the church believes that a purely theological answer to the problem of vocation (*Did God call you to the ministry?*) is all that is needed, the church greatly underestimates the complexity of God’s calling of men and women to the ministry. Moreover, if the church resigns its responsibility around vocation to the secular world, surely it will lead to failure. Humanistic psychology will not be able to integrate the two paradoxical aspects, the divine and the deeply personal. To use a phrase educator Parker Palmer uses, chaplains can assist the church and pastors in discovering “vocational integrity,” a discovery that often leads into the depths of one’s despair.¹⁴

Those called by God to lead Christ’s church and those who educate the next generation of clergy need chaplains to assist them to “think with sober judgment” about future ministers, or they run the risk of being “careless and random” as they prepare and ordain the next generation of clergy for the church of Christ. Likewise, chaplains can play an important role in assuring that the current generation of clergy can experience longevity of call and continue to grow in their ministries, and not leave the ministry through burnout or flame-up.

Even as I argue that the church of Christ needs chaplains to understand the complexity of being called by God, I have to state that chaplains have to call

upon themselves first. What memories, now kept as frozen moments in the depths of their souls, do chaplains need to evoke as they seek to understand their call to enter the ministry? Chaplains need an integrated understanding of their own call before they can assist others to grow in a similar understanding. Chaplains too need to strive for “vocational integrity,” the end result of a difficult and often painful process of discernment and introspection.

In this first section, then, I argued that chaplains need to assist the church in discovering the rich and multifaceted meaning of call. Second, I argue that chaplains can serve the church of Christ by teaching the church the art of having a conversation.

Conversation

Recently, I was involved in a conversation with a group of pastors and church leaders who wanted to talk about homosexuality. They were concerned about an issue that significantly increases the anxiety in most, if not all, mainline denominations. The viewpoints among those who were present varied widely. Some came across as threatened and others seem to have given little prior attention to a complex subject we know relatively little about. As I listened to the arguments, I was struck by our inability to have a conversation about the issue at hand. Rather, personal opinions and theological interpretations were proclaimed. The presenters offered arguments that had to be countered, points of view that were challenged, and engaged opponents that had to be silenced. The rhetoric was disembodied, as if persons whose sexual identity is homosexual do not exist and as if their own deeply rooted views of homosexuality did not influence their proclamations. The essence of having a conversation – listening to each other – was absent. What took place was not a conversation at all, despite the title of “an open conversation,” as the event was announced.

What I witnessed reminded me of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who found in his *Life Together* a close relationship between being the body of Christ and the art of listening. He wrote the following about Christian community:

The first service that one owes to others consists in listening to them. . . . Christians, and especially ministers, so often think they must always contribute something when they are in the company of others, that this is the one service they have to render. They forgot that listening can be a greater service than speaking. Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, for these Christians are talking where they should be listening.¹⁵

The art of having a conversation is central to the body of Christ as a gospel community and requires effective listening techniques. To have a conversation in such a manner as to honor the thoughts and feelings of others does not come easily to the church. As the church speaks across, and not into, the flow of people's thoughts and speech, the church becomes a poor listener and a bad conversationalist. Conversations take place not only with others, but the church needs to converse within itself too. At times it is almost as if the church lives in denial, that tenacious defense that keeps the church from talking about what is truly significant in the life of the church. The denial of not having significant conversations about critical issues such as clergy shortages, dying congregations, ethics in the church, church in conflict, and more, comes at a great cost to Christ's church.

Old Testament theologian, Kathleen O'Connor, in her book, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, becomes a witness to her own family that she describes as a family of denial. She writes:

My expressive, loving family practiced denial. It forbade anger, ignored sorrow, and created a culture of silence about hard things. From generation to generation, we practiced denial: we looked on the bright side, walked on the sunny side, and remembered that tomorrow is another day. Like many assimilating immigrant groups, deaths went ungrieved, anger lurked but could not speak, and broken dreams were barely noticed. Some of us lost great chunks of ourselves along the way.¹⁶

"Some of us lost great chunks of ourselves along the way. . . ." What a statement of truth-telling and a sad witness to family life. I have yet to meet the person who has not lost a chunk of soul. Conversation, the sharing of stories, is pivotal in reclaiming lost parts. Conversation, then, is not superficial talk about this or that. It is definitely not "killing time" and it is not chitchat. Rather, for chaplains, conversation can be defined as the art of empowering others to talk about what is truly significant in their lives, while including God as a conversation partner. Conversation not only implies and creates intimacy and vulnerability, but it initiates the potential for change and growth.

Chaplains can facilitate conversation and break the silence around many "hard things" in churches and in the lives of families and individuals. I think of giving anger a voice, of grieving losses, of exposing many kinds of family violence, of exposing and addressing trauma. I can add speaking about sexuality, which makes the church extremely anxious, or power relations, which can act in a soul-making manner. In conversation the church can speak out against and resist sexism and racism or other oppressions. Chaplains can assist people in reclaiming the chunks of themselves that got lost along the way when the

invisible line between parental discipline and physical abuse were crossed; or when the desire of one person spilled over into a two-body relationship, robbing the other of his or her personhood. Some chaplains empower those in prison and on the fringes of our society to reclaim their personhood and membership in society. Other chaplains can help rebuild the interpersonal bridge that was severed through the painful internalization of shaming experiences. Chaplains can facilitate healing and wholeness through the life-giving act of having a conversation.

To be such a facilitator, chaplains need to discern the “chunks of [themselves] that got lost along the way.” Chaplains need to listen to themselves. What experiences in their childhoods and lives have called chaplains to a ministry that always leaves them being and feeling on the outside? Are they replaying the position and experience they had in their families of origin or among their church family members? Moreover, in the replaying of such a familiar position, are they re-wounding themselves in ways they have been wounded before? Surely feeling on the outside is not a feeling and position chaplains discovered only after they entered the ministry.

Following O’Connor, I can say that my loving Dutch Reformed family labeled me as the “independent one,” while my older sister was labeled “the dependent one.” This split was born in part in my father’s family that only knew sons, leaving them without any “knowledge” of how to raise a girl child. My “sense of independence” often left me feeling unprotected and insecure, especially during transitional periods of my life, such as when I went to school for the first time or when my family moved from one town to another. I even “invented” rheumatoid arthritis and severe asthma attacks to gain my parents’ attention but did not receive the holding environment I needed. It is no wonder that I was called by God to be a pastor and a chaplain to people. My family called me to that ministry of isolation many years before I heard God’s call. Now I find myself halfway around the world, far removed from the country and family that gave me life and my faith, forming my own family.

If chaplains cannot overcome the denial of the pervasiveness and significance of trauma in their own lives, they will not be able to lead the church in conversation beyond the church’s position of denial. A culture of silence about past and present pain and trauma is a common occurrence often among seminarians and theologians. Those who cannot overcome their denial will see and treat people as objects and not as subjects. Though well intentioned, they will burn out in ministry or flame-up in scandal as any sense of solidarity, mutuality, and belonging are thwarted. Others will believe that the proclamation of some truth will be sufficient to facilitate healing and change. Like Docetists of old, they will avoid anything mundane such as the embodied self, which has emotions and

finds its identity in numerous relationships. Some pastors will remain in such denial that they will see their community as “perfect,” without any trauma or significant losses.

Being a chaplain is a refusal to accept such denial. Chaplains practice truth-telling through the art of having a conversation. They invite people not only in times of crisis, trauma, and disorientation, but also in times of joy, gratitude, and orientation to find the connection among their stories, the God-story, and the Word who became flesh. Being a chaplain implies that one brings the skills needed for conversation back to the church. One such skill is the ability to listen to another person. Without the capacity to listen well to another person, the art of having a conversation is not possible. People need to feel heard before a conversation can flow, or else the conversation will break down. Feeling heard, however, is nearly impossible in a world where there are no “natural listeners.”

In his book, *The Lost Art of Listening*, Michael Nichols states that key reasons for a person’s lack of ability to listen are the listener’s inability to suspend his own agenda, a failure to contain preconceived notions and expectations, and an unconscious defensive emotional reactivity.¹⁷ Listening requires a suspension of memory, desire, and judgment, and, for a few moments at least, existing for the other person. It is to make a conscious effort to hear; to attend closely, so as to hear; and to pay close attention. A good listener is a witness, taking the other person seriously. Listening *follows* an individual deeper into his or her own person, rather than *leading* the person somewhere or offering idle reassurances. Listening remains a difficult, if not an impossible task if a chaplain continues to listen with the ears her family of origin gave her. What if the chunk that got lost along the way included one’s ears? Conversation and listening, even though both anticipate a two-body process, require that the listener listens to herself first.

Who within the church can teach the body of Christ the lost art of having a conversation about “hard things”? Can a gospel community be the body of Christ if the community cannot have a conversation and if they cannot listen to each other? Chaplains are trained to foster an understanding attitude. They can risk not knowing the other person’s thoughts or feelings, waiting patiently for others to reveal themselves. Chaplains can teach the body of Christ basic skills that promote listening, such as paying attention, appreciating what is said, and affirming what is heard. Likewise, learning how to ask questions of clarification and elaboration, and not asking factual questions, can facilitate a conversation.¹⁸ The church can learn how to use accurate empathy, concrete and genuine communication, confrontation, appropriate self-disclosure, and immediacy to reach across the divide that separates people who learned early in life to protect themselves against the dangers other people represent. Chaplains can help the church rediscover Howard Clinebell’s famous categories of pastoral responses that

should be used often: supportive, understanding, and interpretive statements. Other responses should be used selectively: probing, evaluative, and advising statements. And some statements should be avoided: controlling, impatient, and moralistic statements.¹⁹ Chaplains can help the church unlearn attitudes and behaviors that make any conversation impossible: In his book *Giving Counsel: A Minister's Guidebook*, Donald Capps names the disrespect of a patronizing attitude, the disrespect of manipulation and of impatience, or the disrespect of being too lax. In addition, Capps writes:

For persons who are seminary trained, one of the most difficult challenges that providing counsel for another person poses is that of learning—or relearning—to talk in concrete ways. Seminary education often encourages the use of abstractions — “humanity, church, sin, mission, Godself, involvement, commitment, faith.” These are important words, but not very descriptive.²⁰

As the church learns about conversation and listening, the church can receive the fruits of a chaplain’s “bilingualism,” for most chaplains speak many languages besides theology. Some chaplains can speak theology and psychology or psychodynamics, others can speak theology and justice, some can speak theology and addictions, and others can speak theology and military. Others still can use theological and corporate language. All chaplains, however, can speak incarnation and compassion. Regardless, the church needs the bilingual conversation skills chaplains were trained to have, for conversation is rarely, if ever, done only in theology.

Chaplain Cynthia, a Clinical Pastoral Education supervisor and hospital chaplain, was in conversation with a group of pastors who asked her to assist them in rediscovering their call. As part of the process, the pastors told their life stories. One, Pastor Christine, a “PK” (or pastor’s kid), described a traumatic event as a young child where she was repeatedly sexually molested by a family friend invited into her home by her pastor-father. Pastor Christine described how she saw herself leaving her body during those moments of abuse. She felt calm and collected, looking down on her own person as the family friend would fondle and abuse her. She did not experience any pain or fear. Her pastor-father and mother denied that it could have occurred, and because it did not happen, she did not receive any counseling or care. As Pastor Christine told the group about how anxious she is in her ministry, she suddenly looked tired. She said that she has not trusted many with this painful part of her life.

Pastor Christine’s colleagues in ministry responded to her narrative of harm by stating that it was God’s grace that she was peaceful at that time. Her tired and absent look, however, did not communicate inner peace and the sense of gratitude God’s grace calls forth. Rather, Pastor Christine described dissociation

(also called neurotic denial), that immature defense that allows a person to dissociate consciousness from the real self. Dissociation evades depression and anxiety by distraction. Regarding this defense, psychiatrist George Vaillant writes: “[It] can transform a roller coaster ride from terror to joy; it can allow the victim of indescribable torture to leave the reality of [her] tormented body and view the process as a spectator.”²¹ Like all defense mechanisms, dissociation is given to us in God’s wisdom to defend our souls against destruction in times of severe trauma. Dissociation, however, does not protect that soul from being deeply wounded.

Chaplain Cynthia responded to Pastor Christine saying it must have been very difficult for her to share her painful story and that she can see how tired her body is. She thanked Pastor Christine for placing her trust in the group and asked her whether she could share where she finds herself emotionally after exposing her story of sexual molestation. The group was silent. Pastor Christine looked confused. She asked Chaplain Cynthia if she could repeat the question, which Chaplain Cynthia did. Pastor Christine could not answer the question and became silent. Her colleagues asked her if she was “all right.” One responded in helpless anger: “I cannot believe your parents did nothing.” Pastor Christine just looked at them and started crying. The trauma of nearly forty years ago revisited her in the group. Chaplain Cynthia’s bilingualism, which she learned in her training to be a chaplain and continues to learn in supervision, helped her listen to Pastor Christine in ways the other pastors could not. Chaplain Cynthia’s training helped her contain her own prejudices, thoughts, and desires, creating space for Pastor Christine’s painful confusion to be honored.

A central aspect of being a chaplain is the ability to sustain a conversation, to be a good listener. Some conversations are turning-point conversations leading to decisions of some sorts. Other conversations have shared self-disclosure leading to deeper intimacy of all involved. Conversations can expose and nurture growing edges of a person or conversations can have a rehearsal quality, where a person practices and remembers a future conversation.²² Regardless of what kind of conversation one wants to have, however, one has to have a conversation with oneself first, possibly even reclaiming the chunk(s) of oneself that was lost along the way. Then, by the grace of God, the big house of denial, the church, might have a conversation as it listens to its members, thereby becoming a compassionate presence to the world.

Charity

Rowan Williams, in his *Lost Icons: Reflections on Cultural Bereavement*, argues that Western society has lost core “imaginative patterns” that determined specific self-understanding.²³ Williams identifies modernism and post-modernism as having eroded Western society’s capacity to remember childhood, to talk about

community, and to nurture the soul. Williams calls the capacities that were lost, "lost icons." He believes that communal bereavement of these losses is needed before any reclamation can occur. Williams argues that communal grieving can be done in primarily two ways. First, a Messianic figure is beckoned to bring apocalyptic (and often violent) transformation. The second kind of communal grieving is grieving that focuses on the concrete here-and-now, where a sense of community allows *the community to take a careful look at itself*. Grieving becomes a witness to the loss and pain experienced and in hopeful expectation, a new reality is anticipated.²⁴ In *Lost Icons*, Williams devotes a chapter to charity as he writes to reclaim childhood, community, and the soul.

The dictionary defines *charity* as Christian love; a word represented by *caritas* in the Vulgate and *agape* in New Testament Greek. Charity refers to God's love for humanity and a person's love of God and neighbor.²⁵ In Christlike conduct, charity is a disposition to evaluate leniently and hopefully the character, aims, and destinies of others, and to make allowance for their apparent faults and shortcomings. Charity implies large-heartedness and practical beneficences to one's neighbors, especially to the poor. Charity, however, has a dark side, as the proverb *cold as charity* indicates.

In the past, charity use to mean love in two directions: from God and towards others. The original understandings of charity have been lost as charity now refers to the benefaction of the needy. It is a hierarchical relationship between those who have and those who have not. The church now finds itself in a time where charity implies the material world appearing in a world of scarcity. Paradoxically, charity might actually encourage us to thrive in a materialistic, consumerist, and competitive culture in which some are winners and others are losers. The Christlike bond between people and with God that the word used to indicate has been lost or is in severe danger of becoming a "lost icon." Still, Williams argues that the church needs to reclaim charity to have any meaning in life, for charity, like conversation, helps us recognize the other. Without such recognition, and the recognition of things a person can *only* value and enjoy *with* other people, the church cannot thrive. Williams states that the church is in need of a social miracle that brings a new kind of imagination, one that can imagine relations other than those of master and slave, advantaged and disadvantaged.²⁶ It is the imagination Paul called the Galatians to have when he stated that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

It is ironic that the Historical Jesus movement, a movement that often denies Jesus as the Christ, writes most compellingly about the compassionate nature of Jesus. In his book, *Meeting Jesus for the First Time*, Marcus Borg identifies compassion, which he defines as the ability *to feel with* and the result of charity,

as the essence of Jesus' teaching and ethics.²⁷ It is summarized by Jesus' words in Luke 6:36: "Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate." Borg refers to the Hebrew and the Aramaic words for compassion, which are associated with the loins, and more specifically, the womb.²⁸ Charity and compassion thus defines not only the very nature of Christlike behavior, but identifies God as "womb-like" or like a womb. This reference to the womb should not be confused with Nicodemus's invitation to be born anew (John 3) even as it holds that connotation as well. The womb or inner space of Jesus refers to the compassionate and concrete "taking in" of the other in a life-giving manner through nourishing and caring acts.²⁹ The womb embraces and encompasses, allowing the existence of the other.

To complete the *imitatio Dei* and be compassionate as God is compassionate is to be like a womb to others.³⁰ Compassionate acts include, among others, being with and eating with people; embracing and listening to those who are touched in a loving way and who never are heard; welcoming people into a loving community; affirming people; and more. These acts transcend the mere speaking of words or soothing of a conscience. Charity becomes a way of being. *Imitatio Dei*, when understood in these terms, leads to a reclaiming of the word *charity*. Risking that the word *charity* might become disembodied, a practical manifestation of being charitable is important. Hospitality, the allowing of others to enter into one's inner space or personal presence, is an act of charity.

In her book, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality in the Christian Tradition*, Christine Pohl revisits the discipline of welcoming strangers, the discipline of hospitality, as a core Christian tradition. This tradition too was lost along the way as other industries claimed it.³¹ Pohl argues that somehow hospitality has the connotation of being a guest to family and friends, to familiar people. Contemporary understandings of hospitality do not bring forth images of strangers or the disenfranchised. The "hospitality industry" – hotels, resorts, and restaurants – surely do not cater for those who do not carry a Diner's Club or an American Express card. Hospitality, once seen as "the good" within a community, has become a "lost icon." Yet again, the Son of Man is searching for a cup of cold water and a place to lay his head, but to no avail (Matt. 24:31-46). Our Lord remains a stranger and nobody welcomes him.

Pohl refers to John Chrysostom, quoted earlier on call, who stated that Christian hospitality should be face-to-face, gracious, unassuming, nearly indiscriminate, and always enthusiastic.³² She also refers to Luther and Calvin in this regard. Luther believed that when one portrays hospitality to a stranger, that "God himself is in our home, is being fed, is lying down and resting."³³ Likewise, Calvin wrote comprehensively about charity and hospitality to strangers:

Therefore, whatever man you meet who needs your aid, you have no reason to refuse to help him. Say: "He is a stranger"; but the Lord has given him a mark that ought to be familiar to you, by virtue of that he forbids you to despise your own flesh (Isa. 58:7).³⁴ Say, "He is contemptible and worthless"; but the Lord shows him to be one to whom he has deigned to give the beauty of his image. . . . Say that he does not deserve even your least effort for his sake; but the image of God, which recommends him to you, is worthy of your giving yourself and all your possessions.³⁵

Calvin's thoughts on charity are filled with an awareness of the needy and with a sense of dignity. They are governed by his conviction that all beings, including the "Moor or barbarian," were marked with the image of God. Thus, even as hospitality always included family, friends, and influential contacts, the distinctly Christian contribution is the emphasis on the poor and the needy, the ones who could not return the favor. The kingdom of God cannot manifest itself without hospitality.

Similar to learning the art of having a conversation, Pohl believes that "hospitality is a skill and a gift, . . . a practice which flourishes as multiple skills are developed, as particular commitments and values are nurtured, and as certain settings are cultivated."³⁶ She states that abstract theological reflections on charity, hospitality and welcoming the "other" are common in today's churches.³⁷ Hospitable *attitudes* do not offer the same blessing and challenges as hospitality, which can be defined as strangers welcoming strangers into a new community because God invited them into God's household. If we use the spoken word to facilitate the awareness of charity, churches might rarely go beyond hospitable attitudes. Maybe the subversive nature of hospitality, for hospitality is a form of resistance, is too much for the church to allow members to learn. Hospitality is dangerous, for who will be invited into the fold next? How will the presence of strangers change the church? The soul (or is that the unconscious?) of the church does not easily recognize the "other" in its midst, not to speak of the person outside the fold.

The need for hospitality is found in every setting in which the church has a presence. As a professor of pastoral care and someone who can readily identify being a chaplain, I have had conversations with a group of female seminary students who believe that the language used within our building is paternalistic and reflective of strong feelings against women in ministry. They described how the majority of chapel services only speak of God as male, how some of their male peers become aggressive in defending male-only leadership for the church, and how some churches in the Reformed Church in America refuse to acknowledge their call from God to enter the ministry. The hurt these rejections

cause and the isolation it brings to their lives were apparent. As I listened to them, I had to contain my anger at a community who prides itself on being hospitable, yet I am a witness to a group of people who would speak to the unwelcoming nature of our community. (My mind drifted to how my community engages its emeritus professors.) Hospitality can be elusive, even in Christian communities.

“The most potent setting for hospitality,” Pohl writes, “is in the overlap of private and public space.”³⁸ Chaplains already operate in this space and are therefore a group within the church that can teach the church what Christlike and thus womblike behavior looks like. Chaplains can help the church live into its mission to be hospitable. They can give the church a new imagination whereby they can see the needs of others. Like the tree of life that gives shelter to the birds of heaven, the church has to be a shelter to the peoples of the earth. By definition, chaplains already practice this tradition, and this might be part of the church’s general rejection of chaplaincy or specialized ministries. Chaplains remind the church of its disobedience to God’s call to be a blessing to the world and the church does not want to be reminded of this. Chaplains are comfortable in the presence of strangers, but strangers make the church anxious, even if the strangers are church youth who experience life in ways foreign to the church. It is ironic that chaplains, often left out by their brothers and sisters in Christ, can teach the church how to *take in* others.

Who else but those already living on the periphery of the faith community and intimate with feelings of rejection can reach out in hospitality to people living on the fringes of society? Hospitality always takes place at the margins. Chaplains can teach the church to be “large-hearted,” to have a large inner space, to have a peaceful disposition of leniency and of hope, to be charitable. Chaplains know about inclusivity and being with a person. A chaplain told me about offering hope to a dying Jewish soldier who never knew Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior but did meet a chaplain who was there in God’s name as he neared his death. Some brothers and sisters in Christ were offended by this chaplain’s ministry to the soldier, for the soldier was not evangelized by the chaplain and died without naming Christ as his Lord and Savior. Chaplains can help the church reclaim the very meaning of incarnational ministry, that ministry of being Christ’s hands, feet, and ears. As stated, chaplains have experienced the cost of incarnational ministries that defy boundaries and culturally generated distinctions. It is a question, however, whether the church is ready to pay a similar cost. Hospitality is not cheap, but the rewards are enormous.

Of course, the church will first have to admit that it too fell into the cultural paradigm that has eroded the very meaning of charity. In many churches, charity has become as faceless as women and children who are victims of family

violence; as the homeless who walk city sidewalks and sleep under bridges; as the convicts who have to reenter society; as the homosexual person who acts out in a city restroom; or as the soldier who enters war because politicians could not negotiate peace. In other cases, often in crises, charity becomes an outlet for the church's, or church leaders,' anxiety.

Chaplains too need to ask whether they have fallen prey to a culture that erodes charity. In a recent conversation with a minister in a specialized ministry I was struck by the fact that he referred to his parishioners, whom he counsels at his church's counseling center, as "clients." When I asked him about this, he admitted that he is tired, feels burnt out, and that calling his church members "clients" gave him the distance he needed from them, thereby helping him sustain himself. He had no sustainable inner space to welcome his own parishioners.

Conclusion

In this paper I argued that being a chaplain means taking seriously one's call, mastering the art of having a conversation, and being charitable by *taking in* and touching others through incarnational ministry. I further argued that the body of Christ needs chaplains for these very reasons, for the church will not be able to establish God's reign on earth if it lacks any of these aspects. I deliberately did not explicitly answer any questions as to how chaplains can be significant to the church or how chaplains can empower the church to think anew about call, conversation, and charity. The "how-question" is not unimportant, but asking "how" in any process of transformation and integration is often done prematurely. Rather, the question needs to be delayed until initial work has been done.

A more fruitful question, thus, would be to ask what work chaplains need to do around call, conversation, and charity. Or what makes it difficult for chaplains to do such work.

Of course finding answers to these questions is not easy. However, if chaplains or ministers in specialized ministries can be in conversation with each other and with the church, answers will be discovered. Only after chaplains have thought about themselves in sober judgment and discovered the painful process of growth and integration in being a chaplain, shall they be able to become significant to the church and empower the church to be significant to the world.

Chaplains engage in pastoral ministry, that ministry James Dittes refers to the as "the art of making space for others to grow."³⁹ It was the objective of this essay to create such a space around the important topics of call, conversation, and charity. These topics require continued discernment, and chaplains can assist the church

in this task. Without continued reflection on the call to enter the ministry, on how to remain in conversation, and how to be charitable and inviting to strangers, the church of Jesus Christ will not be able to be the body of Christ in today's world.

ENDNOTES

¹ This paper was read in a modified format at the Chaplain's Conference of the Christian Reformed Church, Calvin College, June 12, 2003.

² *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry: Reflections on the Aims of Theological Education* (New York: Harper, 1956), 63-64.

³ *Oxford English Dictionary* (CD-Rom) 2nd ed., version 2.01 (London: Oxford Univ. Press).

⁴ "Verbing weirds life" is a phrase used by cartoonist Bill Watterson's character, Calvin, the friend of Hobbes.

⁵ Thomas C. Oden and Don S. Browning, *Care of Souls in the Classic Tradition*. Theology and Pastoral Care Series (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 12, 103.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷ Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The Library of Christian Classics, vol. 20-21 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 35.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁹ Seward Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology: The Ministry and Theory of Shepherding* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958), 34.

¹⁰ Edward P. Wimberly, *Recalling Our Own Stories: Spiritual Renewal for Religious Caregivers*, The Jossey-Bass Religion-in-Practice Series (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 101.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹² *Ibid.*, 14-33.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁴ Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 43.

¹⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 98.

¹⁶ Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 89.

¹⁷ Michael P. Nichols, *The Lost Art of Listening* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995), 41.

¹⁸ Donald Capps, *Giving Counsel: A Minister's Guidebook* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 23.

¹⁹ Howard J. Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Resources for the Ministry of Healing and Growth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 94-96.

²⁰ Capps, *Giving Counsel*, 36.

²¹ George E. Vaillant, *The Wisdom of the Ego* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1993), 56.

²² Gaylord Noyce, in Capps, *Giving Counsel*, 74. Capps quote: Gaylord Noyce, *The Art of Pastoral Conversation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981).

²³ Rowan Williams, *Lost Icons: Reflections on Cultural Bereavement* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 127-28.

²⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary* (CD-Rom) 2nd edit., version 2.01 (London: Oxford Univ. Press).

²⁶ Williams, *Lost Icons*, 85.

²⁷ Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus & the Heart of Contemporary Faith* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 46ff.

²⁸ Gen. 43:30: "And Joseph made haste; for his womb did yearn upon his brother: and he sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there."

²⁹ For more on the "inner space," see Erik Erikson's classic essays, "Womanhood and the Inner Space," and, "Once More the Inner Space," in Erik H. Erikson, *Identity, Youth, and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), 261-94; and Erik H. Erikson, *Life History and the Historical Moment* (New York: Norton, 1975), 225-47.

³⁰ Borg, *Meeting Jesus*, 49.

³¹ Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

³² *Ibid.*, 6.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ In the context of true fasting and worship: Verse 7: Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

³⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols, ed. John T. McNeil (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.7.6.

³⁶ Pohl, *Making Room*, 9.

³⁷ Ibid., 14.

³⁸ Ibid., 12.

³⁹ James E. Dittes, *Re-Calling Ministry*, ed. Donald Capps (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), 9.

The Goal of Education is Action

Cynthia Holder Rich

Introduction

The women students at the Ivory Graduate Seminary in Fianarantsoa, Madagascar, had a problem. These women lived and served in a society that accepted violence against women as a norm and denied women and girls both reproductive rights and the right to refuse sex. They served as well within a Christian community that erected significant obstacles toward the recognition of the vocation of women for ministry. The women students, who had somehow found their way to the highest level of theological education available on the island despite real challenges, were in need of support and safe space for discussion. They often questioned how to maintain the integrity of their calls in the midst of a hostile and often toxic society and church community. Because most of them were wives and mothers as well as students, all of the childcare, housework, and cooking fell to them, so most of them were working the equivalent of two full-time jobs. Exhaustion and attendant vulnerability to disease were constant issues. Yet these women were committed to the ministries to which God had called them, and they had a crucial need for support.

The women faculty of the seminary, who knew firsthand the challenges under which women students worked, decided to offer an elective class. Because any meetings or classes offered only for women were apt to create suspicion and controversy, the class was opened to both women and men; but the text for the class, Renita Weems's *Battered Love*,¹ encouraged potential participants to self-select according to interest. The resulting class included all women students, and no men opted to participate. Early session discussions centered on scripture and Weems's book. Gradually, however, the women brought their life experiences into dialogue with scripture and the work of a biblical scholar to whom they had not previously been exposed, whose approach to scripture was new to them. The class offered permission to discuss painful truths and to find strength in community for the journey of faith that had brought the women to seminary and into ministry. Insights explored in the class empowered the women for their often-difficult work of standing up for justice—for themselves and for others.

"Educational activity . . . is political activity," says Thomas Groome. He then defines education as ". . . any deliberate and structured intervention in people's lives which attempts to influence how they live their lives in society."²

Education is supposed to do something in the lives of people. It is supposed to change the way we do things, how we see things, what actions we take in our lives. It forms, informs, and re-forms us; as Maria Harris says, it *refashions* us, ". . . lifting up and lifting out those forms through which we might refashion

ourselves into a pastoral people.”³ Through educational ministry, we in the church hope to empower people to name the depth and pain of brokenness within us, the church, the society, and the world, while in the same moment announcing and proclaiming the new life that is the Christian enterprise.⁴ This is most certainly the political activity of which Groome speaks.

Baptism is the starting point for the church’s “deliberate and structured intervention” in people’s lives. In baptism, we take vows to stand with the baptized in their faith journeys. In the Reformed Church in America, these vows include promises to “teach the gospel of God’s love,” to “be examples of Christian faith and character,” and to “give [the] strong support of God’s family in fellowship, prayer and service.”⁵ These promises echo congregational vows from other Christian denominations, including my own; at baptism, Presbyterians promise “to live the Christian faith, so to teach it to [those baptized]” and “to love, encourage, and support [the baptized], sharing the good news of Christ’s gospel,” so “to help [them] know and follow Christ.”⁶ As Norman Kansfield reminds us, if the church takes baptism seriously, “to each baptized individual, the church owes rigorous education [and] continuous nurture” to assist people in the development and absorption of “a basic framework for the content of faith—a utilitarian, experiential theology,” out of which a faithful life can be lived.⁷

In the church, however, the grand and awesome promises made at baptism do not compose the, or perhaps even *one of the*, primary foci for us in the planning of educational ministries. Too often, the vast power of education for the growing and nurture of disciples is reduced by common misunderstandings of the task. When the term “Christian education” is spoken, thoughts turn to “Sunday school,” and that for children alone (understood in many congregations as that which children do during worship so adults can have peace). “Education” is not equivalent to “schooling,” nor is it limited to activity in which only children take part. The ministry which I am advocating is an active part of the whole of life, a journey that does not end with the reception of a diploma, degree, or certificate.

Another common misunderstanding about the work of education is that once one is an adult, those who continue theological and biblical education are by definition church professionals—the clergy and other church staff. In contrast, this article argues for vital and dynamic education, taking many forms, touching on a world of issues, concerns, and subject areas, which equips all who follow Christ to live their faith in the world. The world in which we live does not understand nor appreciate the gospel that offers life to the world. Thus, followers of Jesus require the strength and encouragement offered by education throughout their journeys of faith, so to become ever more faithful in their promotion of Jesus’ gospel. The process of growing into discipleship takes the

whole of this life and takes us into the next. As Nelle Morton puts it, discovering who we are and the particular ministries to which we are called in Christ is the journey that is, throughout life, our home.⁸ Educational ministry is crucial to the faithful lifelong development of that journey.

This article lifts up three opportunities for the education of the church, in the church and in the world. While not an exhaustive list, these three encompass some of the most common and natural places and spaces where the church can offer perspective and reflection that can lead to education's goal of action. Education is a constructive response when *a felt need* is expressed; *in times of crisis*, personal, community, societal, or global; and *when the identity and role of the church needs clarification*. We look at these three in turn.

Education that Grows out of Felt Need

This opportunity for education moving toward action covers many kinds of teaching and learning that are commonly offered in congregations and institutions of higher theological education. In some ways, education developed in response to felt need can be the easiest way to accomplish our educational goals – and in particular, the goal of education leading to action. Because the prospective learners have initiated conversations leading to the development of educational opportunities, they are, almost by definition, ready – even eager – to learn what is taught. Effective teaching can equip learners to translate their new learnings into action as well. These are the “teachable moments” in which educators delight.

As in any ministry planning process, care needs to be taken that what we offer in educational ministry is reflective of wider goals – particularly, that initiatives move people from learning to action. Congregations and institutions can fall into a pattern of continuing to program courses that have been on past schedules, through failure of imaginative vision or lack of the work of discernment needed to hear God's current call. A congregation may feel that traditional programming for youth group, stay-at-home mothers, or older adults, for example, should continue. A seminary faculty can operate in the same way, offering many of the same courses from year to year. In itself, this does not present much of a problem; the basic program may remain significantly the same each year. Concern arises only when the need to continue “traditional” programming builds barriers to new initiatives arising from expressed needs. At that point, curriculum planners need to review the whole program and discern to what action God is calling the institution *now* – and what educational initiatives are needed to engender that action. The resulting curricular revision may lead faithful leaders to remove some “traditional” programs that no longer serve the needs and goals of the institution or those whom it serves. When new courses and programs are offered in response to felt needs, we become open to the

Spirit's leading in educational initiatives, and thus we are much more likely to offer education that results in action.

Significant educational initiatives have arisen in response to felt need. One example of this in the U.S. was the publishing of research findings by the Search Institute on the development of youth ministry and vocation in congregations.⁹ Another is the growing body of literature on the ministry and vocation of laypeople in their workplaces, sometimes called "marketplace ministry."¹⁰ Because they arise from felt and expressed need, these kinds of initiatives have real potential for changing the way people live their lives, inciting Groome's "political activity."

Education offered in response to felt need can also change – and indeed, can create – new models and approaches to existing problems. Two examples from African women theologians illustrate this point. Ghanaian Mercy Amba Oduyoye, often understood as the "mother" of all African women theologians and scholars, found herself in a meeting with ten male colleagues sometime in the late 1970s, and during the meeting she was asked by her coworkers to get tea for the group. As she states, "We had the tea – but it was not I who brought it!" For Oduyoye, this incident underlined the need for African women theologians, many of whom at the time were the sole women among men theologians where they taught or served, to form some kind of support group. From that moment, Oduyoye began to work to found what eventually became the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. The Circle encourages women to study theology; advocates for women, both lay and professional, in religious organizations; supports the research of women theologians; and gathers African women theologians from across the continent and the diaspora for mutual support, encouragement, and challenge. In three different institutions of higher education on the African continent, the Circle has been instrumental in the creation of new degree programs and resource centers. Through its many projects, the Circle has become a powerful force in publishing, research, and advocacy for African women theologians.¹¹ The educational and political activity involved in the formation and continuing life of the Circle moves seminaries, churches, and the wider society to action that proclaims God's good news for all people.

Kenyan pastor and theologian Nyambura Njoroge recounts the history of a Christian women's movement that arose in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa from a foundation of felt need.¹² In the early part of the twentieth century, the practice of female circumcision, now referred to by many as "female genital mutilation" [FGM], was widespread, culturally accepted, and government sanctioned in Kenya and in many other parts of Africa. Three Gikuyu Presbyterian women in 1922, in response to the death of a friend in childbirth

from complications resulting from FGM, decided that their daughters would not be circumcised. They appealed both to missionary doctors and to the sessions (church boards) of their congregations to stand with them. Although they met stiff resistance, both inside and outside the churches, their movement grew from three women to hundreds of women's guilds in congregations, called *Kiama kia Ngo*, or "Council of the Shield," which sought to educate about the impact, physical, spiritual, and psychological, of FGM in the lives of women, girls, and communities. Eventually, the purpose of the council grew to encompass all issues "... nurturing African Christian womanhood and the struggle for human dignity."¹³ Through the work of this group to educate women, girls, the Christian community and wider African society about FGM and the need to eradicate the practice, life has been changed for millions of women and girls in Africa and in the African diaspora.

Oduyoye and Njoroge tell and participate in stories like those told by the Search Institute and those writing about the ministry of laypeople in the workplace. In many and various ways, these writers lift the good news of what occurs when congregations and other Christian organizations offer education in response to felt need: life is changed and action is engendered.

In Times of Crisis

In the U.S. and around the world, September 11, 2001, is remembered as the entrance of large-scale terrorist intrusion on American soil. Countless congregations, judicatories, seminaries, and church colleges and universities developed educational programs in response to the crisis. With seeming suddenness, the interest of lay people and church professionals was caught by a cluster of issues: the distinctiveness of Islamic belief and Islamic fundamentalism; geopolitical forces that led and lead citizens of other nations to regard the U.S. with distaste, contempt, and hatred; and how to be safe and to re-integrate a sense of security for children, youth, and adults in a world in which fear at home was a new reality for many.

Times of crisis are not the most fruitful times for education. Fear is not a force that engenders learning well, and the instability that is part and parcel of crisis moves most people to grasp for some sense of control. When we try ever more frantically to control that which cannot be controlled, we create a vicious and exhausting cycle that is not conducive to learning – or at least, learning anything more than the realization, finally, that we cannot control the crisis.

Crisis can open people's eyes to issues that in many cases were present for some time, but were not on the table for examination and dialogue. Once those in crisis face the fact that they cannot control everything happening around them or to them, they often look for safe places for dialogue and new learning. Those

who are gifted at curriculum planning and writing, authoring books, planning worship, preaching sermons and teaching and leading meetings of many kinds can find opportunities in crisis situations to address issues and offer education that might otherwise be ignored. With the wider perspective offered by learning about issues to which we have not attended in the past, people, congregations, and other institutions can find new ways to live into a more faithful future.

Examples of faithful response to crisis abound in the church. A slim volume edited by Langford and Rouner published in response to September 11 includes essays by ecumenical, international and interfaith scholars and theologians.¹⁴ The book, which is representative of a great body of literature produced in response to this particular crisis, can be used effectively with either seminary classes or congregational study groups. The essays share the benefit of having been written some months to a year after the attack, and so display individually and collectively the reflection that is needed to make meaning out of crisis. In the church, the goal in the use of this kind of resource for education is to move people to think differently about life, the world, and their own lives – and then to act differently as a result.

Global crises of many kinds can spark educational opportunities that lead people to action. The worldwide HIV-AIDS epidemic has spurred people not only to participate in learning opportunities, but to give their money and time, and also to visit affected regions and countries. Wars in faraway locales like Liberia, Rwanda, Chiapas, and the Balkan states have sparked interest in these and other areas about which North American Christians have known little previously. Such education has encouraged people to understand the world differently and to act to relieve suffering and to work for systemic reform in the root causes of such conflicts. And the global phenomena of poverty, violence, environmental degradation, and interethnic tensions have been the foci of many rich and deep educational initiatives in congregations and other Christian institutions. These have engendered action in ecclesial and secular spheres in the forms of advocacy, consciousness-raising, new approaches to stewardship, giving of time and talents and direct relief efforts, particularly in the case of natural disasters worldwide. Crisis comes in many forms, and it does not have to involve geopolitical forces to open people to opportunities for education. Personal issues, such as the death of a spouse or child, divorce, severe illness, unemployment, or financial difficulty in a family can throw people into crisis. Many congregations have a long history of marriage classes and weekends, as well as traditional educational programming for a wide variety of age levels and concerns through the life cycle. Strangely, although the types of personal crises listed above are experienced regularly by church members in North American congregations, neither the educational offerings in most congregations nor the curriculum at most seminaries offers much guidance in how to approach these crises personally or pastorally.

Educational planners and leaders sensitive to the painful reality of life for many Christians can take the initiative to offer opportunities for members to work through personal crises within the safety and compassion of a congregation's ministry. While, as noted above, those deep in the midst of crisis will in most cases not be able to take meaningful part in such offerings, for those at a later stage, well-planned educational programs can help people take faithful and fruitful steps toward action and healthy change.

To Clarify the Identity and Role of the Church

In an October 2003 interview on the PBS program *NOW with Bill Moyers*, Union Theological Seminary (N.Y.) president and United Church of Christ minister Joseph C. Hough called on disciples of the Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Islam, and Christianity) to, in Moyers's words, "engage in an act of refusal." Citing Proverbs 14:31a, "Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker" (NRSV), Hough called on believers to stand up and call U.S. government policy what it is: ". . . immoral on the basis of our religious traditions, and . . . an insult to God." Hough named "the growing gap between the rich and poor" as "obscene," and called for believers to understand that ". . . the stated intentional policy of bankrupting the government so that in the future there'll be no money for anything the federal government would decide to do" is a "deep and profound theological issue . . . having to do with whether we are faithful to the deepest convictions of our faith." By October of last year, Hough suspected that the time had "nearly come" for believers in the Almighty to engage in civil disobedience as an act of faith in protest of national policy.¹⁵

Hough's sense of the crucial nature of this moment for American believers is shared by Rosalind Hinton, who wrote last year:

We are not in a time when we can throw up our hands and write a disclaimer regarding our government's actions. For many of us, distancing ourselves from U.S. foreign and domestic policy is something akin to sitting in our rocking chairs on our North American plantations while the poor of the world do our bidding. We simply cannot deny the advantages that we experience as citizens of the most powerful country in the world. . . . Anything short of dismantling our own comfort zones is complicity in, perhaps, the most arrogant display of military and economic might the world has ever encountered.¹⁶

When challenged in this way, many believers may not have adequate resources to respond in any meaningful fashion. Embarrassment, anger, and shame can result, then, in turning off the message and tuning out the messenger. In the U.S., where many Christians understand that "God and country" are an

indivisible and sacred whole, the claim that the One would call us to stand against the other is confusing. Additionally, acknowledgement of the privileged comfort zones in which we live is problematic for many who are “comfortable” with their owned sense of having “earned” what they have and what we as a nation have. Even for theologians and biblical scholars, the raising of these issues can be disconcerting, as those of us who are dominant culturally in our nation and world are, as Richard Horsley puts it, “in and of the imperial metropolis.” Horsley suggests that, as all the fields and subfields of scholarship in which American theology and religion scholars work have been developed from a standpoint of empire and dominance, the question of “how to include some critical awareness of the results and implications of our position” becomes difficult.¹⁷ Most pastors in the U.S. labor under the same limitations. That is, many of those who pastor and lead congregations and churches are “in and of the empire,” and much of the training they have received comes from what Horsley would deem “imperial” sources. Hence, many U.S. pastors and church leaders are also in the difficult position of looking for effective ways to see with a critical eye the dominant cultural milieu, both in this nation and in the world, of which they themselves are a part.

In order to clarify the identity and role of the church in the U.S. in this crucial time, a wide variety of educational processes will be required. Because most American church leaders are from the dominant culture, we cannot rely solely on our own sense of what is true and right in this case. We will have to go to the margins to find those who can effectively lead us in this crucial educational endeavor.

At the margins, of course, God has placed many who have gifts. Members of the global church, leaders who are outside the EuroAmerican dominant stream, women pastors and theologians – these and others who see from their own context and from their experience of knowing imperial oppression firsthand can offer perspectives on “truth” which are different from the “truth” understood from the vantage point of dominance. Representatives of the great body of resources available for this learning include classic texts, such as *God is Red*;¹⁸ international voices, like those included in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*¹⁹ and the *NOW with Bill Moyers* program “Rich World, Poor Women”;²⁰ feminist and womanist resources;²¹ and resources written to assist church leaders and congregations to minister multiculturally, such as the works of Eric H.F. Law.²² In fact, the Presbyterian Church (USA)’s Peacemaking Program employs Law’s “Community Bible Study Process” on its weblink about the war in Iraq, encouraging congregations to use this as a helpful way to talk about difficult issues, particularly issues that raise questions about the righteousness of American actions, both domestically and internationally.²³

The challenge, then, is not finding the resources to look at life and the role of the church in a different way. The pedagogical challenge is to lead U.S. Christians, church leaders, and pastors toward the realization that different understandings of truth *do matter*, despite the continuing evidence that the American way in the world “works.” That is, despite growing global tension and the fear and instability in the post-September 11 world in which we live, the U.S. is still the richest country in the world, with the greatest military might and grandest industrial base. The sense, then, that we are most favored among all people, that God has specially blessed us because God particularly loves us is hard to shake in some quarters. Carol Lakey Hess describes the place in which U.S. churches find themselves in this way:

. . . for North American churches, life is messier these days. No longer do the churches enjoy privileged status and . . . hegemony . . . [this may be] an opportunity for the church to really be the church. . . . When the nation was considered a Christian nation, the church learned neither how to discourse with the “other” . . . nor how to separate gospel from dominant patriarchal worldviews. . . . “Peace” and “stability” are often obtained at the great cost of subduing and suppressing voices who call for justice. The unleashing of the voices of the oppressed, who previously paid that price, has led to unrest, confusion. . . . but also new visions, revitalization, repentance and a new concern for justice.²⁴

Hess’s analysis suggests that while U.S. Christians may have a problem currently with self-identity and understanding rightly our role as believers in the world, we also have an opportunity at this *kairos* time.

The task for educators is clear: to make the most of the opportunity presented to us in this moment. To take up the challenge of that opportunity, we need to seek venues and constructive methods for effective education that moves American Christians toward the goal of understanding both the particular role played by the U.S. in international affairs at this juncture in history, and to discern what the role of the Christian church should be in the face of the actions of our government on behalf of we who are citizens. As we seek ways to achieve these goals, two prominent educators remind us that in action, education occurs. Rebecca Chopp argues for the understanding that theological education is not only about justice – it is justice itself. “We need to conceive of theological education as the doing of justice. . . . In American history the parallel . . . is the understanding of education as the training of citizens. Justice names not simply the goal but the process itself.”²⁵ Chopp echoes Thomas Groome’s sense of action as the praxis in which education occurs, and his belief that “. . . faith is in the doing,” which Groome understands as requiring “. . . the grounding of a trusting relationship with God who saves in Jesus Christ.”²⁶ Educational designs

that move believers not only to greater awareness but also to action itself can create a positive cycle in which education leads to action, which leads to more education.²⁷

Maria Harris has outlined “the powers to claim” the task of teaching. These powers have specific importance to the discussion at hand. Harris names five powers crucial to educational work: “. . . the power to receive, the power to rebel, the power to resist, the power to reform, and the power to love.”²⁸ Harris argues that we must first receive—that is, we must be still enough to be attentive to the real situation in which we live; we must then claim the power to rebel against the injustice inherent in the world’s life, which Harris calls teaching “. . . in the light, where the rage and grief of the world’s suffering provide our angle of vision.”²⁹ Having claimed the power to rebel, we must claim the power to resist. Teachers are especially called to resisting “. . . the privatizing, ghettoizing, and domesticating of the teaching act. To domesticate an animal is to take it and thus render it harmless. . . domestication is the process whereby groups in power seek to channel or neutralize the potentially resistance forces let loose when people realize they are exploited.”³⁰ Harris then claims the power of reform for educators, seeing reform as an activity of education, and finally claims the power to love, reminding us of Martin Luther King’s teaching that human deeds of love make God credible.³¹

These five powers can be used as a scaffold on which to build an effective response to the current educational need in the U.S. of providing clarity about the identity and role of the church. Building on the power to receive, educational programs can be designed that increase awareness of the reality of the role of the U.S. in the world and the impact, domestically and internationally, of the policies of our government. If we come to understand, through claiming the power to receive the truth, that those policies have caused suffering in the world, educators must offer to learners the opportunity to claim the power to rebel. Teaching in the light, as Harris proposes, can lead learners and teachers into wilderness wanderings when that which was assumed is no longer clear. At these junctures, both teachers and learners need safe places to express their completely normal rebellion to the injustices about which they have learned. As educators claim the power of resistance, they begin to get to the heart of the matter in moving from education to action. Too often congregations and other Christian institutions offer courses and educational programs that have no understanding that that which is taught becomes “political.” That is, too often, there is no expectation of actual impact on how people live resulting from what we teach. Additionally, if action was expected or hoped for as an educational outcome, too often we in the church do nothing when no action or change occurs. Education is presented in the church, and the education of the church is

presented in the world, with the goal of action – and quite often the appropriate response to what people have learned is resistance. This is a crucial step.

Claiming the power to resist can lead us to truly claim the power to reform. It is a heady realization to name and claim actual reform as the work of education – and it is a claim that many non-educators in the church would refute, seeing the root of reform in other places. However, if we in the church, and in Christian education, are about the forming of disciples, then part of the educational task must be central in the work of reform, both in the world and in the church. Particularly for those of us in the Reformed tradition who claim the motto, *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda est*, and who hold as precious our heritage of emphasis on an educated clergy and an educated laity, we must claim the power of reform as paradigmatic in the ministry of education. Assisting believers in understanding the ways in which reform of the society is appropriate – and even requisite – work for Christians will be central to this task.

Finally, educators must claim the power to love. Harris states that “. . . the political vocation of mediating the grace of power is incomplete if it does not end in love.”³² Indeed, love provides both the starting point and the end point of the educational task and must permeate every way station on the journey. Nothing is as ineffective as education that masks contempt and hatred of the other, whether for reason of gender, race, creed, or a different perspective on the issue. This is not so much education as hammering, and it has as much impact in the short or long term as Paul’s “noisy gong” and “clanging cymbal” (1 Cor. 13:1). Love requires respect, despite the ways in which the learner and the teacher are dissimilar. Particularly if education is called for in order to clarify the role of the church, a difficult journey will be taken by both teacher and learner. To stay adequately committed to one another to come to a succession of reflective way stations and potential endpoints and resolutions of such a journey, the mutual respect of love, modeled by the educator, is an absolute must.

Conclusion

The achievable goal of education is action. This goal is achievable because of the political power of education, begun in the waters of baptism and the sacred vows taken there, and continuing throughout the whole of life. Education can move people to action by moving us out of our comfort zones, out of the imperial metropolis, and out to the margins from the dominant center.

Education offered in response to felt need, in times of crisis, and when the role of the church needs clarification is *kairotic* education. In these times, the urgent need felt within the body of Christ for learning is served by Spirit-filled educational designs and initiatives that move people to grow and to act from their new understanding and perspective.

The common assumption that “Christian education” means “Sunday School” for children has led to the sense that education in the church is not supposed to do anything or to change anything. It is only training the young to rehearse the stories and practices of the faith in an uncritical way. Once children confirm the baptismal vows made on their behalf, in this assumption, the church transfers responsibility for continuing theological, ecclesiological, and biblical education to its professionals. This understanding of Christian education means that those who are physiologically, cognitively able to deal with information critically (that is, those who are adults) have no need of it. It is a highly political activity, then, to suggest that learning is a lifelong way through which Jesus’ disciples must take part in order to follow Christ in the church and the world. We mean by this that the work of the body of Christ requires those who are equipped with the ability to see the world and the church with a critical eye to reflect on the meaning of the church in the world. Informed in this way, believers can act faithfully and with integrity.

Finally, as Harris’s scaffold shows, love is key to the enterprise of education with the goal of action. Love is found when believers covenant together in mutual learning and growth through educational ministries. These ministries call disciples to mutual accountability, encouragement, challenge, and discipline. Through the sharing of love and compassionate care for all those who seek to learn, the body of Christ is nurtured for its task of service in the world, and we move further toward the goals of the sovereign realm of God in the church and in the world.

ENDNOTES

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- ¹⁴ James Langford and Leroy S. Rounder, eds., *Walking with God in a Fragile World* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).
- ¹⁵ *NOW with Bill Moyers*, Public Broadcasting System, October 24, 2003. Transcript of interview found on Common Dreams News Center at www.commondreams.org/views03/1027-01.htm.
- ¹⁶ Rosalind Hinton, "Contextualizing Rosemary," in *Cross Currents*, vol. 54, no. 1 (New York: Association for Religion and Intellectual Life, 2003), 23.
- ¹⁷ Richard A. Horsley, "In the Belly of the Beast," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 71, issue 1 (Atlanta: American Academy of Religion, 2003), 128. In this response article, Horsley continues developing the line of argument he began with the lead article of the same issue, "Religion and Other Products of Empire," 13-44.
- ¹⁸ Vine Deloria, Jr. (New York: Dell Publishing, 1973).
- ¹⁹ R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed.
- ²⁰ September 5, 2003. At www.pbs.org/now, under "Archives" and "Lesson Plans," there are lesson plans, quizzes, and other educational design aids, as well as other links for adaptation and use in a wide variety of educational designs.
- ²¹ A few notable texts from this large body of literature from the past decade include Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots and Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994); Traci C. West, *Wounds of the Spirit: Black Women, Violence and Resistance Ethics* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1999); Christie Cozad Neuger, ed., *The Arts of Ministry: Feminist-Womanist Approaches* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996); and Chopp's *Saving Work* (see note 4 above).
- ²² These include *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community*, 1993; *The Bush was Blazing but not Consumed: Developing a Multicultural Community through Dialogue and Liturgy*, 1996; *Inclusion: Making Room for Grace*, 2000; *Sacred Acts, Holy Change: Faithful Diversity and Practical Transformation*, 2002; and *The Word in the Crossings: Proclaiming and Teaching the Good News in a Pluralistic Society*, 2004. All are published by Chalice Press, St. Louis.
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- ²⁴ Carol Lakey Hess, "Education as an Art of Getting Dirty with Dignity," in Neuger, ed., *The Arts of Ministry: Feminist-Womanist Approaches* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996), 63-64.
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- ²⁶ Groome 1980, 63-66.
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Liturgy and Ethics, or Liturgy Is Ethics *

David L. Stubbs

If you think back to the latest newspaper article you read that dealt with an ethical issue, or to that undergraduate ethics class you took in college, I would doubt that that class or article even mentioned liturgy. And conversely, when Christian people think about Sunday worship, I would also doubt that many consider it a highly charged ethical activity. However, I am convinced that our corporate worship life as Christians has great potential to shape and inform our ethical thinking, and in fact does so, whether or not we are aware of it. I also think that linking ethical dialogue and instruction to the liturgy is a quite helpful and beneficial way of “doing ethics,” whether that ethical reflection goes on in the parish or the classroom.¹

Ethics, Original Sin, and the Kingdom of God

To show why this is the case, we first need to define our terms. What is “ethics”? Karl Barth in his *Church Dogmatics* says that ethics most generally is an attempt to define the standard or law or value by which we can judge human action good or evil. Pursuing that question is the first task of ethics.

Barth quite insightfully links the very asking of this question with the fall. He writes:

For man is not content simply to *be* the answer to [the ethical] question by the grace of God. He wants to be like God. He wants to know of himself (as God does) what is good and evil. He therefore wants to *give* this answer himself and of himself. So, then, as a result and in prolongation of the fall, we have “ethics,” or, rather the multifarious ethical systems, the attempted human answers to the ethical question.²

Instead of asking *this* question, Barth claims that the first task of *Christian* ethics is to simply point to the covenant that God has established with humankind. Obedience to that covenant, that “Command,” is the human good. Thus Christian ethics is a description of sanctified human life. Put equivalently, the task of Christian ethics is to describe the shape of the kingdom of God.

How then do we know that shape? Does the kingdom of God function according to certain laws like most human kingdoms? Where is this Command found and what is its content? As those who have read Barth will know, the answer is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Command of God. What Barth means by this is that Jesus Christ is the image of God, and this image is the standard to which we are called. Being conformed to the image of God is the goal of sanctification, and so Jesus Christ is the Command to which human life is called to obey.

For Barth, the image of God is not some faculty, some “thing” that God possesses that God had also gifted humans with, but rather a triune *pattern of activity*. Barth writes:

And this obedience of Jesus is the clear reflection of the unity of the Father and the Son by the bond of the Spirit in the being of the eternal God Himself, who is the fullness of all freedom.³

This eternal obedience of the Son to the Father in the Spirit is incarnated in Jesus Christ; therefore, this pattern of activity is not a principle, or a rule, but rather a Way. Christian ethics, in being a description of the Command of God for human life, is confronted not with a rule or set of rules, but, as Barth says, by “the reality fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. This person as such is not only the ground and content but also the form of the divine command.”⁴

So far so good. Barth’s description of a proper Christian ethics has much in common with the historical Christian tradition, for the Greek fathers had a saying that Jesus was the *autobasilea*, the kingdom in himself. Christian ethics must be theologically informed, meaning that insofar as ethics is a description of the good human life, the only way for us to “do ethics” is to reflect on the patterns of activity that God has planned for us humans in his kingdom.

My first point is that Christian ethics must describe the kingdom of God, which is itself seen most clearly in the patterns of activity of Jesus Christ. My next point is that liturgy does the same thing. Because of this, ethical reflection might profitably be done in a liturgical context. But to make this move we must take a closer look at liturgy itself.

Liturgy as a “Window” of the Kingdom

I imagine that some people, in talking about going to church on Sundays, would say that their “worship experience” gives them a nice break from their busy week. After their pleasant experience, in which they might have learned something about God and been energized in some way, they are now ready to get back to their “regular” activities in “the real world.” But by using this phrase, “the real world,” to speak of that portion of their life outside of worship, they are of course implying that what happens on Sunday mornings is either “*un-real*” or else that it has a different sort of “spiritual reality” with little connection to their “public reality.”

The origins of the word *liturgy* point us in precisely the opposite direction. The term was originally rooted in the context of ancient Greek life, where it meant “the work of the people” and originally referred to “public works” such as the building of a bridge or the sponsorship of a public entertainment.⁵ Thus the

word seems to indicate that the liturgy of the Christian worship service *is* the actions and work of the people. We, of course, use it most commonly to refer to the *blueprints* for that work rather than the work itself. The Eastern Orthodox have a phrase, “the liturgy after the Liturgy,” which retains the earlier meaning of the word. “The liturgy after the Liturgy” refers to the weeklong liturgy of our daily work done after the weekly liturgy of our corporate worship. This phrase also implies that the work we do on Sundays in corporate worship is not somehow “unreal,” but rather the “most real” work that we do.

What I am proposing about ethics assumes liturgy is precisely this: Our liturgy in corporate worship is the “most real” part of our weeks. By that I mean that in the liturgy we are in touch in an intense and powerful way with the patterns of the kingdom of God. The actions we perform and the way our minds, language, and emotions are formed in our performance of the liturgy is at the heart of our lives as Christians. In the liturgy, in our worship, we are not simply presented with information, much less are we simply being entertained, but rather we are being made into Christians – our actions and lives are being linked to the Life of the world, our hearts to the heart of God, our minds to the Truth. The liturgy is the embodiment of the patterns of the kingdom of God in summary fashion.⁶ Or put slightly differently, we might say that in the liturgy our actions become transparent to the patterns of the kingdom. Liturgy thus might be described as a “window” of the kingdom.⁷

This way of describing liturgy raises two important questions. First, we must ask precisely *which* liturgical actions are being claimed to embody the patterns of the kingdom. Second, we must also answer the deeper question of how God is involved. In other words, in what way or ways are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit present in those actions?

To begin to answer these important questions, I will gesture to the answers given by three quite different theologians: Karl Barth, from the Reformed tradition; John Howard Yoder, an Anabaptist theologian; and Alexander Schmemmann, an Eastern Orthodox theologian.

As for Karl Barth, let me simply point out something about the structure of his ethics. While Barth has been accused of many things, I do not think anyone has ever claimed that Barth is *too* sacramental. Yet it is instructive to note that Barth’s ethics of reconciliation, when completed, was to have revolved around three central pieces of liturgy, Baptism, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Lord’s Supper. John Webster, a trustworthy interpreter of Barth, writes that Barth’s entire dogmatics is “an extended inquiry into the moral field – into the space within which moral agents act, and into the shape of their action, a shape given above all by the fact that their acts take place in the history of encounter between God as prime agent

and themselves as those called to act in correspondence to the grace of God.”⁸ Given that ethics revolves around this idea of human correspondence to and in the context of the grace of God, where does Barth think this grace is most clearly encountered? It is in the liturgical actions of baptism, prayer, and the Lord’s Supper. Barth calls these liturgical actions of human response “kingdom-like” – a high compliment for Barth. For example, Barth says that all of human life is to be the “dynamic actualization” of the Lord’s Prayer: “He wills that their whole life become invocation of this kind.”⁹ Sanctified human activity is “summarized” in these liturgical actions, actions that also serve to frame the “moral field.”

John Howard Yoder in his intriguing book entitled, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World*, discusses what he calls five “liturgical” practices; he adds two to Barth’s total of three. These five practices are baptism, Eucharist, mutual correction, the diversification of gifts and ministry, and open dialogue under the direction of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ He claims these practices both form the “real world” for Christians and function as “paradigms” for all our action.¹¹ He gets these practices from his study of the New Testament, shows that Jesus commanded them, and traces their precedents back into the liturgical life of Israel.¹² Using sacramental language to describe them, he further writes, “They are actions of God, in and with, through and under what men and women do. Where they are happening, the people of God is real in the world.”¹³ He ends his book with these suggestive comments: “It should not be surprising if there were such a deep structure that, once discerned in the five places where we have touched it, would then illuminate more broadly the shape of all of God’s saving purposes.”¹⁴ These practices might be part of the grain of the universe.

Turning eastward, we find quite similar directions in the work of Alexander Schmemmann, an important Eastern Orthodox theologian. Schmemmann prefaces his book, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom*, with comments about the ethical state of the world. He writes, “It can be said without exaggeration that we live in a frightening and spiritually dangerous age. It is frightening not just because of its hatred, division and bloodshed. It is frightening above all because it is characterized by a mounting rebellion against God and his kingdom.”¹⁵ Schmemmann believes ethical answers to this terrible state of the world are found within the structure and actions of the Eucharistic liturgy. While he admits the entire Orthodox liturgy has in practice been misunderstood as a pious personal encounter with God, he argues this understanding is in contrast to the very words and actions of that liturgy. The liturgy is about the formation of the church into the body of Christ. To help correct this, he outlines no less than *twelve* crucial moments in the liturgy in which the patterns of human activity are united to that of God’s and calls all of these twelve moments “sacraments.” Included in these twelve are the sacrament of the assembly, the sacrament of the offering, the

sacrament of the Word, and the sacrament of Communion. He understands that in *each* of these acts or practices the activity of the church is “gathered up” into the kingdom of Christ; the patterns of activity of all the people and elements involved are “sanctified” or reshaped to their proper ends. In this way we are given a foretaste of the coming kingdom, not only in the elements of bread and wine, but in all the central actions, relationships, and patterns of activity of the liturgy.

Schmemmann’s description of the “sacrament of the offering” is a case in point. In my experience, I have heard people jokingly refer to their offering as “the price of admission.” That description of what is happening redefines the logic of this liturgical act in terms of our capitalist economy. Instead, Schmemmann describes the offering as a central representative act of our total offering of ourselves to Christ and to each other:

. . . the meaning of this consists in the fact that the offering of *each*, included in the offering of *all*, is now being realized as the Church’s offering of her very self, and this means Christ, for the Church is his body, and he is the head of the Church. . . . Our sacrifice is the sacrifice of the Church, which is the sacrifice of Christ. Thus, in this triumphant and royal entrance, in this movement of the gifts, is revealed the truly universal significance of the offering, the unification of heaven and earth, the raising up of our life to the kingdom of God.¹⁶

The offering thus becomes *the* economic paradigm, which I might add is in marked contrast to the foundational principle of Econ 101, namely that individuals are insatiable units of consumption. Instead, this liturgical action may help form our thoughts, hearts, and actions in such a way that we might be enabled to protest against the economic patterns outside of the liturgy in the so-called real world.

There are at least two features common to all three of these figures. First, they all see certain actions within our liturgy as summary actions for the Christian life as a whole. The liturgy summarizes the kingdom of God. Second, these actions are not simply empty symbolic actions which refer to some real activity elsewhere, but rather are actions in which God is present in such a way that our lives, hearts, and minds have the possibility of being shaped into the patterns of the kingdom of Christ.

So, if ethics is understood as speaking about a pattern of human life that fulfills the designs for humanity which God intended, then there is no better place to start this discussion than with the liturgy. For in the liturgy, kingdom patterns are described and embodied. It is in this way that liturgy is ethics.

Ethics in a Liturgical Context

Given that in the liturgy we gain a broad picture or image of what the Christian life should be like, it would seem to be a natural context in which to do further ethical reflection. However, it is not immediately clear how liturgy might help us answer the nitty-gritty questions of everyday life. So, let's try asking a few questions in the liturgical context.

As we begin to do so, the first thing to notice is that the shape of our questions changes. Rather than asking, "What is the good thing for a human individual to do given such and such an issue," in a liturgical context, this ethical question becomes, "What must our actions be like, both individually and corporately, so as not to make a mockery of our worship of God?" We must ask about the *fittingness* of all our actions in light of our liturgical action.

Let us use marriage as an example. Thinking about marriage from the perspective of the pseudo-liturgy of Hollywood film, we of course know that marriage is about finding that special person who will be our all-in-all, that person who fulfills all our needs and desires. Like Jerry McGuire, we must find that person to whom we can say, "You complete me." Looking at marriage from the perspective of baptism, however, we are pulled in a different direction. Rather than looking for someone to complete our bodies, in baptism we immediately recognize that we are called to help complete the body of the church—that the church is our primary family. In fact, baptism tells us that we don't need to get married at all to live a full Christian life. Christian baptism creates singleness as a second equal option. Of course whether our baptismal communities are currently sufficient to sustain the practice of Christian singleness is another question. But the ethics of baptism at least alerts us that we are called to do so as a church. To fill out our understanding of marriage itself, however, we would need to look at it more carefully from the perspective of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, or perhaps the practice of footwashing.

Or what about our current American practice of war? Can Christians fight for America, and if so, in what circumstances? How do we decide? Looking at the practice of war in light of our practice of the Eucharist raises interesting questions. At the banquet feast of the Lamb, we gain the eyes to see that Christ has paid the price for our violence and calls us into his kingdom of peace in which all peoples are bound together. It becomes more difficult to justify our violence when viewed from this perspective than, say, from the perspective of the principle of the greatest good for the greatest number. For example, Stanley Hauerwas asks us "to consider whether Christians can get up from the meal in which Jesus has been the host and begin to kill one another in the name of national loyalties."¹⁷ If indeed in the Eucharist we are in touch with the "really

real," perhaps the phrase, "political realism," takes on new meaning.¹⁸ At least the burden of proof has shifted.

From these two examples, we see that the liturgy cannot be used as an ethics machine into which we put in an ethical question and out of which pops the Christian answer. Instead, the liturgy provides a guiding horizon that both reframes our questions and guides our thinking in certain directions. It is not our only norm; however, it does provide a normative context in which to do our ethical work.

The "Mode of Rationality" of Such an Ethics

This kind of ethical reasoning is thus not an "unbiased" weighing of the "neutral" description of either an outcome or an action against a universal rule. Rather, the liturgy first gives us a "language" to describe situations and, related to this, provides a normative horizon against which to judge the fittingness of actions in those situations. But if indeed ethical reasoning is a judgment about the "fittingness" of an activity, it requires aesthetic judgment, skill, and wisdom. In this kind of ethical activity and reflection, we are more like Olympic gymnastic judges than Olympic track-meet timekeepers. Because of this, this kind of ethics is also open to criticisms often leveled against the Olympic gymnastic judges: it is imprecise, totally subjective, and unscientific.

Most modern ethical theories have in fact attempted to achieve a kind of "scientific" precision that emulates strict logic or the hard sciences. However, just as Christian ethicists seemed to be getting used to doing ethics that way, the supposed strict objectivity of the sciences has fairly convincingly been shown to be a chimera.¹⁹ Alasdair MacIntyre in his groundbreaking works, *After Virtue* and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* has argued that the only viable alternative to total ethical relativity is what he calls "tradition-based rationality." In brief, this involves the acknowledgment that ethical terms such as "justice" and "love" can only be defined adequately within a coherent tradition built around concrete practices. Those concrete practices provide the horizon within which our terms achieve precision. He argues that the people in our culture argue past one another in the name of, for example, "justice," because their different uses of the word are either unclear even to themselves or else stem from conflicting visions of communal life. In his words, "A moral philosophy [. . .] characteristically presupposes a sociology."²⁰ What this means is something students have always known, namely, that examples are more determinative than the abstract concepts we use to describe them. Thus an ethical system needs to be grounded in a vision of communal life rather than in universal concepts. One need only think of Jesus telling the parable of the good Samaritan instead of wrangling about definitions of "love" and "neighbor" to at least feel the force of this claim – or, to ponder the fact that God sent his Son rather than an ethical textbook to show us the Way.

If Macintyre is right, Christian ethics cannot do without this kind of tradition-based rationality. Christian ethics thus must prepare us for skillful Christian living. This ethical skill is similar to the kind of rationality that a master craftsman uses, or that a doctor uses when she diagnoses an illness, or that a painter uses in selecting just the right brushstroke or bit of color in the midst of creating a work of art. Certainly craftsmen, doctors, and painters use reason in their work. Yet their judgments are not easily reduced to universal principles, nor does their actual practice often involve using strict syllogistic logic.

And, quite similar to a painter, we as individual Christians as part of a community seek to make our lives look beautiful to God. Trusting that the Holy Spirit is at work in us, we wish to glorify our creator through our lives. But unlike contemporary art, this beauty is not strictly in the eye of the beholder. Rather, starting from a picture of the kingdom of God that we gain in part from our liturgy, we seek to conform our lives and decisions to the patterns of the kingdom.

One unattractive feature of this mode of rationality is that it admits that not everyone is equally qualified to make the right choices – one chooses better as one becomes wiser or more skilled at living the Christian life. This rubs against our desire to think that everyone is equally qualified or perhaps equally disqualified. So, out of a desire to gain a more sure and egalitarian footing for ethics, perhaps one might say, “Who needs the liturgy for ethics, I have the Bible.”

Liturgical Ethics is Biblical Ethics

Taking this proper Protestant response quite seriously, let us consider the Bible in relation to liturgical ethics. However, instead of looking to the Bible only as a resource for locating the *answers* that biblical authors gave to ethical questions, perhaps we should also look to the Bible for the *way* the inspired biblical authors *themselves* thought about ethical issues. Using Paul as an example, we see that he certainly used the scriptures as he thought through ethical issues; however, he did not usually cite general ethical principles or laws. Rather, he often argued in a “liturgico-ethico” fashion. Paul’s mind and life had been formed through his participation in the services and festivals of the Jewish faith, even before he encountered Christ and was formed through his life in Christian community. These Jewish practices, ways of thinking, and forms of worship formed part of the context of his reflection upon scripture.

For example, in 1 Cor 5: 1-8, Paul is calling the Corinthian church to distance itself from a sexually immoral member. But notice *how* he argues for this:

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Should you not rather have mourned, so that he who has done this would have been removed from among you?

For though absent in the body, I am present in the spirit; and as if present I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

Your boasting is not a good thing. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Paul appeals to the Jewish liturgical practice of destroying all the yeast, which is also called leaven or *hametz*, in one's house in preparation for the Passover meal. But why would Paul think removing and destroying yeast would have anything to do with sexual immorality and with prideful boasting in it? Why doesn't Paul simply appeal to some universal principle or scriptural law? Consider this discussion of the destruction of *hametz* or yeast in a modern Jewish commentary on the Passover:

The most difficult Passover ritual to explain is hametz. Why should a food we happily consume fifty-one weeks a year become something that we diligently search out and destroy before the one week of Passover? . . . According to the rabbinic view mentioned earlier, there is something wrong with hametz. Hametz is seen as symbolic of the yetzer ha-ra – evil inclination – in particular, the prompting of pride. Therefore the search for hametz must be extensive and intensive, for even the smallest particle of hametz in no matter how large a food mixture will corrupt. Similarly, no matter how small or deeply hidden the evil inclination is within us it will fester and grow and eventually poison everything else.²¹

This understanding of the liturgical practice of the destruction of *hametz* helps explain why Paul saw an analogy between the situation in Corinth and this "liturgical" practice. As a result of his formation by this practice, he saw that more was at stake than simply the behavior and attitudes of two individuals. The

welfare of the church community was at stake. He wanted the Corinthians' whole life together to be an extension of their liturgical practice.²²

Thus we can see that an emphasis on liturgy should not be construed as an alternative to sensitive biblical scholarship on ethical matters. Rather the two are mutually reinforcing. Yoder himself engages in such scholarship, and his arguments for his central practices are biblically based. Another example of how they might reinforce each other can be seen in Richard Hays's biblical ethics entitled, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*. While Hays does not focus his work on liturgy *per se*, he does understand the necessity of larger images or stories to guide one's ethical thinking and scriptural interpretation. The interpretive images Hays himself uses, namely "Community, Cross and New Creation," function in a similar way to the liturgical practices mentioned by Barth, Yoder, and Schmemmann.²³ Such biblical images can help us interpret the liturgy, just as the liturgy in its place helps fill out the meaning of those images. Hays's proposal reminds us that both those images and our liturgies are formed and reformed through the results of careful biblical scholarship. Such scholarship also reminds us that the Bible itself was formed in the context of the worship life of Israel and the Christian communities.

Jesus did not only give us a community and central practices. He also left for us his words and examples recorded in the scripture. Finally, he also gave us the Holy Spirit. The three cannot be separated. Any of the three of these taken by themselves have the potential to become as rigid and lifeless as so many "universal principles." Rather, we must remember that our goal as Christians is that *through* scripture and *through* the liturgy and *in* the Spirit we want to be formed into the life and mind of Christ to the glory of the Father. Our liturgy, our Bibles, and our experience of the Spirit are all true yet limited foretastes of that day when the entire universe will become transparent to the patterns of God in one united activity of doxology.

That being said, I do think a quite simple yet compelling argument can be made for grounding ethical discussions in the liturgy. It is this: more people go to church on Sundays than engage in in-depth biblical scholarship or will ever read Yoder or Hays. For pastors and other teachers of the church, it is much more practical and I think more empowering to point to the liturgy than to hand out copies of Yoder or Hays. It is through the liturgy that most Christian people will or will not learn the skills, virtues, and ways of thinking that will allow them and the church to be a light to the world.

The Importance of Good Liturgy

Finally, all that has been said points out that the actual shape and content of our liturgy has the potential for both great good and great ill. Not all worship is

good worship; not all liturgy is “orthodox,” right worship. By saying this I am not taking a position on debates about “high” or “low” liturgy, or “traditional” versus “contemporary” worship. By citing both Yoder, a Mennonite, and Schmemmann, an Eastern Orthodox, I hope to have shown that these are not necessarily the right categories to be thinking in. At either end of the spectrum, we must guard against letting our desire to appeal either to contemporary culture or “high culture” distort our liturgy so that it mirrors them more than the life of Christ and the kingdom of God. Both contemporary and traditional styles of worship are capable of leading us into those patterns or of falling short.

Good liturgy is liturgy that allows our activity of worship to become transparent to the patterns of the kingdom. It is this kind of good liturgy that can provide us with a helpful context for Christian ethical reflection. And it is this kind of good liturgy that can equip and empower the people of God to lead skillful Christian lives.

* Parts of this essay are included in a chapter and the afterword of a collected work in progress, *A More Profound Alleluia: Theology and Worship in Harmony*, ed. Leanne Van Dyk, to be published by Eerdmans.

ENDNOTES

¹The contents, as well as the title, of this paper owe much to the work of both Geoffrey Wainwright and Stanley Hauerwas.

²Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 517.

³Barth, *CD* II.2, 605.

⁴Barth, *CD* II.2, 606.

⁵John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 28. Charles P. Price and Louis Weil, *Liturgy for Living* (New York: Seabury, 1979), 21. Both are cited in Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1996), 80.

⁶Stanley Hauerwas uses the idea of liturgy as “summary” in “The Liturgical Shape of the Christian Life: Teaching Christian Ethics as Worship,” unpublished paper, 14-15, and parallels this to Irenaeus’s concept of “recapitulation.” The danger with such imagery as well as Reinhard Hütter’s suggestion of “narrative unfolding” is that these terms do not necessarily connote the activity of the Holy Spirit. That is why I opt for the iconographically resonate term, “window.”

⁷This description is linked to the theology of icons. See Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1989). While I like the iconographic implications, I am wary of the static nature of the imagery. “Iconic pattern of activity” is what I am after.

⁸John Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 4.

⁹Karl Barth, *The Christian Life: Church Dogmatics* IV.4 Lecture Fragments (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 85.

¹⁰Interesting comparisons might be made to Calvin’s *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, especially the practices of mutual discipline and dialogue among clergy and elders. Yoder himself mentions the *Regel Christi* found in Bucer, Luther, and Calvin’s writings as well as those of the Anabaptists. John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1994), 7.

¹¹Yoder, *Body Politics*, 77. Like Lindbeck, Yoder claims that "the modern world is a subset of the world vision of the gospel, not the other way around" (Yoder, *Body Politics*, 74).

¹²Yoder, *Body Politics*, esp. 79.

¹³Yoder, *Body Politics*, 72-73.

¹⁴Yoder, *Body Politics*, 80. And his final sentence: "Why should it not be the case that God's purpose for the world would pursue an organic logic through history and across the agenda of the pilgrim people's social existence with such a reliable rhythm as we have here observed?" (Yoder, *Body Politics*, 80).

¹⁵Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988), 9-10.

¹⁶Schmemmann, 122-23.

¹⁷Hauerwas, 16.

¹⁸This is a veiled criticism of the Christian Realism of Reinhold Niebuhr. R. Niebuhr might be said to separate "the Eucharist" from politics. For example, Niebuhr writes, "A realistic analysis of the problems of human society reveals a constant and seemingly irreconcilable conflict between the needs of society and the imperatives of a sensitive conscience. This conflict, which could be most briefly defined as the conflict between ethics and politics, is made inevitable by the double focus of the moral life. One focus is in the inner life of the individual, and the other in the necessities of man's social life" [*Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), 257].

¹⁹Michael Polanyi and Richard Bernstein are prime examples of those who argue for a "hermeneutical" understanding of scientific activity. Polanyi terms this kind of understanding "personal knowledge," which involves both "tacit" and "focal" awareness. Bernstein, hearkening back to Aristotle, calls it "practical knowing." Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962) and *The Tacit Dimension* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1967). Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

²⁰Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 23.

²¹Michael Strassfeld, *The Jewish Holidays: A Guide and Commentary* (NY: Harper & Row, 1985), 40-41.

²²For a discussion of other such passages in 1 Corinthians, see Brian Rosner, *Paul, Scripture and Ethics: A Study of 1 Corinthians 5-7* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994).

²³Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (NY: HarperCollins, 1996). That his first image is in fact "community" is instructive.

Book Reviews

America's Worship Wars, by Terry W. York, Peabody, (reviewed by J. David Muyskens)

An Absolute Sort of Certainty: The Holy Spirit and the Apologetics of Jonathan Edwards, by Stephen J. Nichols, (reviewed by Phillip Luke Sinitiere)

Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate: Five Hermeneutical Rules, by Charles H. Cosgrove, (reviewed by Terrance L. Tiessen)

Baptism in the Reformed Tradition: An Historical and Practical Theology, by John W. Riggs, (reviewed by Barry L. Wynveen)

A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of God-Centered Worship, by Michael Horton, (reviewed by Robert J. Hoeksema)

Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas, by Elaine Pagels, (reviewed by Christopher B. Kaiser)

Communion with Non-Catholic Christians: Risks, Challenges, and Opportunities, by Jeffrey VanderWilt, (reviewed by Robert J. Hoeksema)

Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning and Living, by Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., (reviewed by Mark E. Mast)

The First Christian: Universal Truth in the Teachings of Jesus, by Paul F. M. Zahl, (reviewed by David W. Jurgens)

Five Women of the English Reformation, by Paul F. M. Zahl, (reviewed by Donald K. McKim)

Glimpsing the Face of God, by Alister McGrath, (reviewed by Ralph W. Vunderink)

Growing Old in Christ, edited by Stanley Hauerwas, Carole Bailey Stoneking, Keith G. Meador, and David Cloutier, (reviewed by Robert J. Hoeksema)

In God's Time: The Bible and the Future, by Craig C. Hill, (reviewed by Barry L. Wynveen)

Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context, by Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, (reviewed by Terrance Tiessen)

The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards: American Religion and the Evangelical Tradition, edited by D. G. Hart, Sean Michael Lucas, and Stephen J. Michols, (reviewed by Arie Blok)

The NIV Reconsidered: A Fresh Look at a Popular Translation, by Earl Radmacher and Zane C. Hodges, (reviewed by Richard C. Oudersluys)

No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence by Catherine Clark Kroeger and Nancy Nason-Clark, (reviewed by Robert J. Hoeksema)

The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant: An Historical Study of the Significance of Infant Baptism in the Presbyterian Church, by Lewis Bevens Schenck, (reviewed by Barry L. Wynveen)

The Promise and Perils of Postmodernism, by Millard J. Erickson, (reviewed by Ralph W. Vunderink)

Repentance: The First Word of the Gospel, by Richard O. Roberts, (reviewed by Carl J. Schroeder)

A Scientific Theology, Volume 2: Reality by Alister E. McGrath, (reviewed by Derek DeJager)

Sermons on the Book of Micah, by John Calvin (translated and edited by Benjamin Wirt Farley), (reviewed by Barry L. Wynveen)

Spirituality and Social Ethics in John Calvin. A Pneumatological Perspective, by (Sueng Hoon) Paul Chung, (reviewed by I. John Hesselink)

The Starting Point of Calvin's Theology, by George H. Tavard, (reviewed by I. John Hesselink)

To Know and Love God, by David K. Clark, (reviewed by Ralph W. Vunderink)

Touchdown Jesus: The Mixing of Sacred and Secular in American History, by R. Laurence Moore, (reviewed by Jeffrey W. Taylor)

The Trustworthiness of God: Perspectives on the Nature of Scripture, edited by Paul Helm and Carl R. Trueman, (reviewed by Donald K. McKim)

Whose Religion in Christianity?: The Gospel beyond the West, by Lamin Sanneh, (reviewed by Phillip Luke Sinitiere)

Your Word Is Truth: A Project of Evangelicals and Catholics Together, edited by Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, (reviewed by Mark E. Mast)

America's Worship Wars, by Terry W. York, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003. xviii, 138pp., \$16.95.

Terry York is associate professor of Christian ministry at Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University. He writes out of his extensive experience in ministry in Baptist churches and as a seminary professor, offering his observations of American worship since the 1960s. Reluctantly choosing the word "war," he observes how the defenders of the fort (the worshipping community) have been in conflict with the fighters of the front (evangelistic outreach).

In the first section of the book, York describes how the seeds of the worship wars were sown in the 1960s with the blurring of the distinction between worship and evangelism.

In the second section of the book, York writes about trends in the church that have contributed to conflict in worship style. Those who were veterans of the "front" of evangelistic outreach favored new music, often projected on a screen. Those who were veterans of the "fort" of the worshipping community favored music of the hymnal in the pew. York notes the danger of the music becoming entertainment rather than worship and reminds readers "that each new technological advance brings with it a cost to be counted. . . . When technology becomes the master, molding our theology into the shape of technology's capabilities it changes how we think, act, and respond." As examples, he notes vocabulary changes such as the shifts from "congregation" to "audience" and from "mission field" to "marketplace."

The last section of the book suggests a negotiated peace. In the chapter, "Champions of Peace," several people are cited, including Marva Dawn and Sally Morgenthaler, who want worship to "truly praise God" and, in so doing, to "form us and the community to reach out to the world."

This book will be of interest to worship leaders, especially those who wonder how we got into the current conflicts over worship styles and music. It ends on a note of hope, based in the gospel, and Jesus' call that we be one.

J. David Muyskens

An Absolute Sort of Certainty: The Holy Spirit and the Apologetics of Jonathan Edwards, by Stephen J. Nichols, Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2003, x, 202pp., \$14.99 paper.

His revised dissertation from Westminster Theological Seminary, Stephen J. Nichols's *An Absolute Sort of Certainty* offers fresh insight into the important realm of Jonathan Edwards's apologetics. Nichols traverses the detailed space between philosophy and theology in order to highlight the role of the Holy Spirit in Edwards's preaching and in his apologetics. Put another way, Edwards "wrestled with epistemology as he worked out his theology of the Holy Spirit; he developed his theology, as it were, in full view of philosophy and vice versa" (2). According to Nichols, Edwards fashioned an apologetic program (as it related to inspiration, assurance, illumination, and regeneration) rooted in Scripture, dependent on the Holy Spirit, yet conversant with and sensitive to eighteenth-century philosophical trends.

In the opening chapter, Nichols helpfully navigates the currents of Edwards studies by dividing images of Edwards into those of philosopher (e.g., Perry Miller, Peter Gay), pastor-theologian (e.g., Iain Murray, Patricia Tracy), philosopher-theologian (e.g., H. Richard Niebuhr, Sang Lee), and apologist (e.g., Michael McClymond, Gerald McDermott). Nichols's work builds on each of these schools in varying degrees, yet unlike most of the previous scholarship, he looks specifically at how Edwards understood the role of the Holy Spirit in making a defense for the Christian faith.

The bulk of Nichols's book contains chapters on revelation, perception, assurance, and verification. For Edwards, Nichols perceptively points out, revelation came as the Holy Spirit imparted Trinitarian knowledge to the regenerate mind. Such knowledge, for Edwards—shaped by Augustine, Calvin, and Locke, among others—is not a haven of the intellect only, but is also displayed in loving affection because "knowledge entail[s] experience" (45).

Finally, after pages of deft and erudite theological reflection and interpretation, Nichols effectively presents Edwards's apologetic program through two unpublished sermons. "Seeing the Glory of Christ" and "The Work of the Spirit of Christ" both demonstrate that Edwards crafted his sermons with an apologetic flavor. In the former sermon, Edwards argued that one is able to sense the glory of Christ through the Spirit's illuminating authentication; this operation is further articulated in the latter sermon as Edwards showed how the Spirit "communicates" God's grace to humanity. Because Edwards labored primarily in parish ministry, Nichols rightly concludes, "[h]is sermons are the gateway to

his thoughts, his theology, and his philosophy, which come together in his apologetics” (174).

The cutting edge of Nichols’s illuminating study is his assertion that Edwards’s apologetics take center stage if one wishes to understand the theocentric nature of his theologically informed philosophy and philosophically rooted theology. Such thinking was publicly displayed from the pulpit at which Edwards effectively labored for many years.

Though a handful of sermons hardly demonstrates a trend, Nichols has opened up an important angle from which one might understand Jonathan Edwards; readers might hope to hear more from Nichols on the apologetic thrust of Edwards’s sermons. This disappointment, however, does not diminish the clarity of Nichols’s thought or the readability of his prose. *An Absolute Sort of Certainty* demands a keen knowledge of philosophy and presumes familiarity with Reformed theology. Readers wishing to improve their grasp of the nuances of *An Absolute Sort of Certainty* might first consult Nichols’s highly accessible *Jonathan Edwards: A Guided Tour of the Life and Thought* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 2001).

Phillip Luke Sinitiere

Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate: Five Hermeneutical Rules, by Charles H. Cosgrove, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. 240pp., \$22.

Cosgrove has identified five interpretive assumptions Christians commonly, but often unwittingly, use to justify their appeal to the Bible in public moral argument. He formulates each of these as a hermeneutical rule, describes the ways in which the rules are used, and examines the warrants offered for them. He then illustrates the manner in which each rule is used by examining particular moral cases in which appeal has been made to the rule to justify ethical conclusions drawn from Scripture.

The five hermeneutical assumptions or rules Cosgrove examines are (1) the rule of purpose (the purpose or justification behind a biblical moral rule carries greater weight than the rule itself); (2) the rule of analogy (analogical reasoning is an appropriate and necessary method for applying Scripture to contemporary moral issues); (3) the rule of countercultural witness (greater weight is given to countercultural tendencies in Scripture that express the voice of the powerless and the marginalized than to those that echo the dominant culture of their time); (4) the rule of nonscientific scope of Scripture (scientific knowledge is outside the scope of Scripture); and (5) the rule of moral-theological adjudication (moral-

theological considerations guide us in choosing between conflicting plausible interpretations).

This is a very readable and valuable study. It will assist readers to be more aware of their own interpretive methodologies and it will enable Christians to work toward shared assumptions within their communities, so that moral conclusions can be reached together. Cosgrove's aim is not so much to recommend the rules as to examine them, and readers are likely to find themselves more at ease with some of the rules and their applications than with others. Yet, it is hard to imagine anyone who would not benefit from the stimulus this book provides toward serious examination of the hermeneutic we use to reach and to justify moral positions. It may be particularly helpful to Christians involved in the disagreements that so frequently arise within and between Christian communities. Although it will not guarantee resolution of these differences, it should assist in analyzing the different hermeneutical rules at work in the development of conflicting positions.

Terrance L. Tiessen

Baptism in the Reformed Tradition: An Historical and Practical Theology, by John W. Riggs, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002. 187pp., \$22.95.

After centuries of debate, baptism today remains a controversial doctrine in the modern Christian church. Baptism is not only an issue between the Reformed and the Baptists, but it has become a debate within Reformed churches as the Reformed tradition encounters new members from non-Reformed backgrounds. Church planting pastors are now receiving requests for infant dedication. In 1981, the Reformed Church in America Theological Commission concluded that infant dedication was not a legitimate alternative to infant baptism. However, many church planting pastors, after presenting the Reformed instruction on infant baptism, are nevertheless consenting to perform infant dedications. How does the Reformed Church again address the theological doctrine of Reformed baptism and the practical concerns of our church-planting pastors?

Riggs begins with an evaluation of the liturgical movement in many mainline congregations. The evaluation commences with the Roman Catholic Church's liturgical renewal movement "rite of Christian Initiation of Adults." The study then briefly focuses on the liturgy presented in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, especially on baptism.

Following this introduction, Riggs traces the foundations of Reformed baptismal theology" through the first generation of Zwingli, Luther, and Bucer to the

second generation of Bullinger and Calvin. He then finishes his assessment of the reformers by a detailed study of Calvin's "Baptism and Divine Power."

The second part of Riggs's book concentrates on post-Reformation baptismal theology from the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession, through the Reformed orthodoxy of Heinrich Heppe, to the father of liberalism, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and on to the twentieth-century debates. The primary focus of the twentieth-century debate is Barth's rejection of infant baptism and the response from such quarters as Frantz Leenhardt, Pierre Marcel, and the Dutch Reformed Church. At the end of his book, Riggs provides a critical and constructive analysis of the Presbyterian *Book of Common Worship*.

As Riggs demonstrates in his book, even the Reformers did not reach a consensus on the doctrine of baptism. However, just as theologians continued to study, pray, discern the leading of the Holy Spirit, and debate the doctrine, so we are encouraged to continue our dialogue.

I found this book, *Baptism in the Reformed Tradition*, an important contribution to the debate of the sacrament in the Reformed churches. I hope more pastors will too.

Barry L. Wynveen

A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of God-Centered Worship, by Michael Horton, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002. 249pp., \$19.99.

Horton is president of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, editor of *Modern Reformation* magazine, an associate professor at Westminster Theological Seminary in California, and a minister in the United Reformed Church in North America. In the first part of his book, he makes five suggestions for Christ-centered reading and preaching: (1) in the reading of Scripture, whether privately or in public worship, consider including an Old Testament and New Testament reading, with the former related to the latter as promise to its fulfillment; (2) ask yourself what stage of redemptive history is reflected in this passage; (3) ask how you find yourself in Christ (and therefore with his church) in this story; (4) read and hear the Bible with the church; and (5) read and hear prayerfully.

Horton stresses that it is dangerous to separate how we worship (style) from whom we worship (substance). Examining contemporary culture, the author asks, "Where will we find that 'narrative structure' that makes our lives more meaningful than mere consumption and stimulation?" Due to his deep desire for

God-centered worship, Horton deplores the following of the latest fashion, fad, or “buzz,” which may entertain, but does not nourish.

Horton concludes with a few good ideas. He asks for the daily instruction of youth at home. At worship he seeks Word-centered innovation. He desires a distinction between the covenant renewal ceremony and outreach. He wants a new attitude toward the believing community that nurtures the baptized who wish to mature as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. There’s an abundance of material for reflection here and ample suggestions for further reading in the notes. The book is instructive and provocative.

Robert J. Hoeksema

Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas, by Elaine Pagels, New York: Random House, 2003. 257pp., \$24.95 (Canadian \$37.95).

Pagels’s study covers an impressive range of topics. At one level it is a review of the formation of the Nicene Creed and the New Testament canon in relation to heterodox forms of Christianity like the Gnostic schools and Arianism. Pagels finds liberating insights in Nag Hammadi texts like the Gospel of Thomas, particularly in contrast to the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John, she argues, disparages Thomas’s quest for a personal experience of Christ and teaches that passive faith is enough for salvation (based on John 20:29 and context). Pagels goes on to argue that the formulation of Christian orthodoxy that began with Justin and Irenaeus and concluded with Athanasius and Augustine has unnecessarily restricted conversation in the church about spiritual matters.

In Pagels’s judgment, Christian orthodoxy does not allow enough room for personal experience, self-cultivation, or intuition. This assessment appears to be based on Pagels’s own experience of an orthodox, evangelical church that condemned to eternal hell all those who do not believe that Jesus is God (30-31, 151). In order to promote spiritual growth that goes beyond mere faith and baptism, Pagels implies that the canon and creeds must be reinterpreted to allow heterodox beliefs like Gnosticism and Arianism.

Pagels’s reading of Christian tradition is a very personal one, and she is not afraid to stretch the evidence to make her case. Readers who are interested in more careful readings of John and the Thomas tradition, might want to read Gregory Riley’s *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy* (1995) or April DeConick’s *Voices of the Mystics* (2001). Pagels herself is reacting strongly against the church experience of her teenaged years. Readers of the *Reformed Review* will probably respond to her book based upon their own experiences of

the church. Those who have grown up in the more doctrinal, orthodox wing of the church may reject Pagels's ideas completely, or they may sympathize with her ideas as a way of developing their own need for spiritual intuition and individual perspective. The real question here is whether "orthodoxy" is a narrow definition of truth, as Pagels seems to assume, or a more inclusive set of complementary truths (the humanity and deity of Christ, regeneration and sanctification, etc.).

Readers in the more pietistic wing of the church, on the other hand, may wonder why Pagels has a problem with the tradition. Ever since the time of Francis of Assisi, there have been a variety of pietistic reactions against an over-intellectualized dogma. However, Pagels is convinced that all the innovators in the church from St. Francis to John Wesley have been forced to disguise their innovations by claiming that they are only clarifying what Jesus taught (183). In other words, Pietists are just Gnostics in disguise!

Pagels's book is just one of a number of recently published works that appeal to extracanonical sources like the Gospel of Thomas for their arguments. The December 22, 2003, issue of *Time* highlighted several of these books in a feature article on "lost (extracanonical) gospels." This new challenge raises an interesting problem for churches that have traditionally relied on the sufficiency of canonical Scripture (Belgic Confession, article 7). We are used to books that discuss theology on the basis of the teachings of Scripture. Many of our parishioners are able to evaluate such books simply by looking up the biblical texts that the authors cite. But, when arguments are based on less familiar texts like the Nag Hammadi codices, parishioners are more likely to accept arguments from reputable scholars at face value. Worse yet, they may simply ignore such arguments altogether and reinforce the impression that orthodoxy does not encourage any such inquiry.

Christopher B. Kaiser

Communion with Non-Catholic Christians: Risks, Challenges, and Opportunities, by Jeffrey VanderWilt, Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003. ix, 229pp., \$18.95.

Writing especially for Roman Catholics, VanderWilt provides an analysis of the present norms for eucharistic sharing in the Roman Catholic Church. He limits eucharistic sharing to the practice of receiving Holy Communion by baptized Christians.

Each chapter begins with an event that created media coverage. President Clinton's receiving Communion during Sunday Mass at a Roman Catholic

Church in Soweto, South Africa, is one. Each chapter ends with suggestions for further reading and questions for reflection and dialogue offered as a way for readers to explore the chapter's ideas and themes in the light of their own experience and knowledge.

Chapter one asks, What is eucharistic sharing? VanderWilt explains that at present Roman Catholics may only request and receive sacraments from ministers ordained in valid apostolic succession.

Chapter two explains reasons for caution in eucharistic sharing. The author suggests five such reasons: (1) failing to agree on eucharistic doctrine; (2) failing to unite in the church of Christ; (3) failing to maintain the apostolic succession; (4) expressing a nonexistent unity; (5) indiscriminate reception of Holy Communion.

Chapter three gives reasons for a more open eucharistic sharing (1) to share Communion because of Christian baptism; (2) to serve the pastoral needs of all Christians; (3) to signify the grace of unity; (4) to discern the body of Christ in one another; (5) to share genuine Christian hospitality; (6) to avoid further hurts and injuries (to those refused the sacrament).

Chapter four notes the opportunities and reasons for sharing the Eucharist in the hope of full Communion.

VanderWilt concludes that the present position of the Roman Catholic Church jeopardizes ecumenical relationships. It implies "unsubstantiated, sweeping, and negative judgments on the worth of non-Catholics, their ministries, and their faith. In a word, Catholic authorities ought to help us recover the gracious immensity of Christian communion. God has given us the opportunity to heal the wounds of a millennium. We must not let the opportunity pass."

This book offers the reader insight into the variety of opinions present in the Roman Catholic Church today regarding the Eucharist and ecumenical relationships.

Robert J. Hoeksema

Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living, by Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. xix, 150pp., \$15.00 (paper).

Plantinga has succeeded in fulfilling the aim of his book: "to lay out some main themes of the Christian faith and to show how Christian higher education fits inside a view of the world and of human life that is formed by these themes" (xvi). This book is intended to challenge the first-year college student to a higher level of thinking. Plantinga explores the ideas of hope, creation, the Fall, and redemption in order to ground the young reader in many of the Christian basics and provide a depth most Christian students have not experienced. With a rich mix of Scripture, ancient texts, the confessions, and contemporary theologians, he provides a tool for young Christians much as C. S. Lewis did through his book, *Mere Christianity*.

I especially appreciated the final chapter on Christian vocation in the kingdom of God. In this chapter Plantinga challenges the reader to see life as much more than "what we will be when we grow up." "Successful living depends especially on fitting our small kingdom inside God's big kingdom, always recalling where we got our dominion from in the first place" (106).

I must take some exception to Plantinga's view of higher learning outside of Christian liberal arts colleges and universities. He states that "for most Christian students mainstream higher education simply won't be adequate to help them understand the kingdom of God and their own vocation within it" (123). I understand that the focus of this book is for Christians attending a Christian school, but such language has the potential of taking a rich resource out of the hands of other Christian students.

That said, *Engaging God's World* is a gift every Christian student heading for higher education should receive upon graduation from high school.

Mark E. Mast

The First Christian: Universal Truth in the Teachings of Jesus, by Paul F. M. Zahl, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans and Cambridge, U. K., 2003. x, 138 pp.

The author is dean of the Cathedral Church of the Advent, Episcopal, in Birmingham, Alabama. He has also authored *A Short Systematic Theology* and *Five Women of the English Reformation*, both published by Eerdmans. He studied at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Harvard College, the University of Nottingham, and much later under Jürgen Moltmann at the University of Tübingen. There he discussed with Ernst Kasemann the Pauline doctrine of justification, which was Zahl's thesis topic, and Christianity's continuity and discontinuity with first-century Judaism. He also writes of the influence upon his views of the book *Jesus* by David Flusser, who is of the Jewish faith and a scholar of the New Testament who taught for many years at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Zahl studied the historical Jesus for thirty-five years and parallel to his academic study has been in parish ministry for thirty years.

The title arises out of the author's evangelical concern for how Jesus is discontinuous with Second Temple Judaism. This concern flows against the tide of much of present-day historical Jesus studies, which emphasize Jesus' continuity with the Judaism of his day. Zahl accepts Jesus' continuity with Judaism as an obvious given but believes that his discontinuity has been neglected, the very aspect of his life and teachings which brought him into conflict with the Jewish religious leaders and resulted in his crucifixion by the Romans and the rise of Christianity. He sees the holocaust as determining the thrust of New Testament theology since World War II—a theology that has changed extensively with regard to Judaism and its relation to Christianity, St. Paul, and Jesus.

The book has a preface, introduction and five chapters: "The Historical Jesus Problem," "Jesus the Jew," "Jesus and John the Baptist," "Jesus the Christian," and "The Centrifugal Force of Jesus the Christian." It also has an epilogue: "A Meditation at Christmas." The influence of Zahl's pastoral ministry at times is seen in contemporary illustrations he gives from life experience, books, music, and theater or cinema, but academic pursuits are also obvious. The main thrusts of the book are repeated several times so that they will not be missed. The major portion of the book should not be difficult for students and earnest readers, but this writer found himself rereading sentences and sections a number of times to be satisfied with his understanding.

A great deal of attention is given to the contrast between the message of John the Baptist and that of Jesus. John is seen as the end of the age of the prophets, with his message emphasizing the time of judgment being at hand, the ax laid to the

root of the tree, and God's reign about to begin. Jesus is seen as preaching a present time for renewal, a time in which he teaches and practices God's grace to sinners. Jesus' antitheses regarding the law of Moses in the Sermon on the Mount also illustrate the depravity of all people and their need for God's grace. Here is Jesus, the first Christian and evangelist, teaching total depravity and salvation by grace and living it by eating with and calling sinners to repentance.

Many present studies of the historical Jesus stand in sharp contrast to Zahl's position, which can be seen as a corrective to those positions. This reviewer would recommend the book to serious students and those concerned with the origins of the Christian church and its core message.

David W. Jurgens

Five Women of the English Reformation, by Paul F. M. Zahl, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001. viii, 120pp., \$18.00.

This is a unique and readable book about five remarkable women of the English Reformation who exhibited the very faith and heroism that marks the names of the (male) figures we most frequently think of in association with English reform in the sixteenth century.

Zahl, dean of the Cathedral Church (Episcopal) in Birmingham, Alabama, focuses on Anne Boleyn (1507-1536), Anne Askew (1521-1546), Katharine Parr (1514-1548), Jane Grey (1537-1554), and Catherine Willoughby (1520-1580). In each case, he presents a brief biography, the texts the woman has left behind, and the interpretation of her faith and life. Zahl notes,

All of these women thought theologically. They were lay theologians. They read theological books, most especially the Bible, and anything to which they could gain access from the continental Protestant Reformers. They talked theology. Their inner circles of court ladies were twenty-four-hours-a-day Bible studies. They saw everything that happened to them through two lenses: the lens of the providence of God and the lens of the furtherance of the Reformed Religion (5).

The stories of these zealous Christian women make fascinating reading. Anne Boleyn helped introduce the Reformation to England, while Katharine Parr helped save it at crucial points. "Justification by faith" was a life-giving theme to them both. King Henry VIII's second wife, Anne, was beheaded; Katharine, Henry's sixth queen, nearly suffered the same fate.

Anne Askew and Jane Grey focused on the Eucharist and what happened in the Mass, particularly the Roman Catholic view of transubstantiation. Both denied the “real presence” of Christ in the sacrament with Anne proclaiming at Newgate prison shortly before she was burned at the stake: “For my God will not be eaten with teeth, neither yet dieth he again. And upon these words, that I have now spoken, will I suffer death” (33). Jane Grey, a child prodigy, died at sixteen and had a correspondence with Heinrich Bullinger. She was charged with treason and executed but witnessed forcefully to her Reformed faith at her interrogation. Catherine Willoughby anticipated later Puritan views on election and predestination. She was forced to flee into exile with her husband and nursing baby, giving up everything she had as duchess of Suffolk.

Beside the intriguing nature of these lives, Zahl says: “I am pleading for the universality of these women’s lives, transcending gender, or rather unifying the genders within what the German Protestant world calls *theologische Existenz*. These women existed theologically. They said it and we know it. Yet I still experience their stories as unbearably moving” (96). For “theirs was the pilgrim’s progress of life beneath the shadow of the cross, the quintessence of human suffering interpreted by story” (97). This book helps capture the essence of the faith that led these five women to risk their lives for their beliefs.

Donald K. McKim

Glimpsing the Face of God, by Alister McGrath, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. 124pp., \$18.

In his latest book, Alister McGrath, professor of historical theology at Oxford University and principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, invites his readers to search for “meaning in the universe,” to explore the secrets of the vast, mysterious stellar world, which beckons us to explore what lies beyond it and what accounts for its existence. There are two clues: that the universe displays order and that it exhibits “a series of fundamental constants” (12) that invite the possibility of a divine creation (ch. 8).

McGrath engages the thought of those who argue against God’s existence, like biologist Darwin, psychologist Freud, and sociologist Marx (11-12), and admits the presence of an anomaly, namely, evil (ch. 9). Nevertheless, he keeps his focus on the Christian vision: the problem of evil, believers trust, will eventually vanish.

The reader receives more than just glimpses of the face of God, as the title suggests. She will be confronted by God's heart—God's love shown in his Son, Jesus Christ, very God and very man, who arose from the dead. For it is Jesus who through his teaching and especially his healing ministry gives humans the ultimate meaning they seek. *Glimpsing the Face of God* is a captivating book, whose appeal is enhanced by the many excellent color pictures, such as Botticelli's *St. Augustine*, Raphael's *St. Paul Preaching in Athens*, and Cranach the Elder's *Adam and Eve*.

Ralph W. Vunderink

Growing Old in Christ, edited by Stanley Hauerwas, Carole Bailey Stoneking, Keith G. Meador, and David Cloutier, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. x, 310pp., \$24.

This book challenges the church to examine the ways in which it has become a reflector of contemporary thought, rather than a proclaimer of biblical views about human personhood.

The chapter on generational conflict points out that the small-group strategy for church growth isolates the elderly and that the market model diminishes the social character of the church. "Rather than a market strategy, the church is God's jubilee. The church is an invitation to the ineffective and the infirm, a banquet for the sinner and outcast, who are enlivened by new possibilities for life together with God" (242-43).

I was pleased to read quotes from Merold Westphal and Elizabeth Johnson and happy to be reminded that it is not the accuracy of our memory that counts, but God remembering us. This book offers insights for retired clergy and others who struggle with the meaning of their life in Christ as they slowly, or swiftly, move from the active playing field to the sidelines of life. The eighteen contributors inform, encourage, challenge, and warm the heart of the reader.

Robert J. Hoeksema

In God's Time: The Bible and the Future, by Craig C. Hill, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. 229pp., \$16.

Here is a book that provides a challenge to the eschatology presented in the Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkin's *Left Behind* series and other popular books. The author of *In God's Time*, Craig C. Hill, professor of New Testament at Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D. C., endeavors "to show that the idea of God's triumph is central to the Christian faith and that a working knowledge of the concept is essential to an informed reading of the Bible, particularly the New Testament" (vii). In this highly readable paperback, the author appeals successfully both to academic and lay readers by relating personal stories and anecdotes from his own Christian pilgrimage, by clearly explaining complicated theological doctrines, and by the use of charts.

In his chapter, "First Things First: The Bible," Hill proposes a "reasonable and faithful alternative to inerrancy, on the one hand, and skepticism, on the other" (14). The author's hermeneutic is an inductive, modeling interpretation of Scripture over against a deductive, conforming approach.

The remaining chapters of the book guide the reader through the eschatology of Old Testament biblical prophesy, the pseudepigraphal documents, the ever popular Daniel and Revelation through Jesus and the New Testament's approach to eschatology, especially that of Paul. The author concludes his survey on biblical eschatology by an appeal to the church "to pass on to our descendants a faith that is both coherent, that is rooted in the past and oriented to the future" (195).

In his conclusion, Hill encourages Christians to live with hope, because God has acted preeminently in Jesus Christ, since "to live Christianly is to live hopefully" (198). In the appendix, "Not Left Behind," he provides a critical analysis of the history of the premillennial dispensational movement.

Teachers may find this book a useful tool for teaching about the biblical doctrine of last things. Preachers may find this book a helpful source for developing a doctrinal series of sermons on the subject of eschatology.

Barry L. Wynveen

Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context, by Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003. xvi, 538pp., \$30.

Stassen and Gushee have attempted “to write an introduction to Christian ethics that focuses unremittingly on Jesus Christ, the inaugurator of the kingdom of God” (xii), and the fruit of their effort is very rewarding. In particular, they want to let the Sermon on the Mount set the agenda for Christian ethics, within the framework of an ethic aimed at character formation, with the realization of God’s dynamic rule as our goal.

In this process, the authors put forward once more the distinctive reading of the sermon for which Stassen has previously argued, identifying fourteen triads, in each of which Jesus describes traditional righteousness, the vicious cycle into which sin leads us and a transforming initiative which will break that vicious cycle.

I find their approach very helpful. Unlike some traditions, whose emphasis on the teaching of Jesus has been put in contrast to the teaching of the Old Testament, here the roots of Jesus’ teaching are expertly traced from the Old Testament and confirmation of his teaching is noted elsewhere in the New Testament. The central norms of Christian ethics are identified as love and justice.

Roughly two-thirds of the book addresses thirteen contemporary situations in which Christians need great moral discernment. These are grouped under three main categories: issues regarding life, topics related to maleness and femaleness, and issues where relationships of justice and love are particularly difficult to ascertain and to implement. Given the desire to identify ways in which we can follow Jesus in transforming initiatives, the discussions include both moral analysis of the issues and identification of Christian practices. As ways by which we can seek the kingdom of God, prayer, politics, and practices are each discussed in closing.

This book will serve well as a textbook in ethics courses. It will also provide a valuable resource for Christians who are serious about living as faithful disciples of Jesus and who are seeking moral guidance in the midst of often confusing situations.

Terrance Tiessen

The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards: American Religion and the Evangelical Tradition, ed. D. G. Hart, Sean Michael Lucas, and Stephen J. Michols, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003. 225pp., \$21.99 (paper).

This book is a compilation of essays much in the model of a *festschrift*. The authors of these essays are Harry S. Stout, Stephen J. Nichols, Richard A. Bailey, Charles Hambrick-Stowe, George M. Marsden, C. Samuel Storms, K. Scott Oliphint, Gerald R. McDermott, Douglas A. Sweeney, Michael Lucas, and George S. Claghorn.

Richard A. Bailey writes about Jonathan Edwards as a preacher. He points out that the picture of Jonathan Edwards as a dry academician in the pulpit, reading from a manuscript is a very wrong picture. Edwards strove for liveliness and spontaneity in the pulpit, making use of sermon notes but not being bound to them.

Charles Hambrick Stowe writes about Jonathan Edwards's inner life, of his "inward sweet sense of Christ." Jonathan Edwards had his mystical side, although he always submitted his experience to the written Word of God. He also believed that the old scholastic theology was passé and concentrated much more on salvation history. He felt that reason was important but that the Christian's reason should be guided by revelation.

K. Scot Oliphint writes about Jonathan Edwards's apologetics in his opposition to Deism. He opposed Deism's rejection of everything that is mysterious in religion, pointing out that the heavenly source of Christianity makes it inevitable that it should contain some mysteries and that in rejecting all that is mysterious in Christianity, Deism has rejected Christianity itself.

D. G. Hart writes about Jonathan Edwards's own conscious conversion experience and examines his *Treatise on the Religious Affections* in some detail. He says, "Edwards stands at the font of modern day experimental [experiential] Calvinism" (170). I have to disagree with D. G. Hart. What Jonathan Edwards did do is submit the Puritan "experientiology," and that which had arisen around the events of the First Great Awakening, to a searching examination based on Scripture and concentrated on the "affections" of the persons involved. In his *Treatise on the Christian Affections*, J. Edwards addresses both the attitudes and allegations of the promoters of the Great Awakening and those of its detractors and submits them to a thorough discussion, not based so much on the emotional phenomena presented as on the state of the person's affections and attitudes toward sin, God, Christ, and holiness.

Parts three and four of the book deal with the effects of Jonathan Edwards on American religious life. In general, the Old School Presbyterians were quite

negative towards Edwards. Some later theologians such as Robert Lewis Dabney saw Edwards's thought as contributing to the decline of Puritan religion in New England. Archibald Alexander considered Jonathan Edwards's *Religious Affections* as being too detailed and too hard to read and comprehend.

The position of this reviewer is that Jonathan Edwards's legacy has been influential but that much of his influence has disappeared with time. His fame has endured longer and been greater than his influence.

Arie Blok

The NIV Reconsidered: A Fresh Look at a Popular Translation, by Earl Radmacher and Zane C. Hodges, Rendicion Viva, 1990.

The reader is presented with a ten-chapter survey and review of the NIV which, in turn, examines and evaluates the accuracy and adequacy of previous book reviews and studies, and among them the review of Oudersluys in the *Reformed Review* 34 (Autumn 1980), 39, 67-68, etc.

The authors are negative in their appraisal of the NIV, and are always pleased to encounter new additional reviews and studies that reinforce their negativity. It is not surprising that they find objectionable my praise of the NIV's use of "dynamic equivalence" as a translating technique, because the meaning of the term itself is in some dispute (29). On the other hand, they approve my criticism of the new version's handling of *hilasterion* (67), and on the same page where I question the handling of the phrase *in his blood* (Rom. 3:25), they are quick to approve. It does not take long for a reader to sense that the authors approve of my negative comments but are dismayed if in any shape or manner I approve or defend the NIV version. Their negativity goes so far as to question whether or not the NIV is translated from the best available Greek New Testament text (144).

To ensure that the latter will be the case for all future readers of the Greek text, the authors have provided the now everywhere accepted critical edition of the Greek New Testament with what they hope will be a formidable competitor – a new edition of the old, long-dead *textus receptus*, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, 2nd ed., edited by Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, assistant editor William C. Dunkin (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985). If the authors are not already doing so, I hope they will take steps to fortify themselves against the disappointment that is bound to be ensuing and inevitable.

Richard C. Oudersluys

No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence, by Catherine Clark Kroeger and Nancy Nason-Clark, Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001. 200pp., \$12.

Nason-Clark is professor of sociology at the University of New Brunswick, Canada. Kroeger is adjunct associate professor of classical and ministry studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Together they challenge the evangelical Christian community to listen to women talk about the violence they have suffered. They illustrate how the church denies the abuse in its midst. They include arresting statistics: "Over 60 percent of murderers between the ages of fifteen and twenty-one are incarcerated for having killed their mother's abuser." They offer superb resources.

I begin with the resources. In the appendixes the authors present scripture passages and principles in illustration of the word God speaks against abuse; scriptures that provide comfort for the victim and condemn the abuse; intervention resources for pastors; education and congregational resources. These include specific questions that a pastor or a friend might ask a person suspected of being the victim of abuse. Internet and bibliographical references are also supplied.

Is dating violence discussed in your youth group? Are you aware of the nearest safe women's shelter to your church and what its needs are? Have you preached a sermon condemning abuse in the home? Do you believe the suffering of an abused woman can bring salvation to her husband?

The book calls the church to recognize the extent of abuse in Christian families, confronts the church in its self-deception, and demonstrates deception's consequences. The authors include the church's global responsibility for women who face dowry death (6,917 deaths in India in 1996), sex trafficking, enforced prostitution, and genital mutilation.

For the pastor or the church leader who seeks to understand the nature of abuse and what may be done on a very practical level, this volume provides a splendid resource. If you are an evangelical pastor and you don't have a book in your library on the subject of abuse, buy this one. It's an excellent starting point.

Robert J. Hoeksema

The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant: An Historical Study of the Significance of Infant Baptism in the Presbyterian Church, by Lewis Bevens Schenck, introduction by Frank A. James III, Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1940, Introduction 2003. 188pp., \$15.99.

Originally published in 1940, *The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant* augments the current debate over the practice of infant baptism. The author, the late Lewis Bevens Schenck, taught Bible and religion at Davidson College for almost forty years. His biographer described the professor as a “compassionate Calvinist (Frank A. James III, introduction). This book was a publication of Schenck’s doctoral dissertation at Yale University.

Schenck’s doctrine on infant baptism agrees with Horace Bushnell’s *Christian Nurture*, which states that a child of the covenant should “grow up as a Christian and never know himself otherwise (p. 2).”

Although not explicitly stated, the author’s purpose attempts to answer the question of a Dr. Gerhart. Describing the Presbyterian minister as a “workman in the garden of the Lord, Gerhart posed the question, “Are these little ones (i.e. children of believing parents) living plants, or are they poisonous weeds?” (156). Schenck adds, “Do baptized children belong to the Devil or to the Lord? Are they in a state of condemnation or in a state of grace?”

Schenck answers the question through a historical study of the Presbyterian Church’s doctrine on infant baptism. Then the author criticizes the Great Awakening and the development of revivalism for threatening the doctrine of children in the covenant. The book concludes by clarifying the confusion about the doctrine of infant baptism and the role of children in the covenant. An underlying theme in Schenck’s book is promoting a strong Christian education program in the church, especially the covenant children.

Although the book primarily addresses the tension in the Presbyterian Church U.S. (Southern Presbyterian Church) of the 1940s, I believe that Schenck’s defense of infant baptism equally applies to the debate in the Reformed Church and other historic reformed churches. Let us heed Schenck’s call to return to our Reformed, historic roots on the doctrine of infant baptism and the Christian education of these covenant children.

Barry L. Wynveen

The Promise and Perils of Postmodernism, by Millard J. Erickson, Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001. 335pp.

Erickson probes the elusive nature of postmodernism by viewing the teachings of four of its diverse representatives. Two are Frenchmen: Derrida, who deals with the relationship between words and reality; and Foucault, who captures the notion of power, notably political power. Two are Americans: the pragmatist, Richard Rorty; and Stanley Fish, who is a member of the “Yale School” of literary criticism (ch. 6-9). While each of these has an individual agenda, they all concur that human knowledge is historically conditioned, not metaphysically ascertainable.

The author traces the roots of this contemporary movement back to its twentieth-century predecessors (Heidegger, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein) and nineteenth-century figures like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche (ch. 4-5). Most fascinating to this reviewer is the historical context of postmodernism. It is a rejection of modernism: Descartes’s mathematical approach to reality, Newton’s clockwork universe, Locke’s empiricism, and Kant’s notion of autonomy (ch. 3).

Concurring with the postmodernists that human knowledge is limited, Erickson regrets that the movement at times is intolerant of other alternatives, demanding as it does a measure of conformity (ch. 10-11). In other words, he detects promises as well as perils in postmodernism. Erickson accepts a kind of correspondence view of truth (ch. 13, 15), taking over parts of the objective view of reality as described by premodernists like Plato, Augustine, and Aquinas.

Author of a three-volume *Christian Theology*, Erickson is eminently qualified to guide the reader through the postmodernistic maze to a new appreciation of the Christian faith. An in-depth treatment would do greater justice to this rich work—a description of four pivotal stages in Western intellectual thought, with a steadfast focus on the Christian faith.

Ralph W. Vunderink

Repentance: The First Word of the Gospel, by Richard O. Roberts, Wheaton: Crossway, 2003. 368pp., \$19.99.

Richard O. Roberts lists several reasons why repentance has faded from much public worship. He cites the avoidance of doctrinal preaching, lack of awareness that repentance is mandatory, confusion of repentance with “works” (we are not saved by works, but by faith alone), a distorted focus on the positive, the

substitution of a strong emphasis on success, and the lack of moral earnestness among church leaders (16-20).

Roberts focuses on repentance as the “first word of the gospel.” This is a reference to John the Baptist’s and Jesus’ own earliest preaching. A cursory scan through the Bible will uncover regular, persistent references to repentance as the precursor of all renewal. The history of the Christian church is similarly the story of the rediscovery of the need to begin at this point. Roberts reminds us that repentance is the “first word of the twelve,” “the focus of Peter’s preaching,” “heart of Paul’s preaching,” and “the last call to the churches in the Revelation” (32-39).

The author traces this repentance theme through both the Old and New Testaments. He deals appealingly with such themes as, “Seven Myths of Repentance,” “Seven Maxims of Repentance,” “Seven Marks of Repentance,” “Seven Fruits of Repentance,” and “Seven Models of Repentance.” These are so structured that they may be used in sermon series or taught in classes. The chapter, “Myths of Repentance,” for instance, deals helpfully with the distinction between “self-improvement,” and repentance. The centrality of calling directly upon God in the midst of our own helplessness is a refreshing emphasis, especially for those of us who have tried repeatedly to weed out bad habits in our own strength. The focus upon repentance as the proper “handle” by which we experience a constant partnership between the Holy Spirit and our own actions is well worth the effort of reading through this well-written book.

As pastors and church leaders, we may well ask ourselves whether we are giving sufficient time and emphasis to the need for repentance. If this was a hallmark of the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus, and has been at the core of virtually every movement of renewal in the history of the Christian church, may we not profit by taking the risk of making this emphasis central to our own church activities? Thanks to Richard Roberts we have helpful tools for making the necessary adjustments in a way relevant to our own time.

Carl J. Schroeder

A Scientific Theology, Volume 2: Reality by Alister E. McGrath, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. 343pp., \$50.

McGrath suggests that the epistemological integrity of theological science in the twenty-first century can be aided through the philosophy of critical realism. With reference to Karl Barth's concern that the task of theology not become dependent upon philosophy or other methodologies outside that of the Word of God revealed in Jesus Christ, McGrath stresses the ancillary posture that any tool of philosophy, such as critical realism, must take with respect to theological pronouncement. That said, McGrath argues basically that, as an epistemological option, critical realism helps create intellectual space for the adoption of a worldview that seeks the unity of knowledge yet without insisting on the uniformity of knowledge.

McGrath begins by identifying and then discrediting one of the main epistemological assertions that grew out of the Enlightenment, that of foundationalism. Attention is also given to those epistemologies aimed at dismantling and discrediting the claims of Enlightenment foundationalism. One of McGrath's main points is that the fragmentary status of knowledge with which many theologians now struggle is a result of the overcorrection of foundationalist claims. These theologians would have us believe that none of us can ever know all the truth of reality and that truth does not exist beyond the bounds of human construction.

In response to this urge to overcorrect as well as to a few who today still hold out hope for the viability of foundationalism, McGrath makes his case for critical realism over against two other schools of thought: naïve realism, and postmodern anti-realism. The main characteristic that distinguishes critical realism from both of these is its acknowledgment of the impact that the knower has on the pursuit of knowledge. McGrath offers the work in critical realist philosophy done by Roy Baskher as the grounds on which a possible reintegration of Christian spirituality and theology could take place.

The undercurrent running through McGrath's work is his concern for the intellectual credibility of Christianity within the sphere of public discourse about a world that is inhabited by both theologians and natural scientists. The specific point of intersection between theology and natural science for McGrath is the Christian belief that the natural world is God's creation. Those who subscribe to the doctrinal articulations of orthodox Christianity have a stake in the work done by natural scientists since, "The basic theme of 'encountering reality' runs throughout both these natural sciences and a scientific theology, and is rooted in the Christian doctrine of creation" (245).

A Scientific Theology is the result of a decades-long yearning McGrath has had to “explore the relation between Christian theology and the natural sciences, using philosophy and history as dialogue partners,” (*A Scientific Theology*, vol. 1, xi). Volumes one and two have been devoted largely to the definition of terms. Volume three is entitled, *Theory*, and in it McGrath will articulate a scientific theology for the life of the church as well as its employment in the service of the gospel message that the church proclaims.

Derek DeJager

Sermons on the Book of Micah, by John Calvin, trans. and ed. by Benjamin Wirt Farley, Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2003. 433pp., \$19.99.

John Calvin’s sermons on the Book of Micah demonstrate these words from Ecclesiastes: Times have changed but human nature has not. In his time, Micah proclaimed God’s ethical word to the rebellious people of Judah. Over 450 years ago, Calvin preached against the Genevan civic leaders, merchants and the judicial system; the Sixteenth Century Roman Catholic Church; the Anabaptists; and the Libertines or the Spiritualists. Although Calvin preached these twenty-eight sermons on the Book of Micah from November 12, 1550, to January 10, 1551, they are equally relevant today.

The sermons demonstrate Calvin’s wit as a communicator, his erudition as an interpreter of Scripture and theologian, and his righteous passion as a pastor. At times, Calvin attacked his opponents with a biting criticism, which was always concealed in the glove of a loving pastor. With one hand the Genevan preacher presented the cold, hard reality of judgment for unrepentant. With the other hand, Calvin offered God’s loving grace to the contrite.

Micah’s prophecy and Calvin’s preaching needs to be heard in our own time. Both servants attacked the materialism and the idolatry of their time. For instance, Calvin would disparage our commercialization of Christmas. On December 25, 1551, preaching on Micah 5:7-14, Calvin began his sermon with his usual form. Then he observed the disproportionate attendance in the service for Christmas Day (what’s new?). The preacher accuses them of being poor beasts who have come to honor Noel. (Calvin preached on incarnation on the Sunday after December 25). He then added, “But if you think that Jesus Christ was born today, you are as crazed as wild beasts. For when you elevate one day alone for the purpose of worshiping God, you have just turned it into an idol.” He further adds that while they claim to celebrate Christmas to honor God, they have turned the holiday into an honor of the devil (303). Do we make our holidays into celebrations of idolatry?

Benjamin Wirt Farley has rendered a readable translation of Calvin's sermons. Preachers should read these sermons. Calvin is the master preacher and teacher of preachers.

Barry L. Wynveen

Spirituality and Social Ethics in John Calvin. A Pneumatological Perspective, (Sueng Hoon) Paul Chung. Lanham, M.D.: University Press of America, 2000. viii, 217pp., \$37.

The title of this book immediately arouses one's interest, for what does spirituality have to do with social ethics? If one is familiar with Calvin's life and theology, however, it will soon become apparent that this linkage is not farfetched. For Calvin is distinguished by his profound sense of piety or godliness, on the one hand, and his social concern, on the other. Moreover, Calvin, "the theologian of the Holy Spirit" (B.B. Warfield and others), did not limit the work of the Spirit to one's salvation, but also saw the Spirit at work in the church and in the world.

Hence, after a brief introduction to Calvin's pneumatology, Chung discusses the Spirit in relation to the cosmos, the Trinity, soteriology, the Law, the church, and the much-debated question about Calvin's contribution to democracy and capitalism. The book concludes with an appendix, "The Lord's Supper Among Lutherans and Reformed Protestants from an Ecumenical Perspective." Here his concern is to demonstrate that the differences between Luther and Calvin on the nature of the real presence of Christ in the Supper have been overemphasized. Perhaps, but I question one word in Chung's statement that in the recent "'Mutual Affirmation and Admonition' neither Lutherans nor Reformed have hesitation in confessing the presence of Christ in the Supper really, *physically*, and spiritually" (172, emphasis mine). Have Reformed believers ever agreed that Christ is *physically* present in the Supper?

Apart from that, and a few other minor quibbles, I find this to be a balanced and perceptive treatment of Calvin's doctrine of the Holy Spirit, viewed from a variety of perspectives. Chung, a Korean-American, who is an adjunct faculty member at San Francisco Theological Seminary, wrote this as a post-doctoral dissertation, with Martin Anton Schmidt of the University of Basel as his principal advisor. However, he also received help from William Bouwsma of the University of California in Berkeley and Timothy Lull of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley.

Chung explains that after writing his doctoral dissertation on Karl Barth at the University of Basel in 1992, he became interested in Calvin, "with special regard for the reception of Calvinism in my home country of South Korea" (vii). Having lectured in Korea at an Asian Calvin Studies Conference, I can vouch for the fact that the long-standing interest in Calvinism in Korea is now turning more and more to an interest in Calvin himself. This book, which is generally very readable, should also help toward that end in this country as well.

I. John Hesselink

The Starting Point of Calvin's Theology, by George H. Tavard, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. ix, 199pp., \$20.

It will probably come as a surprise to non-Calvin specialists that some of the finest studies of Calvin's life and theology during the past forty years have been written by Roman Catholic scholars. One of them is the distinguished French-American theologian George Tavard. Although approximately half of his numerous publications are in French, most of his teaching career has been in the United States, not only at Roman Catholic colleges and seminaries, but also at Protestant seminaries.

The present study arises out of two special interests of Tavard: the ecumenical movement (he has been involved in Catholic dialogue with Anglicans, Lutherans, and Methodists), and his many years of teaching a course on Calvin at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio. (I asked him once how he happened to do this and his response was: "There were a number of Presbyterian students and others at the seminary who wanted to study Calvin's *Institutes*. No one else was willing to do this, so I taught the course most of my career there.")

Tavard makes a singular contribution to Calvin studies in this book because he provides us with a thorough analysis of what he calls "the starting point" of Calvin's theology, viz., Calvin's little-known work, *Psychopannychia*. This is basically a polemic against the Anabaptist view of soul sleep after death. What makes this study particularly significant is that it was written in France in 1534, shortly after his conversion experience prior to the composition of the first edition of the *Institutes*. However, Calvin did not publish the work until 1542. The reasons for the delay are not although clear, but the point is that this work represents Calvin's first theological effort. (His earlier published work in 1531 re: Seneca on clemency was a humanist study.)

Tavard is not only interested in the content of this first theological writing of Calvin; he also sees here a link with the first chapter of the 1536 *Institutes* and

traces certain themes from the early work as they are developed in the *Institutes*. Moreover – here Tavad is on shaky ground – he contends that the first four chapters of the *Institutes*, which are more irenic, were written before Calvin’s open commitment to the Reformation, and the rest of the book after the episode of the Placards in November 1534 (123, 141). According to Tavad, this accounts for the more polemical tone in the latter part of the *Institutes*, especially the condemnation of the Mass as an abomination, polluted “by every kind of impiety, blasphemy, idolatry, sacrilege” (122).

What Tavad wants to do, in short, is to find a common ground for Catholic-Reformed dialogue on the basis of the less polemical portions of Calvin’s theology. Tavad’s motivation is laudable, but it is questionable whether one can separate the anti-papal, polemical parts of Calvin’s theology from the more positive ones, especially the mystical trends of late medieval theology that Tavad finds developed in Calvin’s theology. Tavad’s irenicism and goal, however, are admirable. He concedes, for example, that “Calvin’s Catholic adversaries were blinded to the fundamental catholicity of his thought” (191). And few would disagree that “there is an urgency to go beyond mutual understanding, beyond polite apologetics, in order to discover equivalencies or analogies between the traditions where this is at all possible” (192).

I. John Hesselink

To Know and Love God, by David K. Clark, Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2003. xxxii, 464pp., \$35.

This is a timely book, for *To Know and Love God* addresses several major issues facing the Christian faith today. Starting with Scripture as the principle of authority for theological reflection, embodying as it does God’s self-revelation to, and written down by, the Hebrew-Christian community, the author David Clark, at present professor of theology at Bethel Seminary, moves on to discuss theology’s cultural context, the communal (and personal) way Scripture’s message is being interpreted. He then treats theology in relation to modern science, which in recent years is being viewed by some to be less hostile, in fact, more favorably disposed to religious discourse. Theology may, further, receive valuable aid from, rather than be pitted against, philosophy by employing human wisdom’s careful definitions and clear distinctions as it maps out various sources of human knowledge and assesses non-Christian truth claims.

Especially pertinent, in the opinion of this reviewer, is chapter ten on Christianity’s message and the world religions, notably in light of current discussions about Islam’s militant or moderate nature. Clark tries to balance

between an exclusive disagreement with and an inclusive tolerance toward other religions, but he holds steady on the uniqueness of the Christian message, which transcends religious (and ethical) relativism. He can uphold this absolute claim because, for him, religious language refers to the triune God, the author of faith.

To Know and Love God is a fine tribute to the cause of evangelical faith, even more so when it is rendered, as the author himself acknowledges toward the end, *To Know and Love God the Creator and Christ the Redeemer*. Its irenic approach reflects Millard Erickson's conciliatory trilogy, *Christian Theology*, and its scholarship mirrors the stance of evangelicals like the late Baptist Carl Henry and occasionally cites contributions from Reformed thinkers (e.g., Alvin Plantinga). A possible follow-up volume may show how concretely a developed evangelical theology can meet the counterclaims of an equally articulated Islam theology; that is, whether or not both comprehensive religions affecting all aspects of life can co-exist as salvific options.

Ralph W. Vunderink

Touchdown Jesus: The Mixing of Sacred and Secular in American History, by R. Laurence Moore, Westminster John Knox, 2003. 195pp., \$24.95.

Moore believes that anyone wishing to understand America must pay attention to the interaction between religion and the public sphere. His purpose in this book "is to give historical perspective to the way religion operates in American culture at the beginning of the twenty-first century." The author is well qualified to achieve this goal. Moore is professor of American studies at Cornell University and the author of several books, including the well-received, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans*. Two key ideas inform his study – the religious and the nonreligious may be distinguishable but are never separable in culture, and religious activity always includes nonreligious goals and consequences.

Following a brief introduction to religion in the United States, nine topics are examined historically, such as the public display of religion, Protestant and Catholic cultures, Protestant adoption of the free-market approach, and immigrant religion and the negotiation of identity. The chapter, "Science and the Battle for the Souls of Children," may serve as an example for Moore's approach. He introduces the controversy over the teaching of evolution by placing it in context: religious groups requesting exemption from certain laws; and, rights/responsibility conflict (in this case, the right of parents to teach their children versus the state's responsibility to educate citizens). Moore then tells the story of the Scopes Trial, suggesting that more was at stake than simply

scientific knowledge – religious beliefs help determine many other sorts of beliefs. He presents the history of the relationship between science and religion in America, with special attention to Darwin’s theory. His analysis leads him to conclude that the teaching of Darwinian evolution has been so explosively controversial because it challenges the assumption that there is a harmony between different areas of knowledge and because it has enabled atheism to become intellectually respectable by explaining the existence of human beings without reference to God.

This book is aimed at the general reader and provides a good introduction to the complex interaction of religion with American culture. Its lack of footnotes or endnotes would limit its use academically. Pastors could benefit from reading it.

Jeffrey W. Taylor

The Trustworthiness of God: Perspectives on the Nature of Scripture, ed. by Paul Helm and Carl R. Trueman. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. xiii, 289pp., \$28.

This is a collection of fourteen essays and two responses by an international array of scholars. The essays are divided into Old Testament; New Testament; and historical, systematic, and philosophical perspectives. The theme of the book is God’s trustworthiness or faithfulness.

The writers approach their theme by looking at the way it is developed in various portions of Scripture. In the case of the Old Testament, the focus is on Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, the wisdom literature, and Micah’s prophecy. For the New Testament, essays discuss Jesus and Scripture, Paul’s view of Scripture and God’s faithfulness, God and Scripture in Hebrews, and Paul’s literal interpretation of “do not muzzle the ox.”

Just as it is central in the Scriptures to say that God can be trusted, so also, the writers argue, we must affirm that the medium through which this message comes – the Bible – is likewise trustworthy. Thus, there is a firm interrelatedness between the doctrines of God and Scripture. In the end, one of the most helpful summaries of what is at stake here is Carl Trueman’s comment in relation to Calvin and the Reformers: “To argue for a promising God is to argue for a trustworthy God, and to argue for a trustworthy God is to argue for a God whose words and deeds are basically consistent with each other and reveal one who is committed to being a certain kind of God for us” (191).

Fortunately, this volume does not get bogged down in “labyrinthine debates about inerrancy and about the nature of the degrees of inspiration” (97). Francis Watson’s “An Evangelical Response” puts it well:

The “key issue” for evangelicals in their debates with others is not “the authority of Scripture” as such and in abstraction but the authority and trustworthiness of Scripture in its manifold, variegated, infinitely rich testimony to Jesus, as the fellow human who, for Christians, is constitutive of God’s own identity. If we could achieve clarity on *that* point and interpret Scripture accordingly, then the old, unevangelical, and therefore irrelevant anxieties about the historicity of Genesis or the date of Deuteronomy would disappear, and we might have a biblical scholarship focused on the gospel itself (288).

If this volume can contribute to that end, it will serve a significant purpose indeed.

Donald K. McKim

Whose Religion Is Christianity?: The Gospel Beyond the West, by Lamin Sanneh, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003, xii + 150pp., \$12 paper.

To adherents of secularization theses, religion (and Christianity in particular) has become irrelevant and has been marshaled into the margins of private oblivion. Yet a number of journalists, historians, and other scholars of religion, contrary to those who prophesied the triumph of secularization, contend that Christianity has witnessed sustained and significant growth in recent years. “The top-down culture of Christendom, with social pedigree ruling the roost,” observes Yale historian Lamin Sanneh, “has been replaced by the bottom-up shakedown that world Christianity has induced” (87-88). In *Whose Religion Is Christianity?* Sanneh engagingly seeks to account for, describe, and explain the recent “worldwide Christian resurgence” in Latin America, Africa, and Asia (among other areas) that “seems to proceed without Western organizational structures, including academic recognition, and is occurring amidst widespread political instability, and the collapse of public institutions” (3). To best observe such resurgence, Sanneh convincingly argues, Christianity should be seen as a *world* religion and in a *global* context.

Sanneh’s approach is as helpful as his thesis is challenging. After setting the global context in the introduction, he writes in a question-and-answer format for the remainder of the text, exploring first “Christianity as a World Religion,” and

second, "The Bible and Its Mother Tongue Variations." Sanneh adopts the "interactive interview style" because it opens the "personal dimension of religion" and because the differences that emerge in religious conversations (and notably discussions of Christianity and culture) can actually be "enriching and mutually instructive" rather than divisive or harmful. Furthermore, Sanneh keenly asserts, uncovering difference should not be a "barrier to dialogue" (5-6).

So why has Christianity witnessed explosive growth beyond the West? Sanneh suggests that the "political domestication" (75) of the Christian faith in Europe has resulted in a cold "melancholy" where the spirit is "wilting" (30). Other factors, like globalization, expand boundaries and redefine relationships and associations, whether political, social, economic, or religious. Also, the Western "guilt complex" (35) over the painful memories of slavery or the maddening prerogative of colonialism prompts reflection on the wider world. Either way, Sanneh concisely contends, western Christians *must* attempt to understand the dynamics behind this world Christian resurgence. Such an attempt must be informed because, as important as doctrine and exegesis are to the life of faith, lived religion according to scriptural injunction within a community of faith is equally important. Simply put, Western Christians must become conscious of the local indigenous factors (translation and agency) that shape global Christian faith and promote healthy spiritual growth, despite things like economic distress or severe persecution, things western Christians often *disassociate* with progress and expansion.

Sanneh highlights Africa (and to some extent China) to explain how the new Christian resurgence operates. He points out that this growth has occurred in a postcolonial context and is asked by his interlocutor if it is better to describe the process of cultural translation in Africa "[a]s the Christian discovery of indigenous societies or the indigenous discovery of Christianity?" (55). The differences, Sanneh carefully points out, lie in "external transmission" on the one hand, and "internal appropriation" (55) on the other.

Sanneh's large claim—and it is a claim western Christians must thoughtfully consider and sincerely give time to ingest—is that the new Christian resurgence has come about because of the process of (cultural) translation—a fact that is the church's "birthmark" and "its missionary benchmark" (97). Sanneh then observes that "Christianity is the religion of over two thousand different language groups in the world. More people pray and worship in more languages in Christianity than any other religion in the world" (69) and that "Christianity seems unique in being the only world religion that is transmitted without the language or originating culture of its founder" (98). As such, the storied history of "vernacular translation" produced a literacy that typically resulted in moments of cultural and social transformation and acted as a "shelter

for indigenous ideas and values” (109). Sanneh cites Yoruba Christian converts in Nigeria, for example, whose name for savior, *Olugbala*, is loaded with meanings of divine power and redemptive suffering, and the Maasai of East Africa, whose notions of faith and believing hinge not on individual appropriation but on communal participation. According to Sanneh, the process of translation leans against conquest and opens the way for “encounter” (123).

Sanneh is supremely qualified to bring his depth of insight into such a salient topic. Gambian-born and the son of a Muslim chieftain, Sanneh’s scholarly career has focused on, among other things, Christian-Muslim relations in West Africa (*Piety and Power: Muslims and Christians in West Africa* [Orbis, 1996]) and, perhaps most importantly, the thesis that translation of Christianity to indigenous, mother-tongue languages actually preserves rather than undermines the health of cultures (*Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* [Orbis, 1989] and *Encountering the West: Christianity and the Global Cultural Process* [Orbis, 1993]). Those keen to hear Sanneh out on these issues might also consult the work of Andrew F. Walls (*The Missionary Movement in Christian History* [Orbis, 1996] and *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* [Orbis, 2002]) and Philip Jenkins (*The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* [Oxford University Press, 2002]), scholars whose work complements and enhances Sanneh’s observations. Above all, Sanneh’s *The Gospel Beyond the West* pushes those of faith to reevaluate and expand denominational and ecumenical boundaries and ultimately embrace the fact that “Christianity is a multicolored fabric where each new thread, chosen and refined at the Designer’s hand, adds luster and strength to the whole. In this pattern of faith affirmation we should stress the importance of interwoven solidarity with fellow believer, past, present, and future” (56).

Phillip Luke Sinitiere

Your Word Is Truth: A Project of Evangelicals and Catholics Together, ed. Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. x, 168pp., \$20 (paper).

The project, “Evangelicals and Catholics Together,” endeavors to find common ground and to explore those areas often thought to be stumbling blocks for ecumenical relations. *Your Word Is Truth* brings together distinguished evangelical and Catholic theologians to explore the role of Scripture and the authority of tradition. Evangelical scholars Timothy George, J. I. Packer, and John Woodbridge and Catholic scholars Avery Cardinal Dulles, J. J., Thomas G. Guarino, and Francis Martin explore the ideas of truth, *sola scriptura*, and tradition. Each is faithful to his own tradition, being both scholarly and personal and allowing his own passions to be read between the lines. The authors speak to

what they know and allow their words to stand on their own. It is up to the reader to connect the dots as the dividing wall between these groups begins to fade and understanding is discovered. It is not possible to read this book without having a greater understanding and appreciation of the Catholic tradition and a better understanding, and often ignored insights, into our own Reformed tradition.

This book is an obvious must for any Reformed person who is working in an ecumenical environment where Catholics and evangelicals are striving to work together in sharing with the world that Jesus is Lord. It is also a wonderful resource for ministers who find more and more of their parishioners exploring the other tradition. The general knowledge to help understand where they come from and to provide words to what the other might believe is well worth the price of the book. The value, however, does not end there. As reformers who often forget that our roots stem from the same church fathers that molded the tradition of the Catholic Church, we must be willing to enter into this conversation for our own wholeness. As Pope John Paul II said, "Dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas. In some ways, it is always an exchange of gifts" (79). There are many gifts found in the pages of this book.

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