Contributors

3 The Editor / IN LUCE TUA: CONFERENCE CALL
6 Lois Reiner / THE IDEA (verse)
7 John B. Hougen / LUTHERAN ROOTS FOR A THEOLOGY OF CULTURE
14 Philip M. Merklinger / HEGEL, THE YOUNG MARX, AND DEUTSCHE MARKS
20 Judith Peters / LETTER FROM LIMA
23 Robert Pawlowski / BEYOND LIMA (Verse)
24 Charles Vandersee / LETTER FROM DOGWOOD: GOD IS IN THE DETAILS
27 Michael Becker / MICRO-BUSINESSES IN THE TWO-THIRDS WORLD
30 REVIEWS / Betty DeBerg, Sarah DeMaris, Theodore Ludwig, Tom Kennedy and Eric Wignall
35 Charles Strietelmeier / CAPPING THE JOKE (verse)

Departmental Editors
Eric Wignall, Assistant to the Editor
Richard H. W. Brauer, Art Editor
Kathleen Mullen, Poetry Editor
Tom Kennedy, Book Review Editor
Jane Layman, Proofreader

Advisory Board
James Albers
Richard Baepler
James Caristi
Christine H. Lehmann
Alfred Meyer
Arlin G. Meyer
Frederick A. Niedner, Jr.
Mel Piehl
Mark Schwehn

Business Manager
Wilbur H. Hutchins

THE CRESSET is published monthly during the academic year, September through May, by the Valparaiso University Press as a forum for ideas and informed opinion. The views expressed are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the preponderance of opinion at Valparaiso University. Manuscripts should be addressed to the Editor and accompanied by return postage. Letters to the Editor for publication are subject to editing for brevity. The Book Review Index and the American Humanities Index list Cresset reviews. Second class postage is paid at Valparaiso, Indiana. Regular Subscription rates: one year-$8.50; two years-$14.75; Student subscription rates: one year-$4; single copy-$7.50. Entire contents copyrighted 1990 by the Valparaiso University Press, Valparaiso, Indiana 46388, without whose written permission reproduction in whole or in part for any purpose whatsoever is expressly forbidden.


Back Cover: William DeHoff, John’s Painting, 1978-81, acrylic on canvas, 46 5/8 x 71 7/8 inches. University Collection, Valparaiso University Museum of Art. University Fund and Gail M. Eifrig Purchase. 82.11.

The drawing on pp. 4-5 of the Wartburg is the work of California artist Jeffery Neal Larson, and is used with his permission.

Correction: Librarians take note:

The April and May issues of this current year are mis-numbered. The correct numbers are April, Vol. LIII, No. 6; and May, Vol. LIII, No. 7. We regret any inconvenience this mistake may have caused.
Conference Call

During the week following the Call to Faithfulness conference at St. Olaf this summer, three of us from Valpo who had been there sat down to talk about it: James Bachman, from the Department of Philosophy, Mel Piehl of Christ College, and the editor. Recognizing in the process a considerably greater degree of humility than is her wont, the editor has tried to bring the large and somewhat free-form shape of this conversation into order by focusing on five major points: the apparent reasons for the calling of the conference and its tone; the question of how far a confessional church can legitimately reflect a Zeitgeist; the nature of ministry; the meaning of the three parts of the Great Commission in the practice of evangelism; language and preaching.

What kind of gathering was this, and what were its messages?

JB: Initially I thought it had to do with disaffected people in the ELCA wanting to get some things said to the church hierarchy, but I gather there are two definite groups somewhat out of sync with each other, both out of sync with the current leadership of the ELCA: the evangelical catholics on the one hand, and folks with roots in the old ALC on the other, and that they wanted to get together and hash things out.

MP: I thought it was going to be a kind of propagandistic forum, and the first night's presentations [Jensen and Kittleston, ed.] did seem to work along those lines, but I gradually became convinced that there were enough disparate voices and cross conversations that a partisan rally was not the sole thing that went on, it was more multifaceted than I initially expected.

GME: The first night was extremely disappointing to me. I went somewhat naively, I guess, with hopes for a serious exchange of views. In fact, Jensen began by saying that this was to be "mutually edifying discourse," but his talk didn't fit my definition of those terms.

Confident in the process a considerably greater degree of humility than is her wont, the editor has tried to bring the large and somewhat free-form shape of this conversation into order by focusing on five major points: the apparent reasons for the calling of the conference and its tone; the question of how far a confessional church can legitimately reflect a Zeitgeist; the nature of ministry; the meaning of the three parts of the Great Commission in the practice of evangelism; language and preaching.

When you read it, the document seems perhaps more like propositions for debate, but when it was given—well, Jensen is a wonderful speaker, a great actor. He plays to an audience, and he gives a spin to what he says that really sounded to me very scornful and dismissive.

All the applause at his most ringing denunciations of those he opposes—to me it did have the atmosphere of a rally.

JB: Well, he did set up what he perceives as a clear contrast between Biblical faith, and humankind's "normal religions" or normal religious propensities. That's what he called gnosticism, and he does think that it needs to be clearly differentiated from Biblical faith.

MP: It surely does, but those terms "gnosticism" and "normal religion" were used pretty freely; in fact, they often seemed to mean "things I don't like about the people I disagree with." Who are these gnostics he's talking about? People like Elaine Pagels? or Elizabeth Fiorenza? or Mary Daly?

GME: I don't agree with Jensen or with Neuhaus in many points, but I'm not willing to say to them, "You're not a faithful member of my church." And I resent what seems a readiness to say that about me, (by which I mean those people who speak for me and to whom these theologians listen). I mean, I've never asked Bishop Chilstrom to apologize to the church for Robert Jensen. It seems to me that he and I can both be Lutherans, that the boundaries extend that far.

JB: This is how I think Jensen would respond, in his own words, "Normal religion sees the necessity of restrictive and consequence laden choices as the very damnation from which we need to be rescued. Salvation is precisely escape from consequences and hope alike. It is only the jealous God of the Bible who demands choice and commitment and who says if you are to have me for your God, you can have no other." I think the people who called this conference believe that the conversation between them and others has been going on for a long time, and that making some definitions and getting them clear is more important at this time than finding common ground.

MP: I understand that. Obviously making choices...
and accepting consequences is legitimate. There is choice in religion, but I want to make sure the choice is for God and not for somebody's interpretation of God. If the church is catholic, then it is going to have to dig deep and wide and think about the possible wisdom that lies in diverse people as they seek to understand what God is and demands.

**How far can a confessional church reflect its own time?**

**JB:** It seems to me (and I have to emphasize that I don't know the inside of the struggles in the ELCA) that the organizers feel strongly that the people in the church who are making changes (for example, inclusive language changes) are doing so on the basis of hardly any Lutheran confessional arguments—that they aren't even interested in what a Lutheran confessional argument might be, but just in some directions they think the church should move in today.

**MP:** Well, I'd surely be uncomfortable with anybody who says, 'The past is irrelevant—let's dump it and go where we want.' But I am also uncomfortable with those who are convinced they've got the goods, and want to operate with the confessions as a kind of club. There is a problem of authority about the tradition.

**JB:** Well, sure. And that's certainly part of the debate going on between these two groups I mentioned earlier; some want to mine the possibilities of the Reform tradition, and others want to maintain and continue to develop the dialogue with Rome. I think their claim would be that what's wrong in something like the inclusive language decisions, for instance, is that the people who come up with those documents are not mining any tradition, but simply want to be with it.

**GME:** But all theologians change the way they see even the big points. To call the use of certain language a mark of faithfulness seems to me to misunderstand even the nature of language, as though we believe in a God who can only be called "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" if that's the God we mean. Wait, is it 'Holy Spirit' now, or 'Holy Ghost'? Both of those have had approved uses in our part of the church in the last few years.

**MP:** Where does it come from, the authority to say, 'This is the language that is faithful'? And how are those who claim that authority accountable, if not to the people of the church?

**JB:** I think the present critics are appealing for just that authority and responsibility, on the basis of their understanding of confessional arguments. I think they are saying that these sorts of decisions ought to be made by theologically responsible folks, not people who are simply hired to head up various offices within the national church body.

**What is the understanding of the church's ministry?**

**JB:** When Lutherans talk about the ministry of the church, its central mission, they tend to talk, as Forde did in his paper, about how the "word of the gospel, spoken by the minister in the present is the word of God right then and there. It is God speaking." So, the ministry of the church has to do most of all with doing the word and sacraments, because, in baptism, for example, that is not just a way of vividly saying 'God loves you,' it is God loving you, there, on the spot, by what's done. Now that may be a false reading of scripture, and it may be outmoded, but it is a Lutheran way to talk about what the church has a call to do.

**GE:** But surely there are other ways of doing what God wants people to accomplish in the world than sacraments and preaching?

**JB:** Yes, maybe, because there are lots of different brands of Christianity out there reading the Bible differently. But not according to the Lutheran confessions.

**MP:** Well, how do you carry out this ministry, this being God's action, so that people know that's what's happening? You can't just say the words, and conclude
'now that's justification by faith. Now you/we are justified because we have heard the words and been touched by the water.' What happens inside the person who is on the receiving end of this ministry? It seems to me a very limited view of ministry to put all our attention on what we are doing in church, and not much on the qualities or condition of response to that word and sacrament.

JB: Salvation is not growth in understanding, nor is it the fundamental task of Christian ministry to make me grow in understanding. First it is to get me baptized and feed me the meal and speak the word of absolution.

MP: But what about faith as the living out of God's will in the world, not just the intellectual or mental quality of assent to a proposition?

JB: It's not mental, it's water being poured over you, bread being munched and wine drunk.

GME: But that really does put us into the question of 'is-ness' if we can call it that. Because that moment both is and is not the way we can understand and perceive or apprehend what God is doing with us. The moment of the munching is not all we can know, or understand about the experience of faith, or what it means to make that assent, though it is a part we cannot do without.

What does the church do with all the parts of the Great Commission?

GME: I felt all during Braaten's paper that he was unhappy because the mission effort of the church had ceased to be centered on some important language, that it was asking and answering the wrong questions. But it seems to me that if we take the other parts of the Great Commission seriously—making disciples and teaching them to observe—then evangelism has got to take seriously what it means to reach people, not just the special words at them.

MP: What does it mean to proclaim the good news to people today, to all kinds of people? It can't mean what it did 100 years ago, it can't possibly be said the same way, because the situations in which people hear the words are different. People often say they're proclaiming the gospel but it seems to me that they are just talking to themselves. They're talking, not listening.

GME: In Braaten's talk, which certainly had a lot of enthusiastic response, there was a strong distrust of any of the interest in psychology, or personality development—what it means for a person to hear a word and have some process happen as a result of that, what it means to feel water on oneself and how that works through various parts of the personality. As humans we are constantly translating what we hear and perceive so that it 'makes sense,' that is, fits with what I know and can function with. But it seemed to me that Braaten, and those who cheered and clapped throughout his speech, feel that any concentration on those things means that one has lost a concern for evangelism.

JB: I think they're worried that in every generation the old Adam tries to take control of what it is God can do for me, tries to manipulate the gospel into being a rationale for 'what I want.' The church always has to be aware of that, and work against it. Of course you have to say the gospel in new ways that will make it meaningful to each generation, but one has to acknowledge that that effort, like all human efforts, can simply make another way for our sinful self to try to defeat God's ends.

How does preaching effect the work of ministry?

MP: I'm traditional enough to be the last person to criticize verbal formulas, but some of the formulaic ways we continue to use language bothers me. This is a kind of Lutheran heresy, in fact, if you want to talk about gnosticsisms, in which getting the formulas right counts for a great deal. People have gone around proclaiming the Word of God in exactly these terms, and have been incredibly indifferent to the real work of the way of the cross around them. Of course our tradition is highly literate and verbally sophisticated, but when are we going to pay attention to how those formulas work out in the communities we live in? Like "drowning the old Adam" for example. I mean, why use that formula and expect something meaningful to happen from it in, say, a Nicaraguan women's coop Bible study group, or a faculty workshop on semiotics?

JB: Well, the object of preaching the word is not to
do it so that that intended hearer gets an understanding—at least initially—and then, a la Billy Graham, accepts the lordship of Jesus Christ. That's not the saving act because that's the old Adam saying, 'Let me see your goods, God, and if they're good enough, I'll accept you.' That kind of expectation has got to be undercut in genuine preaching.

GME: But if the person doesn't see anything in what you're saying...

JB: That's then the Holy Spirit's problem. But the goal is not that people can be better persuaded; the goal is that God does His act through that spoken word.

MP: But you and I know that a lot of what is said in sermons is just birdcalls. It isn't even trying to be conscious of or sensitive to what people are hearing, it's just saying the right words. My biggest complaint about preaching is that many people do it who aren't listening at all, but they have this authority to talk because somehow it is supposed to be 'the Word' that they are speaking.

JB: But it is certainly true that lots of people, Len Klein for example, would tell you that that's exactly what they're trying to do, Sunday after Sunday, is preach the word of God so that God's actions are done in the world. But I think he'd also say that what he's being told by the folks at Higgins Road actually hinders—not just gives him a little bit of bad advice, but actually misunderstands what the whole job of the preacher is supposed to be. And that's dangerous for us all.

GE: The conference was absolutely right to make us talk about what to expect from church offices, and the people at Higgins Road have made some awful decisions. I agree with the writers in the June Forum newsletter when they criticize the stupid scheduling of 'Central America Week' for Holy Week. The place of social and political tasks in relation to ministry of word and sacrament tasks needs constant scrutiny. I think, as Rasmussen's paper pointed out, that those who called the conference tend to want to see these things as very separate concerns, and others who call themselves Lutheran see them as more connected. How can we not think of ministry of word and sacrament as social ministries when they involve people as social beings and within social structures? But I'd like to hope that mutually edifying discourse can be the way that we try to keep these topics before us, without breaking entirely into little camps, each of which is, as DeAn Lagerquist put it, "guarding the boundaries so some insider doesn't move the fences while we're not looking."

Peace,

GME

---

**The Idea**

It is good. Like the surprise of a star
snagged for the night on an ebony sheet.

Like song from the mouth of a chasm
digging through layers of blackness to
offer remembrance.

We either follow, eager for warmth, for
direction, or reject what it pledges and
huddle, afraid of the journey required.

To keep our eyes on its patient request
is a trip in itself. It asks us to come.

To learn of our futile defenses against
what it good.

This is no light the dawn
can erase. No song dulled by clever excuses.

It has its own life.

Watch it tonight. Rehearse every facet.

Tomorrow it still will be daring confusion.

Singing us clear of its lulling embrace.

Beaming us over this terror of answers.

**Lois Reiner**
Lutheran Roots for a Theology of Culture:
Reading Literature as a Means of Grace

John B. Hougen

I have come to believe that identifying these ‘Lutheran roots’ for a spiritually significant way to read may be a modest contribution to the rich plurality of theories undergirding the academic study of religion and literature, religion and the arts, religion and culture.

Let us turn first to the Reformer’s convictions about God’s relationship to the things of this world, expressed in his explanation of the first article of the Apostle’s Creed from the Small Catechism:

I believe that God has created me and all that exists; that He has given and still preserves to me my body and soul, with all my limbs and senses, my reason and all the faculties of my mind, together with my raiment, food, home, and family, and all my property; that He daily provides me abundantly with the necessaries of life; protects me from all danger, and preserves me and guards me against all evil; all of which He does out of pure, paternal, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me; for all which I am in duty bound to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.

As the explanation unfolds, it becomes clear that God’s act of creation is both past and present, for Luther says, “God has given and ... daily provides.” It is also clear that Luther includes products of human inventiveness and industry in his list of God’s gifts: raiment and food, home and family and property are listed along with the gifts of the natural order, “body and soul, all my limbs and senses, my reason and all the faculties of my mind.” Here and elsewhere Luther affirms God’s radical and comprehensive relationship with creation. He makes no distinction between sacred and profane, religious and secular, spiritual and earthly, natural and civilized. God is ultimately and intimately responsible for all that is.

Luther's understanding of God's relationship to creation is further elucidated by his suggestion that each creature is a mask of God. As masks of God, creatures hide God from direct human perception. Also, however, they serve an expressive function: as masks were used in the classical Greek theater to reveal characters and project the characters' voices, so, for Luther, the

---

John Hougen, campus pastor at the University of South Carolina at Columbia, holds a doctorate in religion and literature from the University of Virginia. He has written extensively on the poetry of Richard Wilbur.

September, 1990
masks of God are means of divine revelation. They mediate God's glory and articulate God's word. (Watson 78-80; Ebeling, Luther, 198) It is consistent with Luther's doctrine of creation, then, to see novels and poems, paintings and other cultural artifacts as masks of the divine, hiding and expressing God the Creator.

Moreover, Luther's doctrines of the fall, redemption, and vocation corroborate this point. Without detailing each one, it may suffice to say that just as all is God's creation, all is corrupted by the fall, all is in need of redemption, and all constructive human work may be means by which God redeems fallen creation. Artistic work is one of many possible ways for humans to respond constructively to the call of God.

Alongside these affirmations of God's presence in all creation, in Lutheran theology a few specific things and occasions have come to be known as "means of grace." While Luther himself never uses the phrase "means of grace" (Pelikan 124), he uses as synonyms: "signs of grace," "Word of God," and "sacrament," all referring to things and occasions in this world by which the Spirit makes Christ's presence real for God's people. Those signs which Luther discusses most thoroughly are the spoken word (preaching), Baptism, the Sacrament of the Altar, the power of the keys (forgiveness of sins), the mutual consolation of the brethren, the Bible, prayer, the cross, the church itself, and the humanity of Christ.

For one with such sweeping things to say about God's presence in creation and human works, this is a mighty short list. Luther is not very speculative when it comes to discussing the means of grace. Why not? I suspect that Luther's controversies with the "scholastics" on one side and with the "enthusiasts" on the other made him cautious about claiming to have witnessed the Real Presence of Christ. He sticks to "sure and certain means," around which the church has traditionally centered its life. When we move outside this list to consider the possibility that literature or some other cultural phenomenon might be a means of grace, we must do so with care lest our thoughts and methods come to resemble Luther's enemies' more than Luther's own.

On the other hand, while Luther's list is short, it is long enough to encourage our exploration. For, Luther has spoken of several different means of grace, and these discussions arise out of diverse times and occasions. These facts, coupled with Luther's doctrines which portray the whole world as potentially sacramental, may give us confidence that we are being true to Luther's theological spirit and practice when we consider the question at hand: whether literature might be one of the means God uses today to encounter men, women, and children with grace.

However, it is finally not this systematic set of doctrines which provides the taproot for a Lutheran theology of culture, but rather Luther's faith. What I believe to be Luther's greatest legacy to Christians interested in culture is his hermeneutic, the faithful way he went about discerning God's presence in the things of this world. When I find Luther's faith more important than his works, his hermeneutic more important than his doctrines, I am placing myself in line with some Luther scholars and out of sync with others. I am particularly informed by the work of Gerhard Ebeling, by Joseph Sittler's book of forty years ago, The Doctrine of the Word in the Structure of Lutheran Theology and by several younger scholars who have made a Sittlerian interpretation of Luther very much a part of the current scene.

The key controversy is about Luther's sense of the authority of Scripture, with Sittler et alia suggesting that Luther found authority not in the Scriptures, but behind them. The living Word of God, the risen and ascended Christ, is known in faith. And, in faith, the living Word speaks through the Bible, filling otherwise empty words with meaning. This reading of Luther's beliefs protects him from charges of biblicism. Opponents of this interpretation emphasize that the words on the Bible's pages are inspired words, and therefore they have become authoritative in themselves. They value the particular words of the Bible as an objective safeguard against the dangers of subjectivism inherent in Sittler's suggestions. It seems to me that their warnings of subjectivism are valid. However, Sittler's risky suggestions are truer to Luther's spirit and practice than any interpretation verging on static Biblicism.

The evidence on Sittler's side is quite strong. Luther's exegesis unlocks the mysteries of the Psalms and, indeed, the whole Hebrew Bible with Christ as the interpretive key. Likewise, when Luther prefers St. Paul's letters to that "epistle of straw" attributed to James, it is because Paul's words communicated the reality of the living Christ, and James's words (for Luther) did not. For Luther, it is Christ who enlivens the Bible and provides its words with their vital and salvific content. The Bible is a means of grace and not a source of grace. In a similar vein, according to Luther, we are saved by Christ and not by the liturgical formulae or earthly elements of the Sacraments. And, the good news comes to us from the living Christ and only through the preacher or evangelist or comforting sister or brother in the faith.

If we remain true to these distinctions in Luther's thought, then however much human interpretations of the Bible (including Luther's) help us, however much doctrines (including Luther's) make sense of the world, however much historical precedent (including
Luther's) provides guidance for the church in matters of worship and polity, these are less important than faith. Thus, according to this line of reasoning, Luther's greatest gift to the church is his example of faith in the living Word.

Finally, and most important for this essay, Luther's hermeneutic, his habit of discerning the living Christ, seems to have been operative when he moved beyond his primary doctrinal concerns and persistent controversies. That is, Luther's occasional judgments regarding particular cultural artifacts also seem to be guided by this hermeneutic, leading him to endorse particular paintings or woodcut styles to carry the gospel to the people. (Christiansen, Art, passim.) When advocating the study of languages in German schools, he did so because "languages are the sheaths in which the knife of the Spirit is contained. They are the case in which this jewel is borne. They are the vessel in which the drink is held" (Luther 360). And, about music he once remarked, God has "his gospel preached also through the medium of music; this may be seen from the compositions of Josquin, all of whose works are cheerful, gentle, mild, and lovely; they flow and move along and are neither forced nor covered and bound by rigid and stringent rules, but, on the contrary, are like the songs of the finch" (Buszin 13). In other words, as Luther encountered the arts in his daily life, he valued most highly those artistic creations which seemed to carry the living Christ into the hearts of beholders.

I believe that we ought to examine the possibility that literature might be a means of grace in this context of Luther's habitual discernment of the Gospel in the arts. To do so, however, we must answer the many Lutheran scholars who have made much of Luther's contrasts between written and spoken communication. They imply or state Luther's disdain for the written word. They quote his contention that the church should be a "mouth house" not a "pen house." They draw their conclusions from statements made by Luther such as this one:

It is not at all according to the New Testament to write books about Christ's teachings—but there should be, instead of books, in all places good, learned, zealous, and devout preachers who draw the living Word out of the old writings; and constantly nuture the people as the apostles had done. Before they wrote they had preached to the people with bodily voice and converted them, which was their specifically apostolic and New Testament work. (quoted by Sittler 21)

In a concise summary of this position, Carl Christiansen states that Luther believes "printed words are dead, spoken words living," books suggest a "dead past" and preaching constitutes an "event of the present," something contemporary, and a fit vehicle for the living Word. Moreover, the oral Word is personal. "An individual can read a book without really applying its message to himself" though when addressed by a living voice he knows that he is the one addressed. Further, the "spoken Word establishes community." To sum up, Luther views God as "active, dynamic, as one who addresses his people in direct discourse" and therefore, oral communication corresponds more directly to the nature of God than written communication." (Christiansen, Luther's Theology," 162-5) These conclusions are typical of the tendency in Luther scholarship to imply that Luther shares the anti-literary bias held by many Christians since the New Testament era.

On the other hand, traditional scholarship concedes, Luther praised classical rhetoricians like Cicero and Quintilian (Lindhardt 68), and urged German schools to include poets and historians in a curriculum that reveals Luther to be an advocate for Christian liberal arts education. (Luther 347-378) The Danish scholar Jan Lindhardt provides evidence that Luther saw important similarities between the classical rhetoric he admired and the dynamic preaching he advocated. Lindhardt cites a study by Birgit Stolt which concludes that Luther's sermons were highly skilled applications of classical rhetorical theory rather than the results of untutored natural genius as many have supposed. (64) Moreover, Lindhardt argues that Renaissance humanism provided Luther with the rhetorical criteria he used to mark preaching as a fit vehicle for the living Word. For example, Luther echoed his own criteria for effective preaching when he praised St. Paul and Moses as great rhetoricians because they avoided ambiguity and spoke to the heart, suggesting that these writings can indeed do what good rhetorical preaching is designed to do: communicate persuasively and personally. (62-4)

Most importantly, Lindhardt reports that in Renaissance rhetorical theory, which he asserts shaped Luther's thought and expression in profound ways, no great distinction is made between written and oral communication. Rather, the written word is assumed to be a substitute for the oral when face to face conversation is impossible. The same rules of rhetoric are, by and large, applied to both oral and written communication. The same effect is assumed to be possible in the heart of a reader as in the heart of a listener. (94-5)

Therefore, it makes sense to me to see Luther's praise of Cicero and Quintilian, as well as his interest in poetry and history, not in contrast but in continuity with with his delineation of the aptness of preaching for communicating the living Word. The quotations from Luther which are trotted out in order to show his preference for oral over written communication are...
best understood as part of his support for effective sermons in the pulpit, and should not be construed as a polemic against writing per se. When Luther calls the religious writings of his opponents "devil's dung," as he does in his "Open Letter to the Councilmen of the Cities in Germany" (370), the writings are not considered to be dung-like because they have been written rather than spoken. Rather, it is because, first, his opponents failed to discern the living Christ in the world, and, second, they compounded their error in faith with errors in rhetoric. They expressed themselves poorly in writing. The most crucial question for Luther is not whether God's Word comes to us in oral or written form, but whether the Word we receive is the living Word of God: vital, dynamic, and contemporary.

While we must swim against the current of scholarly opinion to claim that Luther regarded the written word as vital, dynamic, and contemporary, many who followed Luther clearly believed that the written word could indeed be so regarded. More often than not, theorists in the history of literary criticism and Christian hermeneutics have stressed that the proper interpretation of a written text comes about as the result of reading which has the dynamic character Luther observes in preaching. And within the confusing and volatile debates about hermeneutics today, there are strong voices describing reading as an event, an encounter, an exchange which is like an interpersonal exchange and similarly capable of producing challenge and growth.

From among the theorists of the past I am thinking of an intellectual line of development that starts with Friedrich Schleiermacher, and continues through Wilhelm Dilthey and Rudolf Bultmann to the present day. In Schleiermacher's and Dilthey's view, the reader tries to enter the author's mind and create a contemporary, dynamic, and personal relationship even when the author is from a different historical period. (Schleiermacher 1, 7, 109)

In Rudolph Bultmann's existentialist theory of interpretation, the reader relates not to the author, but to the author's existential stance, which Bultmann believes will be present in the text either explicitly or implicitly (Bultmann 252). In a manner which Ebeling relates to Luther's beliefs about the dynamics of the Word-event (God and Word), Bultmann suggests that the reader asks the text about one's proper relationship to life and the text offers a possible answer. The reader must decide whether or not to change on the basis of what has been read. This reading-event has the same liveliness and directness as a personal confrontation. It addresses the reader in the same way as a pointed sermon or a personal challenge from another Christian on a matter of the faith.

In the middle and latter parts of our own century, literary theory and biblical hermeneutics often have stressed the autonomy of the text and spoken of the text as a closed, self-referential system. These theories, from the New Criticism in the thirties and forties to Deconstruction in the seventies and eighties, emphasize the lack of relationship between the text, on the one hand, and, on the other, either the author or the reader. However, the fields of literary theory and hermeneutics have been far from univocal, and other voices affirm and clarify the common experience of having one's faith nurtured by reading. Recent voices I would like to mention are those of Dan Via, a biblical interpreter interested in the literary genre found in the New Testament; and Wolfgang Iser, a literary theorist outside the religious community whose analysis of the reading process gives my hypothesis more precision and a welcome affirmation.

Dan Via's early work on the parables is useful to us as we ask the question whether reading literature may be a means of grace, for he makes a strong case for treating the parables as aesthetic units. He points out that the stories we call the Prodigal Son, the Sower and the Seed, the Unjust Steward, and others like them make no direct references to God or the Holy Spirit, the faith of the Hebrew people or the religious establishment of Jesus' day. Yet, we know these stories have made a great impact on the Gospel's listeners and readers. The impact, Via says, is existential. "Language becomes an event, and ... a poem, novel, or story tests a reader and has the power to move him into a new state of being or into the experience of a new horizon" (56). On this point, Via sounds like Bultmann, except that he identifies the most helpful relationship in interpretation to be the one between the reader and the text. If the perspective of the text is Christian and it moves the reader into the experience of a Christian horizon, or if the text raises the kinds of questions which make the reader more open to the Christian message from some other source, then, as Via says, "letting one's existence be so structured is faith" (67). That is, if readers find a text compelling and take on its perspective as their own, and if that perspective is Christian, the readers will have taken on Christian faith. Then, reading will be an event of grace, a movement of the Holy Spirit as certainly as any other event which prepares the heart or effects conversion.

Though Via is writing about biblical texts, logically, the same grace-filled possibilities would inhere in other texts. Remember, Via is concerned specifically with those biblical texts without specific religious content. I see no theological or hermeneutical reason to con-
clude that non-Biblical texts similar in perspective to the parables would function in readers' lives any differently. The Scriptural status of one text may heighten our confidence that God's spirit will be present in the text's reading, but does nothing to preclude the possibility that God also will choose to be active in the reading of other texts.

It is precisely these other, non-biblical, texts with which Wolfgang Iser, a contemporary literary theorist from the school of reader-response criticism, concerns himself. I was first drawn to his book, *The Act of Reading*, because it analyzes the process and effects of reading in terms that strongly echo Luther's analysis of the process and effects of preaching. (198) Iser uses the vocabulary of speech act theory to report that reading is a vital, dynamic, interchange between text and reader. In his words, literature must "not only organize the signs but also condition the way in which these signs are to be received" (56); conventions [must be used which are] common to speaker and recipient, procedures [must be] accepted by both, and the willingness of both to participate in the ... action [is assumed]" (69). The text draws on a repertoire of "material from social systems and literary traditions" (86) and utilizes strategies which "defamiliarize the familiar" (87). The text contains new information, but also blanks and negations (215-16) which stimulate the reader to construct imaginary scenes. The reader thereby produces an aesthetic object (96). This object is not a single construct— the text cannot be grasped as a whole— but a series, because the reader's viewpoint changes as the work is read (107,112). The legitimacy of a reader's formulation is judged by the criterion of "harmony" (175) between the text itself with its many layers of structure and the constructed image.

At this point, a brief illustration may help us see what Iser means, for the process he describes is not as complex as his unfamiliar vocabulary might suggest. Let us look at what goes on in the process of reading the first two lines of a poem by Richard Wilbur.

*Advice to a Prophet*

When you have come, as soon you must, to the streets of our city,
Mad-eyed from stating the obvious...

The title begins the conversation between the text and myself. "Advice to a Prophet." I respond with a question: Is this prophet a known biblical figure or social reformer? The prophets Jeremiah and Martin Luther King come to my mind. I am curious about the kind of advice that should or could be given to a prophet. Isn't it more customary for prophets to speak and the rest of us to listen? I wonder, what would I tell a prophet? Since I am an irenic spirit myself (who would just as soon avoid confrontations), I might suggest that prophets would be more successful politically if they would be less strident in tone and less alienated in style. Is that the advice Wilbur's poem will give? I have second thoughts. After all, stridency and alienation are integral to the radicality of prophets' messages, so I should probably keep my first thought to myself. I really would rather have stridency and alienation than to do away with what is integral to prophecy and risk losing it altogether.

With these questions and hypotheses about the nature of prophecy beginning to form in my mind, I move on from the title to read line one: "When you have come, as soon you must, to the streets of our city..." Ah, *our* city. From reading other poems by Wilbur, I can guess that he is writing about a contemporary situation, though it is still possible the voice chosen for this poem comes from a different era. Occasionally Wilbur employs such voices. Whatever the case, there is urgency here, for the line says the prophet will come because he must come to our city. What crisis faces us? the text asks. I respond: racism? ecological disaster? the threat of nuclear annihilation? It could be any of these. Because Wilbur has the conventional interest of poets in nature, I will guess this is a contemporary prophet coming to sound an ecological warning. A few lines down I must revise my hypothesis, for I read that the topic is "weapons ... [and] the death of the race." Very well, I respond, but the nuclear threat is also an ecological threat. I wasn't wrong, but now I am more precise in my hypothesis about this prophet.

The second line is "Mad-eyed from stating the obvious." This puts me more in touch with Jeremiah and the biblical tradition of prophets who were distinguished in part by their bizarre behavior and ecstatic states: "Mad-eyed." When I find out the issue is contemporary, I know from this second line that I must see the contemporary prophet speaking to us in light of the biblical tradition to which the text here alludes.

We'll stop here, for this is probably enough to show the dialogic character of reading. Not only have we seen that there is interaction between text and reader, we have seen how conventions raise expections, how the text raises questions by using "strategies to defamiliarize the familiar," like giving advice to a prophet, and how the text stimulates hypothetical responses in the reader which undergo constant revision.

While it is easiest to illustrate this process in the microcosm of a title and two lines of poetry, the effects of this process would be more dramatically illustrated if we considered the entire poem. For, in the course of
many lines, this poem utilizes the formal resources of rhyme and rhythm and the cumulative power of image upon image, allusion upon allusion, insight upon insight, until I learn something new about the nature and value of human beings and our world. And, though I am consistently sympathetic to the cause of nuclear disarmament, every time I read “Advice to a Prophet” it gives me new reasons to hold my convictions and it strengthens my resolve for peace and justice. These, I believe, are gifts of grace.

There is more involved in the process of reading than a short summary and illustration can present, but I hope that this has indicated the kind of analysis offered by Wolfgang Iser. More crucial than the particulars of Iser’s theory is his insistence that reading is a personal experience in which the text disrupts the reader’s expectations and enables the reader to see reality in a new light and from a new perspective. The reader then must decide how to relate this experience of reading to the rest of her life. For Iser, reading has all the force and immediacy of a sermon as Luther conceived it (57,61). Viewed from the perspective of Luther’s faith and doctrine, reading as Iser presents it can be and is very likely to be a means of grace.

Something, however, is missing, and what is missing is the Christian community. Though I believe I have shown that Luther’s doctrines and Luther’s hermeneutics of faith provide a framework for understanding an individual’s grace-filled experience with reading, it would not be true to Lutheran roots for a theology of culture to leave the topic without more explicit reference to the role of the Christian community. For Lutherans, faith is always communal. It is highly interesting, therefore, to note that Wolfgang Iser believes that a work of literature creates community just as Luther believes a community is created whenever the Word is preached.

In the congregation, preaching creates a community of listeners. Not all listeners interpret the weekly sermon in the same way, but hearing it gives them something to talk about. In the conversation of the community, parishioners help one another assess whether their interpretation of the sermon is in harmony with the Word spoken, and how best to incorporate the Word into their lives. Something similar happens among readers who have become a community by means of their common experience of the common text. If we all had taken the time to read “Advice to a Prophet” and compared our experiences, we would probably have discovered that we do not all agree to a single interpretation of the text, but that our common experience would provide a basis for discussion. We would be able to compare interpretations and decide which ones were in harmony with the text. We would be able to help one another decide how to incorporate the text’s impact into our lives (Iser 50).

Furthermore, Lutherans understand that the Church, past and present, will play an important role in countering the individual’s potential for misinterpreting her experience. As a Lutheran community of readers we would give over a significant place in our discussion to the relationship between the work in question and the Holy Scriptures as they have been interpreted in our tradition. Just as Luther tested the content and spirit of his opponents’ proposals against the standards found in his Christ-centered interpretations of the Bible, so would a Lutheran reader of literature place literature in conversation with the Bible.

This is not a simple matter. Iser teaches us how dynamic and fluid interpretations of literature can be. Scott Hendrix describes Luther’s method of interpreting the Bible in equally complex terms, involving prayer, meditation, the study of Biblical languages and rhetoric, and working towards meaning in the midst of controversy and debate. So, bringing together the study of secular and sacred texts is never a simplistic matter of creating a check-list for doctrinal purity. It is, rather, a subtle coalescing of vital communal processes that are likely to enrich one’s experience of the same Word living behind and through both texts.

Finally, if we would be true to our Lutheran heritage as we receive God’s grace in reading literature, we will not want to claim too much for these possibilities. We will remain steadfast in our insistence on God’s sovereignty over the grace we receive. God’s presence is not believed to be automatic even at Baptism or the Lord’s Supper, Luther’s “sure and certain” means of grace. Even where God has explicitly promised to be, grace is always a gift, always something of a surprise. Therefore, Lutherans would certainly want to insist that even when a sensitive reader encounters a well written text, the Spirit must move for grace to be given. Out of humility we will not guarantee grace to everyone who reads Flannery O’Connor or Walker Percy.

This Lutheran humility about our claims for literature as a means of grace also ought to mark our encounters with the literary community. We ought not suggest to those in the fields of literary criticism and theory that this spiritually significant potential of the act of reading should become the only reason we urge others to pick up their books and read. We ought to affirm the principle articulated in contemporary hermeneutics, that texts have polyvalent significance. Serving faith as a means of grace is just one of many contexts in which literature might have meaning.

What I want to claim is a possibility: that within a Lutheran understanding of how God’s gifts are communicated, reading literature ought to be considered a
potential means of grace. In light of the basic doctrines of Lutheran theology (the doctrines of creation, redemption, vocation, the Word, preaching, Scripture, and the sacraments) reading literature may be seen as a human work with the potential to serve God as a means of grace. In light of Luther's discussions of the Bible, preaching, and rhetoric, reading literature may be approached as an event with many of the same formal characteristics as those events through which God's grace regularly flows. Formal characteristics are no guarantee of grace, but they give us hope and confidence that the presence of God indeed may be discerned. Luther's habitual way of discerning and interpreting God's Word in Scripture, in the world, and in the arts, serves as an exemplary hermeneutic for interpreting literature. Luther's potential as a model interpreter for twentieth-century readers is affirmed by the similarity of his hermeneutics and those offered by such disparate readers as Dan Via and Wolfgang Iser.

Finally, I want to raise the possibility that a process similar to reading goes on when we listen to a symphony, attend to a painting or sculpture, or observe the unfolding of political events in Eastern Europe. I believe it is appropriate to extend the range of these remarks to say that Luther's doctrines and hermeneutical example may lead us toward a most profound delight in the world around us. As inheritors of Luther's vision, we may scan with eagerness and hope our contemporary cultural milieu, praying that God will come to us with fresh gifts of grace. Refreshing and even salvific, such experiences are also the raw materials out of which we may fashion a cogent and persuasive theology of culture.

Works Cited


Hendrix, Scott. "Luther and Authority." Audiotape of lecture delivered at the Martin Luther Jubilee, Nov. 1983, by Memory Makers, 11961 Tech Road, Ste. 101, Silver Spring, Maryland, 20904.


Hegel, Young Marx, and Deutsche Marks

With the recent collapse of totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe, it has become common for many persons living outside of those regimes to interpret this event as the death of Marxist and socialist thinking and the triumph of capitalism and free market competitiveness. Indeed, some like Francis Fukuyama have gone so far as to proclaim "the end of history," a term adapted from the thinking of the German philosopher, G. W. F. Hegel. It is also a well-known thesis that Karl Marx had inverted the thinking of Hegel, that is, as it is often said, Marx 'stood Hegel on his head.' If we couple Fukuyama's proclamation of the end of history with this thesis, what Fukuyama is implying is that an inversion of Marx's inversion of Hegel has taken place: an inversion that is, at the same time, seen to be a reversion to Hegel's supposedly 'correct' views about economic and political liberalism.

It is not my intention to show how mistaken Fukuyama is in his interpretation of Hegel, and especially his notion of the 'end of history.' (The best critique has already been done by Philip T. Grier.) Nor is it my intention to vindicate any particular ideological interpretation of the recent events in Eastern Europe. Rather, my sole concern is to point out how Marx's 'inversion' of Hegel's philosophy (specifically, Hegel's philosophy of religion) leads us to a philosophy of ideoltr, which, as a second-order reflection (like that found in the philosophy of religion or the philosophy of science), analyzes and critiques the basic tenets of the way of thinking upon which it is reflecting. Moreover, I will be suggesting in what way this new mode of philosophical reflection can be useful in suggesting what political economy should result from recent events in Eastern Europe. After setting forth the history of the Hegel, Marx progression, I intend to show that any new political economy arising in Eastern Europe should arise out of its own political traditions as established in the last forty years. Any abrupt rupture with tradition could spell disaster. One further note: by 'young Marx', I mean the writings of Marx prior to The Communist Manifesto (1848). Now let us turn to Hegel's philosophy of religion.

Hegel said of philosophy and philosophers that "Every individual is a child of his time, so philosophy too is its own time apprehended in thoughts" (Hegel, Right, 11). In other words, the role of the individual philosopher is to mirror in his own thinking, to reflect in thought, all the socio-historical elements that make up his particular time period. Thus, the philosopher reflects on what has taken place in history up to and including his own situation. He does not prophesy or predict, invent or stand in Judgment over the events of the past.

Indeed, for Hegel, philosophy does not teach anything about "what the world ought to be":

Philosophy in any case always comes on the scene too late to give it. As the thought of the world, it appears only when actuality is already there cut and dried after its process of formation has been completed.... The Owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk. (12,13)

For Hegel, philosophy's task is to display all the elements of the actuality of being human as they have been played out in the process of the unfolding of history. The goal of the philosopher, then, is to be totally and absolutely self-conscious, and, in this self-consciousness, comprehend in thought the collective consciousness of humanity as it stands in the present and has been formed by the past. In this way, philosophy is not simply one science among many, it is the science, the science of science, the totality of all knowledge which embraces within itself all other ways of thinking. Hegel modestly calls his realization of this goal of philosophy absolute knowing. In this sense, Hegel follows Plato, who has Socrates say in The Republic, "that which is, is wholly knowable. . . ."

One particular area of knowledge in which Hegel was particularly innovative was the area of religion and knowledge of God. Hegel was the first to unite explicit-

Philip M. Merklinger
ly the variety of approaches to the philosophical study of religion under the general rubric, the philosophy of religion. Whereas, prior to Hegel, the type of inquiry we now know as the philosophy of religion was only practiced implicitly by such diverse thinkers as David Hume, Baruch Spinoza, St. Augustine, and St. Thomas Aquinas. Moreover, prior to Hegel, there was a marked difference between the way the philosophy of religion was carried out by pre-Reformation thinkers like St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas and the way post-Reformation thinkers like Spinoza and Hume practiced it.

The philosophy of religion which is to be found implicit in the pre-Reformation period is often called 'Classical philosophy of religion.' Classical philosophers of religion believed that philosophy was quite capable of assisting religion in its knowledge of God, if and only if it complemented, not contradicted, the knowledge of God gained through faith and revelation. But, after the Reformation, Enlightenment philosophers placed natural, human reason before and above religion as that which is most able to uncover the truth of God and the world. Freed of the conceptual restraints and limits of faith and revelation, these thinkers located religion as a lower, more primitive form of knowledge of God and world, and thus, open to critical scrutiny by philosophy. Consequently, this modern version of the philosophy of religion developed into what John Hick has called a "second-order activity, standing apart from its subject matter" which analyzes such central concepts in religion as God, miracles, immortality, worship and ritual, and even the central notion of the Christian faith, the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ. In the Enlightenment period, this standing apart from religion also meant the demythologizing, secularizing, and in some cases, devaluing of the content of religion.

Into this context came Hegel, who was both influenced by and critical of the modern philosophical study of religion. From the Enlightenment philosophers he adopted their standing apart; yet, in so doing, he recognized that the Classical philosophers were quite right in granting fundamental authority to religion. Hegel came to appreciate that religion binds human beings together into community by giving meaning to human life, a meaning which is complete and satisfying. In the opening lines to his first lecture series on the philosophy of religion in 1821, he wrote:

This is the region in which all the riddles of the world, all the contradictions of thought, are resolved, and all griefs are healed, the region of eternal truth and eternal peace, of absolute satisfaction, of truth itself. (Hegel, Phil. of Religion, I, 83)

Religion is this region of truth, according to Hegel, because it has as its center a thought or idea that human beings share: the idea of God.

All that proceeds from thought—all the distinctions of the arts and sciences and of the eternal interweavings of human relationships, habits, and customs, activities, skills, enjoyments—find their ultimate center in the one thought of God. God is the beginning of all things and the end of all things; [everything] starts from God and returns to God. (84)

Hegel could have followed his Enlightenment predecessors by criticizing and dismissing much of the claims of religion, but instead, Hegel confirmed that religion is at the core of the organization of peoples into civilizations. In fact, we may say that for Hegel, religion is not buildings or rituals or even holy books; on the contrary, religion is the whole way of being together that human beings form through positing a divine Being or God outside of themselves. This absolute Other, then, serves as a mirror which allows a people to construct and see how they do and should relate to each other and to nature. In this sense, the sacred both allows for and dwells in the social order.

Because Hegel thinks that what it means to be human is conditioned by history, he also undertakes a history of religion. Since religion is about thought of God and human being in relation to God and other human beings, Hegel undertakes this history of religion by looking for how the God-human relation has been understood and lived over time. A particular lived view of the God-human relation is that which undergirds a particular community in a particular historical epoch. Moreover, this history of the God-human relationship is a history of the progressive overcoming of perceived disunion and alienation of God and human being. The last stage in this development is the Christian community of Europe. In the Christian world, Hegel finds that the belief in the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ constitutes the final, complete expression of the interrelation of God and human being. Indeed, the figure of Christ as the 'God-man' or the "human-God" suggests for Hegel that the alienation and separation of God from human being and human being from God is forever overthrown. Moreover, this reconciliation that takes place through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ also takes place in the hearts of individual believers, since:

but in the hearts and souls [of believers] is the firm [belief] that the issue is not a moral teaching, nor in general the thinking and willing of the subject within itself and from itself; rather what is of interest is an infinite relationship to God, to the present God, the certainty of the Kingdom of God—finding satisfaction not in morality, ethics, or con-

September, 1990
science, but rather in that than which nothing is higher, the relationship to God himself... This is precisely to say that God is present, that his presence must exist as one's own feeling, as self-feeling. (Hegel, *Consummate*, III, 922)

Since this self-feeling is in the hearts and souls of believers, it thus becomes manifest as the self-feeling of the Christian community. Because of God's presence in the hearts of the members of the Christian community, the community is also where absolute truth resides. Indeed, absolute truth is the truth of reconciliation of God to human being, human being to human being, and human being to world into one giant whole—the Kingdom of God—which cannot be known by philosophy unless it is first known in religion, in Christianity. Thus, philosophy can only become absolute knowing through the life of Christian community and reflection upon its absolute content.

From the foregoing, we can see that Hegel does affirm the approach the Classical philosophy of religion takes to religion. His philosophy does not contradict, dismiss, or deny religion's truth; on the contrary, it complements and supports it as absolute. But, Hegel also affirms the point of view of Enlightenment's philosophy of religion that religion does not have the final word on truth. For Hegel, in light of what had occurred in Enlightenment thinking, religion must also be understood as the penultimate mode of knowledge; philosophy can and does stand in a second-order relation to religion—it can analyze and critique religious thought. Therefore, Hegel finds himself compelled to discuss religion as the second-to-last stage in his system of absolute knowing, second only to philosophy, which, as we noted, contemplates what has already taken place in religion.

As the penultimate mode of knowing, religion has not fully realized nor comprehended its own truth. For Hegel, religion only knows its truths implicitly because it thinks in what he calls "representations" (Vorstellungen) or "pictures," "images." (For example, the eternal truth of the Trinity is cloaked in pictures partially taken from the natural life of the family, e.g., God as Father and Son.) What philosophy must do (and Hegel does) is extract the philosophical truth from the religiously imaged absolute truth of reconciliation. Once philosophy removes the pictorial cloaks which surround this absolute truth, it has made it explicit—for all to see.

It must be emphasized once again that Hegel did not mean that religion is untrue or that its mode of knowing should be discarded. On the contrary, philosophy needs religion for its philosophical comprehension otherwise it would not have any material for its reflection: "philosophy is theology, and one's occupation with philosophy—or rather in philosophy—is [of] itself the service of God." (Hegel, *Concept*, I, 84)

Thus, for Hegel, philosophy and theology, and hence philosophy and religion, are conjoined in the same way the divine and human are conjoined in the person of Jesus Christ. They are the same but different: they both have knowledge of God, but philosophy's knowledge of God is higher than theology's, just as the divine part of Christ is higher than the human. And, just as Christ's humanity is subsumed in, with, and under His divinity, so is theology subsumed in, with, and under philosophy.

After Hegel's death in 1831, there arose much debate about what Hegel actually meant in his philosophy of religion. At no time was the controversy more heated than in the first decade following Hegel's death when followers of Hegel broke into two major camps or wings: the Old or Right Hegelians, who held that Hegel had intended that we maintain Christianity in all its doctrines and practices; and the Young or Left Hegelians, who maintained that religion is no longer necessary once we have absolute knowledge. For the Young Hegelians, all that was necessary was to achieve absolute knowing's message of the overcoming of alienation in the actual, concrete life of the people. For the Young Hegelians, the church, the Bible, pastors, and priests only perpetuate alienation by portraying reconciliation as occurring in the afterlife. Full, actual self-consciousness, thus, means recognition that there is only one reality which can and must be known by all people, regardless of who they are. This collective self-consciousness, thus, would be the final consummation of the historical development of knowledge of reconciliation noted by Hegel. And, as the last stage of history, this collective self-consciousness would be, in effect, post-religious and post-Christian. Indeed, for the Young Hegelians, Hegel had shown that God was nothing more than an idea, a human idea, and, if this was so, as they firmly believed, all there is to be known is history as the development of human being as material being, nothing more, nothing less.

The first work to publicize this Young Hegelianism was D. F. Strauss' *Life of Jesus* (1835) in which Strauss attempted to prove that Jesus Christ was merely an idea produced by the collective imagination of the community. Many other similar arguments quickly followed but the most influential was Ludwig Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*. In this work, which the young Marx took to heart, Feuerbach was concerned with describing religion totally in human terms, with human being understood as only material being. For Feuerbach, religion was rooted in the very structures of human consciousness, for human consciousness has
the ability to project its own essence outside of itself onto the sky. Thus, religion is the result of human projection of human essence. However, we are alienated from our essence as long as we hold our essence as somehow existing in God.

In truth, Feuerbach asserts, God's revelation of Himself to human being in the form of the incarnation is human being's revelation of its own truth as incarnate being, as a being who has divine qualities (such as being able to think, universalize, and project). To overcome the alienation that comes from projecting our essence outside of ourselves, Feuerbach suggests that we simply invert the subject-predicate order of religious statements:

Now, when it is shown that what the subject is lies entirely in the attributes of the subject; that is, that the predicate is the true subject; it is also proved that if the divine predicates are attributes of the human nature, the subject of those predicates is also of the human nature. (25)

Thus, a statement like 'God is love' really means that love is God or godlike. As he says, "Is not the love of God to man— the basis and central point of religion—the love of man to himself made an object, contemplated as the highest objective truth, as the highest being to man?" (58) Indeed, Feuerbach argues that love is the essence of being human and if we realize this we would join together into a community of love in which all people, in full self-consciousness of their essence, love one another. Hence, the Biblical injunction, "Love thy neighbor as thyself" will be incarnate here and now on earth.

Feuerbach's inversion of theology into an anthropocentric materialism had a tremendous effect on the thinking of the young Marx. Marx, who had called himself a Hegelian, considered himself briefly a Feuerbachian. In the introduction to his 1843 essay, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" are these triumphant words: "For Germany, the criticism of religion has been largely completed; and the criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism." (Tucker 53)

What follows is straight Feuerbach filtered through Marx's own expressive prose:

The basis of irreligious criticism is this: man makes religion; religion does not make man. Religion is indeed man's self-consciousness and self-awareness so long as he has not found himself or has lost himself again. But man is not an abstract being, squatting outside the world. Man is the human world, the state, society. This state, this society, produces religion which is an inverted world consciousness, because they are an inverted world.(53)

Marx's love for Feuerbach's philosophy did not last long, however. It became quite obvious to Marx that Feuerbach's philosophy was indeed only that—a philosophy, dwelling in the realm of ideas as much as Hegel's philosophy did. Although Feuerbach claimed to have inverted the idealistic ground of religion and Hegel's philosophy, Marx argued that Feuerbach had not carried the inversion all the way through thought to the actual, material world. Consequently, Marx wrote his Theses on Feuerbach in 1845 philosopher to task for still concerning himself with abstractions:

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism—that of Feuerbach included—is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as human sensuous activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence it happened that the active side, in contradistinction to materials, was developed by idealism—but only abstractly, since, of course, idealism does not know real, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from the thought objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as objective activity. Hence in [The Essence of Christianity], he regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude, while practice is conceived and fixed only in its dirty-judicial manifestation. Hence he does not grasp the significance of "revolutionary," or practical critical activity. (143)

In other words, Marx saw Feuerbach as avoiding reality ("human sensuous activity") by merely generating yet another theoretical picture of the world. Marx's "Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach" sums up his position on Feuerbach and on philosophical theorizing in general: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it" (145).

What Marx is suggesting in his criticism of Feuerbach is that even the Young Hegelians, with their emphasis on material being and overcoming alienation, perpetuated alienation by replacing ideas of the Divine with ideas they considered divine. Consequently, they were as 'religious' as Christianity or Hegel. Indeed, for Marx, any idea is religious that is reified, that is, raised above human sensuous activity as a thing that actually exists. When this is done by thought in thought, the religious idea alienates by positing some kind of bifurcation between the ideal and real, between thought and lived material experience. Thus, Feuerbach's anthropocentric materialism as well as the socialism and humanism of other Young Hegelians like Arnold Ruge, the anarchism and nihilism of Young Hegelians like Bruno and Edgar Bauer, and so on, were all religious ideas, or, to use a term Marx starts stressing in The German Ideology in 1845, ideologicaL. For Marx, ideology had replaced religion insofar as it too
offers an interpretation of human being in relation to an idea of God, other human beings, and nature. All ideas, therefore, were interpretations, having value if and only if they "inquire into the connection of German philosophy with German reality, the relation of their criticism to their own material surroundings" (149).

What we can detect in the foregoing is a moment which signifies Marx’s transition from a theory-oriented thinker to a full-fledged ‘Marxist’ political economist. Marx’s constant reference to actual, material conditions as the testing ground of all ideas in *The German Ideology* (and which is assumed in all subsequent works) is the final, total inversion of Hegel’s philosophy. *Praxis*, or "productive activity" is to be the measure of all things, of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not. Thus, whatever knowledge human beings could achieve would be confined to conceiving “the sensuous world as the total living sensuous activity of the individuals composing it” (171). Hence, Marx’s grounding of Feuerbach’s inversion of Hegel produces what we can call a philosophy of ideology, similar in intent to Hegel’s philosophy of religion. That is, this philosophy of ideology can stand apart from all ideologies and analyze and criticize their modes of reasoning and central concepts to see if they display any substance, if they are truly windows on the world as we live it. At the same time, the philosophy of ideology can confirm, extract, refine, and, in so doing, complement what is true in these ideologies. Thus, for Marx, Hegel was right: the world is one, human self-consciousness does develop through history, but with the amendment that “circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances” (165). Feuerbach was correct as well—the value of human being is to be sought solely in terms of being human, but with the addition that “the first fact to be established is the physical organization of these individuals and their consequent relation to the rest of nature”(149).

Moreover, Marx goes to great lengths to ensure that his philosophy of ideology does in fact stand apart from any ideology. Thus, Marx’s own assumptions about human being as material being in *The German Ideology* are considered by him to be non-ideological, that is, merely the results of consciousness being clear about the nature and ground of its own existence in materiality. Indeed, Marx noted:

Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life. In the first method of approach [idealistic German philosophy] the starting-point is consciousness taken as the living individual; in the second method, which conforms to real life, it is the real living individuals themselves, and consciousness is considered solely as their consciousness. Where speculation ends—in real life—there real, positive science begins: the representation of the practical activity, of the practical process of development of men. Empty talk about consciousness ceases, and real knowledge has to take its place. (155)

As we can see, central to Marx’s own use of his philosophy of ideology is the desire to set aside all ideological presuppositions in order to describe the things themselves. Of course, if the material conditions—the things themselves—change, so does the description. It is clear that for Marx, any idea, even his own ideas, are in a sense biodegradable, that is, they decompose when the order of things changes into a new order. If one insists on holding to them, they too will become ideological.

It will be obvious to most readers that, indeed, Marx’s own thought did become an ideology which revolved around its own gods, creeds, and rituals, subject to Marx’s philosophy of ideology as was the thinking of Hegel and Feuerbach. At the same time, this construction of a new ideology—out of a mode of thinking that was designed to be non-ideological—indicates a truth about human beings that both Feuerbach and Hegel emphasize and which Marx ultimately does not emphasize enough: human beings need to create images of reality and in so doing they automatically reify those images into ideological, or religious pictures. In fact, the activity of ideologizing, if we can coin a new word, is as real as the material world which it pictures. For Hegel, this is the spiritual side of being human, or Spirit (Geist) as he calls it. Spirit, a term which Hegel takes over from Christianity, is that which represents itself as ‘human,’ ‘spiritual,’ ‘material,’ or any other idea which has gained ascendancy at a particular time. Thus, the spiritual side of being human is the medium through which human being witnesses to human being about what it means to be human. (Of course, as both Hegel’s philosophy of religion and Marx’s philosophy of ideology suggest, this witness, if it is to be self-conscious, must be continuously analyzed, criticized, and affirmed so that human being does not lead itself down the wrong path.) If we affirm Hegel’s point as true, then the lesson of the history of the development of ideology in Eastern Europe is clear: the spiritual and the material sides of the human being must be thought as conjoined, as continuously forming and informing the whole human being.

At the same time, Marx’s overemphasis on the material side of this equation has done us a great service: what better way of evaluating ideas than by looking at
the effect that they have on the actual material conditions of living a human life? I am sure that if Marx were alive today to observe the crumbling of the Eastern bloc he would readily admit the damage that ideological interpretations of his thought have done to the lives of the people under those ideologies. However, I think Marx would also enact his philosophy of ideology and note that the collapse of these systems was not the result of another, more divine ideology gaining the upper hand. The collapse of communism was the result of desperate material conditions which have made the citizens of these countries change their ideas. Indeed, Marx could quote his own words from *The German Ideology* and find that they still ring true:

These conditions of life ... decide also whether or not the periodically recurring revolutionary convulsion will be strong enough to overthrow the basis of the entire existing system. And if these material elements are present (namely, on the one hand the existing productive forces, on the other the formation of a revolutionary mass, which revolts not only against separate conditions of society up till then, but against the very "production of life" till then, the "total activity" on which it was based), then, as far as practical development is concerned, it is absolutely immaterial whether the idea of this revolution has been expressed a hundred times already, as the history of communism proves. (165)

In order for us to keep in view what I take to be the necessary conjoining of the spiritual and the material, I must also stress that I think that rejecting communist ideology out of hand, and advocating the reversion to pre-communist capitalism, would also negate the significant role that Marx’s thinking has played in the development of human being. The ideology which grew out of his thought has witnessed to several essential truths: that human beings have irreducible material needs (e.g., food, clothing, shelter), that needs must be met by cooperative productive activity, and that there should be a collective recognition that the meeting of these needs is a responsibility that is to be shared by all members of the community. Indeed, the examples of Ceausescu and Stalin aptly demonstrate that there is a conflict between the interests of the individual and universal interests of the community. They simply transformed these truths into an opiate to anesthetize and still the voices of their peoples. And, at best, they hid their individual interests under the cloak of Marxist ideology. But handing over these people to capitalists is not the answer either. Capitalism too thrives on the conflict between the interests of *individual* (or corporate) *capitalists* and the universal interests of the community. Extreme poverty, illiteracy, and the ghettoization of the poor are just a few examples of the effects of this version of the conflict upon the lives of people. If Marx was writing today he would warn us that ‘A specter is haunting Eastern Europe—the specter of Capitalism.’

Perhaps, then, a new philosophical examination of ideology along the lines of Hegel’s philosophy of religion and Marx’s philosophy of ideology should take place. By maintaining Hegel’s vision of criticizing and affirming, of holding in view the spiritual side of being human, and coupling it with Marx’s criterion of scrutinizing all ideas for their impact on material conditions, this reflection could envision a new system which combines the best of liberal democracy and communism. In short, a new system could emerge, something like a *democratic communism* which would ensure that all ideas are open to change from those who have to live their lives under them and which, at the same time, guarantee the meeting of the irreducible needs of its peoples through the coordinated productive activity of the community. In this way, both the spiritual and the material needs of being human would be met so that we would self-consciously realize that “... circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances.” Then the history of human alienation could come to an end and a history of reconciliation could begin.

**Works Cited**


Letter from Lima
Judith Peters

Everyone asks what I think of Lima, not only the folks from home whose letters I devour with the hunger only someone who has been away from home for a long time can understand, but also the ELCA missionaries and members of the three Peruvian Lutheran congregations I am meeting and am learning to know here in Peru. Lima—once a series of Indian ceremonial centers along the Rimac River, then an elegant colonial city, viceregal capital of the Spanish conquerors, now a complex metropolis of eight million people squeezed between the cliffs that border the Pacific Ocean and the bare foothills of the Andes. I have been here during the months of April and May, transition time from sunny summer to damp, foggy winter, and still am trying to formulate a satisfactory way to describe my reaction to Lima. I am searching for a word that is not judgmental, but that conveys both the plusses and minuses of this baffling city.

I might say that Lima is a sort of ongoing chaos. In the time I have been here the city has been beset by a number of strikes, all accompanied by protest marches and some violent clashes between strikers and the police. Public school teachers are on strike, having walked out just a few weeks after the beginning of the school year in April. Transportation workers are on intermittent strike—some weeks there are no morning buses on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday; occasionally there will be a full day with no bus service—a frightful situation for the thousands of Lima’s underclasses who depend on the buses to get from marginalized communities on the outskirts of the city to their places of work. (The wealthy do not use public transportation.) Construction workers on government projects are on strike, halting work on the elevated train, and other needed public works. Most devastating is the strike of all public health workers—doctors, nurses, maintenance workers. Only the most severe emergencies are being dealt with by medical personnel in hospital emergency rooms, but family members of the ill must bring clean sheets and food for the patients, and no one is cleaning operating rooms, patient rooms or bathrooms. Under these conditions everyone fears serious illness or injury.

Unfair or unpaid wages, and unkept promises motivate most of these strikes, and each protest march vibrates with suppressed anger and desperation. Tanks and water cannons stand in reserve in central Lima, and police in the main square wear flip-down plexiglass masks and carry bullet-proof shields. In early May Lima’s mayor eliminated the jobs of several hundred street sweepers, all women who had been promised continued employment. These workers, dressed in their yellow uniforms and brandishing their brooms, were joined by hundreds of female colleagues for a march to city hall, where they were met by water cannons and police wielding billy clubs. In one of the ironies that are so typical of Latin America, the following day was Mothers’ Day (an almost sacred holiday here, trailing only Christmas and Good Friday in importance) and the Sunday newspapers, already replete with flowery tributes to Mother, blazed with front page pictures of police clubbing stumbling women, and female bodies rolling across the central square impelled by streams of water from the cannons. One headline declared, “Working Mothers Beg for Jobs and Receive Brutal Beatings.” Despite such retaliation, the street sweepers and other strikers continued their demonstrations.

The tension and disruption caused by the strikes is heightened by Lima’s additional problem of rationing of water and electricity. There has been little rain in the mountains this summer to fill highland reservoirs. The huge bladder-type water storage facilities in the shantytowns lie collapsed on their vacant lots, and the poor are paying extortionists’ prices to private water trucks for a fill-up of...
buckets and drums with murky water. Hydroelectric plants have been unable to generate electricity at full capacity, and this shortage, coupled with the systematic blowing up of electric pylons by the Shining Path guerrilla organization—one of their principal tactics in attempting to foment a state of anarchy in Peru—has compelled rationing of electricity not only in the shantytowns and poor barrios, but also, of late, in the prosperous areas of the city.

Daily water shut-offs finally settled into a predictable pattern at the pleasantly-located Lutheran Center House where I have lived for these two months, and where each of the five members of the missionary team stops in a least once a day to pick up materials, work in the office, hold meetings, or take a hot shower. About 6 a.m. I hear banging and whooshing that means that the empty water tank on the roof is filling. Somewhere around noon the water is shut off again until the following morning. I have been quickly trained to shower and do my laundry early in the morning, and to set aside a big pot of water for later in the day. Such Pavlovian training has not helped with electricity, as the shut-offs follow no consistent scheme. In our area the lights rarely go off at night, but flashlight and candle are still close at hand. Most often the electricity goes out early in the morning—sometimes I hear the back-up generator come on at the East German embassy around the corner while I am still in bed, and can cancel the notion of coffee, toast or eggs for breakfast even before I get up. We never know how long the shut-off will last, and some of the missionary team often arrive hopefully at the Center House intending to use the electric typewriter or the computer only to give up by early afternoon and shift to other tasks. I am merely frustrated and inconvenienced by the lack of water and electricity, but for the workers and businesses of the city the rationing causes irrecoverable losses.

Coping with the unpredictable is one of the strengths of the people of Lima. Patience, creativity and stubborn persistence keep them going, although there is a vague sense of near-desperation, as though the hope that things will improve is approaching its limits. Most discouraging is the persistent inflation, which has been at levels that defy the ability to adapt. How does one cope with two million percent inflation over a five-year period? The figures are so absurd that they become meaningless. The missionary team purchased a car three years ago for a sum that will now not be sufficient to buy a candy bar. The forty percent per month inflation that I have experienced here is considered quite an improvement by my friends, but I am still shocked that the cup of coffee I paid 18,000 intis for on Monday costs 23,000 on Tuesday, or that the dollar that netted me 26,000 intis in early April now yields 48,500.

The poor can never keep pace with spiralling prices. Although salaries are usually adjusted once a month, most of Lima’s poor are self-employed, and fall farther and farther behind in the cost of living. The poor spend all they have and fall short of meeting basic needs. Those who earn even a small fraction more than they need for expenses immediately convert their intis to dollars before they lose their value. This exchange is easily accomplished, for everywhere in the city there are money-changers (cambistas) who stand on street corners with fistsful of intis and dollars and a handy calculator, actively involved in the ‘dollarization’ of the Peruvian economy. These dollars cannot be deposited in a national bank, since all deposits must be made in intis, and I envision stuffed mattresses, clay pots buried in patios, and secret compartments all sheltering hoards of U.S. dollars. The wealthy, of course, have long known how to protect their money, spending it on luxury items and collectables, or sending it to foreign banks.

This process of trying to frame an accurate statement about the city of Lima helps me advance toward the goal of my being here in the first place. My principle knowledge of Latin America has been through its literature. I have done some traveling in both Mexico and Peru, and feel comfortable with my general knowledge of places and culture, but my growing interest in the rich production of Latin American novels of social and political protest has given me a craving to try to view the conditions that inspire those novels from a perspective that a tourist, and even an academic who remains in educated university circles, can not hope to achieve. In order to enter the world of the marginalized classes, I asked the Division of Global Missions of the ELCA to accept me as a mission volunteer, and they most graciously responded by sending me to Mexico in January and February, and now to Peru.

In Mexico I had a specific task to perform, serving as interpreter for U.S. groups visiting Mexico through the Lutheran Center in Mexico City, accompanying them on site visits to Indian villages, experimental agricultural projects, and shantytowns, and translating documents for a social service agency. I not only saw aspects of Mexico I had never seen before, I also felt useful. Peru has been different. ‘Accompanying’ has taken on the meaning of that word as it is used by theologians in Latin America—‘being with’ those who are doing the living, working and suffering, offering one's presence and support because there is little

September, 1990

21
else that one has to offer. Here in Lima there are no visiting groups or educational tours, and the missionaries all speak excellent colloquial Spanish, so the skills I have to offer are superfluous. I have no healthcare training, and despite our back-yard vegetable garden in Indiana, I am no agronomist who can offer suggestions for making crops grow on Lima's coastal desert. Carpentry, plumbing, masonry are not talents that I have honed in a quarter-century of teaching.

In Lima I confront three tiny Lutheran congregations in marginated areas of the city to whom I have nothing to offer but my presence, and I wonder how even that might be of any value. I come from a country which has of late been instrumental in ruining the Nicaraguan economy, has violently invaded Panama, and here in Peru has landed Green Berets to wipe out cocaine fields with Spike. I am tall, light-skinned, and blond (by Peruvian standards), thus associated with the privileged classes who have kept the poor in their place for five centuries. I begin to feel that I am one more agent of exploitation, drawing insights and observations from the people I meet, while offering them nothing in return. Why the members of the Peruvian Lutheran Church should trust me or accept me I really don't know.

Miraculously, they do accept me, and although in this short time I do not form the sort of friendships that lead to intimate confidences, I am warmly welcomed to worship, to meetings of women's groups, to Bible studies, to celebrations, and to many comfortable every-day conversations. I am particularly intrigued by the Bible study sessions which take place every Tuesday afternoon at the Luz Divina church in Marquez, a squatter settlement of several thousand people on the northern edge of Lima. The passages selected by Leif Vaage, the missionary who conducts the reflexion biblica, seem written for this setting of struggling people and one-room shacks. One afternoon Leif has chosen the parable of the lost coin for the group to reflect on. The desperate search for the coin and the rejoicing of all the neighbors when it is found are vividly understood by the study's participants. Several women tell of similar experiences, and share the terror they felt at misplacing money meant to feed their family. As I hear their discussion, the parable assumes a sharpness for me that it never had before. The Bible as it is read and received here is less a book of eternal verities than a manual for coping with daily struggles, a useful book of valuable how-to suggestions.

The Marquez congregation consists entirely of women. Many of them are the head of their household. Others have husbands who are not able or interested in participating in the life of this small congregation. These determined women of the Luz Divina congregation are proud of the small cement block church that occupies a corner opposite one of the public water faucets in this community of narrow dirt streets. When they planned the construction of this church, they insisted on two rooms, the larger for worship and meetings, and the smaller for a kitchen. Slowly they have achieved their goal for that kitchen; inspired by their biblical how-to manual, they have established a functioning people's kitchen to prepare one nourishing meal a day for their neighbors.

This kitchen I think, reveals much about living at survival-level in a marginated community. The women of a dozen families are in charge of the project, which serves about 120 meals each day. Since there is no refrigerator in the kitchen, each day begins with a trip to the market to purchase all the provisions for the day's meal. The food, usually soup (an indispensible staple for Latin American meals) and a meatless main dish, is cooked in huge pots on a bottled-gas stove. The meals are sold almost at cost to anyone in the settlement who wishes to buy them. Setting the price of the meal has been an ongoing problem, as the cost of food has risen so rapidly that even the plainest fare has become expensive. The women's concern is to keep the cost affordable for those who most need these meals. The notion of profit does not enter the debate. The women do not view this as a money-raising project either for themselves or for the church. They meet a need, volunteer their time in exchange for a slightly lower cost for the meals for their own families, and sometimes 'forget' to ask for payment from a neighbor who needs help.

The kitchen is a cooperative venture under difficult circumstances, and the tensions of keeping it going produce daily spats over what to cook, how to cook it, who is shirking, or the size of portions. Any difference of opinion has the potential to erupt into shrill, vituperative accusations, with a frequency that leads me to suspect that these arguments are a sort of necessary recreation that serves to vent frustrations and define personal territories. The concern, sacrifice, competition, and conflict that characterize the precarious success of the Luz Divina kitchen embody the stubborn daily struggle of the poor.

The women of Luz Divina and of the other two Lutheran churches teach me another essential Latin American lesson in survival. They seize the opportunity to celebrate with family, with friends, now, today, before the opportunity is lost, spending, contributing (squandering, we might say) from the little
they have in order to enjoy the moment to the fullest. There is an enormous birthday cake, baked to surprise one of the missionaries on her birthday. One woman brought eggs, several others sugar. The chocolate was a major purchase, requiring numerous small donations. That sacrificial cake became the center of a marvelous party—hours of laughing, joking, singing, and impromptu dances, and poetry recitations. I suspected that the coin of the biblical parable, had it been found by one of these women, would have been spent without a moment’s regret on a raucous celebration with all those concerned neighbors. In a society where it has been useless for the poor to set aside for the future, the suggestion of the biblical manual that they not be overly cautious about tomorrow makes practical sense.

Chaos does seem to describe what I think of Lima. Part of that chaos is my own reaction to finding that the patterns and values that order my northern life do not serve to order my life here. Part of that chaos is the destructive legacy of a society that has never ceased to be colonial in its sharp division of classes and the use of wealth and power to defend that division rather than to build for a whole nation. All now suffer from the breakdown of the financial system and of public services, although the poor suffer much more deeply. And part of the chaos is the feisty struggle of strong spirits to persevere, clogging the street with food stalls, claiming the sidewalks for vending, protesting, and insisting on feeding one another, arguing, worshiping, and celebrating, trying to lay claim to the right to survive.

Beyond Lima

Beyond Lima, where Cuzco rises, Suave, metaphysical bats sound The cathedral towers. Each Veer arcs away above our heads And our dreams break sleep. We wheeze in the nightly cool, Thin air Pizarro also breathed, Wheezing too, and rattling, Gasping, mas...mas... And through the dark window We can see the sacred mountain, Clouded barely white at the top; There the virgins were murdered Whose trust lived so briefly; There Inca, too, died.

Robert Pawlowski

September, 1990
God is in the Details
Charles Vandersee

A summer project, and here in fall the pleasure still lingers. But I didn’t get to it right away, because of our murder trial.

This was in the Bedford County courthouse, 80 miles south of Dogwood. On trial was a former student at the university here, who with his girl friend, was charged with the bloody knife killing of her parents, five years ago. (It was not a Disney family.) The students were classmates, members of our scholars program. The purpose of my three minutes on the stand was to give the jury a generic description of students in this program: bright, able, energetic—often unpredictable.

His girl friend, now in the Goochland women’s prison, was sentenced as an accessory in 1987. Our summer trial ended, after three weeks of front-page and TV coverage statewide, with conviction on two counts of first-degree murder.

While the cameras and wheels of justice continued to roll, I meanwhile crossed the state line, to ramble around western North Carolina. The subpoena served as springboard to vacation. For years I’ve wanted a full day at stately Biltmore, located near Asheville. This is the George Vanderbilt estate of the 1890s, which for both grand design and functional detail may be the most brilliant house on the continent. My travels and academic acquaintance with American culture suggest no rival. It’s a French chateau, 255 rooms, superbly adapted by siting, plantings, and flowing interior spaces to a climate sometimes muggy. Monticello, a house near Dogwood, seems by comparison merely clever in places, unambitious and cramped.

Heir of a ferry and railroad fortune, George Vanderbilt deserves to be better known, as imaginer and deployer, despite the crime of personal wealth. He inspired to best advantage the talents of Richard Morris Hunt, architect, and Frederick Law Olmsted, landscape designer. He also saved the surrounding forest and restored ruined farmland.

Biltmore exceeded expectations, I realized, recrossing the state line. In Bedford, real-life crime-and-prosecution had been engrossing. I enjoyed the art museum in the old mint at Charlotte, and even a chat in Winston-Salem with a former student, now a department chairman (but still teaching, not a full-time renegade). However, my main satisfaction of the summer was not friendship, courtroom, or castle. It was perfecting the big list: all the letters of Henry Adams known to exist.

An early version done years ago was the map of our territory during editing of six volumes of letters. Those volumes are now complete, but the final obligation of editors is bibliographical: Tell future scholars everything they need to know about the documents themselves, by means of a list, letter by letter.

To do this well you have to sacrifice annoyance and accept a host of pleasures. Swift-passing hours without human contact, days at the word processor. The gratification of something ‘pure,’ something with its own inner logic to tease out and respect. The pleasure of polishing a tool, perfecting a device.

All these are satisfactions the school year, with its teaching and nurturing, can’t provide. In class, for example, dealing with novels and poems for a term is finally almost criminal. Never can you work through everything important, or expose all the essentials. You do Faulkner and Heaney injustice; you do students injustice. As for yourself, you decline in moral stature year by year, as these foreordained failures accumulate within. You’re tired, by May, of playing Sisyphus—though in September and October you had never heard of the guy, and instead were a sort of Sistine deity, bringing everything to life.

So making a list, of a finite quantity of objects (four and a half thousand, in the present instance), ministers to the soul: order, form,
wholeness, closure. Especially closure, something more substantial than the soft pang of delight as you finish a crossword. There you've followed impeccably what has been designed impeccably. But in making a list of letters, design has been subverted by criminal acts and cosmic accidents.

There was once a hoped-for design; this is the engrossing starting point. Henry Adams expected his letters to be saved and published. All important men and women do. However, friends can't be commanded to preserve. Down, egol Adams must have inquisitively in conversation the concept of value—that what certain people write to their friends will be wanted by posterity. Within his own circle, John La Farge, who re-invented stained glass; the geologist/racon­teur Clarence King; the fat genius of Romanesque architecture, Henry Hobson Richardson; the accom­plished novelist Edith Wharton.

Yet letters to these people do not survive (except a few to King). La Farge, whose own letters to Adams, some 200, are at Yale, was famed for fastidiousness; evidence suggests that he purged his files every year and threw things away. Letters to Richardson fell victim to uncaring descendants. Wharton’s surviving papers are abundant, but not even her formidable biographer, R. W. B. Lewis, has found the letters from Adams. King, a promoter of dubious mines, was always traveling, in the western U.S. and in Mexico; he may have left most of his letters in hotel wastebaskets.

Editors therefore deal with silences, lacunae, crevasses, mysterious black holes even. The melancholy pleasure of editing may be that of steward/owners who have lovingly restored a Frank Lloyd Wright house—but had to leave rooms sparsely furnished when they couldn't find the pieces once there.

With Wright you don't augment; the building and the furnishings were all one.

The pleasure of a list-maker is analogous to taking photographs of the restoration—of every object, in rigid sequence of appearance, but not of every detail. The list-reader can then get the idea of the individual object (each letter), and by watching the objects in juxtaposition (a period of a month or a year) can see, as it were, the walls and contours of rooms. In a mere hour, a whole life even.

Different editors find their materials demanding different schemes, when it comes to making the Big List. On the floor of my office, with the work materials, was a monstrous red book, the Calendar of the Correspondence of Charles Darwin, 1821-1882. It was an icon. Not a model to follow, this 1985 volume, but a luxurious example of one of the kinds of things one might do.

The main body of this oversize work, 568 double-column pages, is a straightforward list. All known Darwin letters and all letters written to him. A series of typographical chunks, one chunk per letter. Each entry giving the essential information: date, place, recipient, manuscript location, place of publication, synopsis of contents. This model, funded massively by both NSF and NEH, fascinated me because it differed from my own scheme.

The Darwin list includes letters to Darwin as well as by him; the actual thinking of Darwin himself is thus difficult to follow in any consecutive way. You have to look, item by item, to see if he wrote the item, then ponder the substance (the annotation), then trek back to the previous letter by him, to think about connections. Another trouble: You can't see at a glance a whole wall or room. Except for running heads at the tops of pages, you can't see where a year (or month) starts and ends. You can't get a quick idea, therefore, of how much writing at any given point in life Darwin was doing. Nor, at a glance, what people he's writing to at any one point. Your eye has to trudge rather than scan.

The inner logic of the huge Darwin archive (13,925 items) evidently dictated the scheme. But for Adams this scheme would have worked poorly, for at least one reason: Adams was an addict. For much of his life he was unable to get through the morning without writing a letter or two. He admitted once to his brother Brooks that he wrote for himself; was there need within him to set his mind in order as the new day began? Early a widower, he may also have needed to reach out and connect with parts of the world, in his big Richardson house separated from the White House by only a small park.

Therefore, what I myself wanted and needed—and figured all Adams scholars wanted—was a view at a glance of Adams day by day, month by month. A visual break for each new month, a big break for a new year, and the story of each item on a single line rather than in a block of data having to be cracked open.

But you might be asking, if not falling asleep (if asleep, do take flight to the Biltmore terrace, to see Mount Pisgah): Didn't you say Adams wrote almost every day? Did you mean that he wrote complete letters, or did he sometimes take three or four days to finish a letter, adding to it a little at a time? The interesting answer is the latter; often (especially when traveling) he wrote an installment rather than a full letter. So I gave each installment its separate line. With this scheme you really do see at a glance that he wrote almost every day. From my list you crave the text of each letter, each installment, to see how his accounts of experience differ from...
correspondent to correspondent.

To go on in this vein, reveling in typography, is merely to pile up evidence about that “inner logic” referred to—understanding the nature of your materials and the solutions that lie within them, resistant to any generic model. In my format you read up and down, in vertical columns, as well as across. One column shows the places he wrote from. At age 60, summer and fall of 1898: Luxor, Cairo, Beirut, Baalbek, Damascus, Beirut again, Smyrna, Athens, Constantinople, Sofia, Belgrade, Budapest, Vienna, Paris, London, then a country-house in Kent shared with friends.

This same inner logic I noticed at the Bedford trial. I admired the design of the county prosecutor. The student had fled Dogwood and was apprehended months later in London. There, lengthy interrogation and a confession. Those long and tedious tapes had to be played for the jury. Long letters written by the defendant had to be read aloud, at the right time, and placed into evidence. Photographs too—what eventually assured conviction was a sockprint, in blood. Some 200 exhibits, finally.

Some pieces required more explanation than others, as in my list. The letters we left unpublished needed annotation, whereas the published ones didn’t. Again a difference from Darwin—no edition of his letters has been issued since 1903. Throughout our project, of course, part of the agony was to decide which letters to omit. For the list-maker, that agony is finally redeemed, transubstantiated into fun, the composing of terse, accurate annotations.

As a principle of annotation, one line for each letter, no more. Except for very long letters, and problem cases (undated letters, elliptical contents). One line only, for reasons both esthetic and utilitarian. The eye, doing all this “glancing” I keep talking about, does not want a list interrupted at length by commentary and paraphrase. But the eye serves the mind, and the scholar’s mind does wish to see whether an unpublished letter is worth looking up or sending away for. Much of the Adams archive can be obtained on microfilm, 36 reels, and we editors have produced a two-volume set of omitted letters (typed transcripts only, no footnotes). But that set exists in only 10 copies, in only five libraries.

So you experience the joy of thoughtful condensation, *multum in parvo*, selecting what may be significant and useful to others. You seek to avoid cleverness, yet you discover that Adams often awakens his mind in the morning by the witty and unpredictable. The list-reader will smile occasionally, even though the list-maker has sternly adhered to the material. Annotations such as these have emerged:

“Lemons arrived, also Tati, expert on grandfather’s human sacrifices.” “How to settle with Rodin; looking at old furniture with Helen and Payne.” “Playing chiefly with Mrs. Lodge. Auto in shop. World ends 1930.” “Mrs. Marshall Field begs me to breakfast at Ritz’s. No news, no books.”

These, I assure you, do make sense to the scholar acquainted with Adams. And, of course, one of the other satisfactions—besides rigor and closure and the absence of human distractions—has been new acquaintance with the letters themselves. A stack of six volumes at elbow, you’re always querying, verifying. I even redated a couple of troublesome letters, happily none of those in print.

And near the end of the task I found Biltmore. It was a touch of symmetry in a summer of trying to assemble perfection. Adams was barely acquainted with George Vanderbilt, though he knew more or less everybody else. But when Vanderbilt died in 1914, Adams noted the fact:

“As John Hay used to say, there was no bassesse [lowdown toady] to which we had not descended for an invitation to Biltmore, but he never noticed us.

“I never saw Biltmore, and am now curious to know what will become of it.”

From Dogwood, yours faithfully,

C.V.
Micro-businesses for the Two-Thirds World

Michael Becker

"In countries with high unemployment the government has two low-cost options to create jobs: the army or small businesses. However, soldiers must be paid, so the government has a large annual bill. In addition, a large military can lead to a breakdown in democratic systems. As the military grows it becomes difficult for the government to keep under control." These are the words, spoken in the English-as-a-second-language accent, of Jorge Martinez, Vice Minister of Agriculture, El Salvador.

"In contrast, investments in small businesses create jobs and products that continue year after year. Also, after small business owners and their workers are able to meet their own basic needs, they become more involved in the democratic process." Martinez is the featured speaker at Opportunity International's annual dinner meeting last spring. Opportunity is a not-for-profit, non-denominational Christian organization dedicated to helping Third World entrepreneurs to start and to expand their own businesses. David Hardin, Chairman of Opportunity's Board of Governors, suggests that the Third World might better be called the Two-Thirds World since it makes up that much of the world's population.

Mr. Victor Buenaventura of the Philippines wanted to expand his family's corrugated box business. An Opportunity loan bought tools, used boxes and new rolls of corrugated cardboard. Ten jobs were created by recycling old cardboard boxes: taking them apart, reversing the old print to the inside, and creating new custom size boxes. A second loan of $4,300 increased business and doubled the number that Victor employs.

To meet my friend, Gordon Murphy, is to quickly dispel any notion that 'Christian businessman' is an oxymoron. Gordon was an executive for many years at one of the major Chicago banks and has started several small businesses. Several years ago he joined a small study group of successful businessmen, who called themselves the 'Bruised Camels,' at his church in Glen Ellyn, Illinois. The men prayed together and studied to learn what God wants of wealthy people in a world of poverty. It is said that the men's families got quite nervous when sudden bizarre things began to happen, like tithing.

At least partially as a result of the camel experience, Gordon accepted a position as President of Opportunity International. The organization makes loans to small businessmen in the Third World and provides training in business management. Among other things uncommon in the usually secular world of business, Gordon sees himself with duties as spiritual director to those who work with him in the Oak Brook, Illinois headquarters of Opportunity.

The small businesses—make that micro-businesses—funded by Opportunity last year created 9,701 jobs. Politicians like to boast about such numbers, with no more justification than taking credit for the rain. These 9,701 people have names and addresses and families and new jobs directly financed by Opportunity.

Mrs. Rani Selvanathan and her son, Prabhu of Bangalore, India, live under a lean-to of plastic sheets. Her alcoholic husband lost his job, their home, and his health. Rani, on the brink of abject poverty, obtained a small loan from Opportunity's partner, and now runs a small snack stand to support her family.

Gordon Murphy and I used to meet at Spice and Easy in Glen Ellyn to enjoy flavored coffees and French pastries. Both of us had recently left jobs in the high-rise, pin-stripped corporate world of downtown Chicago. Between jobs we each did a little consulting, though Gordon always said consulting is what unemployed people said they were doing to avoid the word, 'unemployed.' He is direct that way. He is also one of those direct people who ask God's blessing at every meal, even between-meal-snacks in fashionable public restaurants. So we did that, and we talked about what God might want us to do with our lives and what jobs that might lead us to.

Those 9,701 jobs were created by an organization which barely exceeded $2,000,000 in income last year. The figures seem mismatched. In this country it takes an average of
$20,000 to $30,000 in investment to create a new job. Former President Carter recently noted that it takes $1,000,000 in defense spending to create one job. Let's see, one Stealth bomber at $700 million, employing a pilot, co-pilot, navigator, flight crew, ground crew....

The low cost of job creation in Third World micro-businesses is one thing that makes Opportunity work. Opportunity loaned out just over $4 million in 1989 to 4,500 entrepreneurs who created the 9,701 jobs. That's an average of about $900 per loan and one job created for every $420 loaned. Money that is loaned out is fully repaid with interest on over 90 percent of the loans. Repaid funds are then loaned again and again. Further, entrepreneurs trained by Opportunity and given a chance through Opportunity loans continue in business and continue to grow on their own, sometimes through additional Opportunity loans.

Two things are needed to promote small business development, according to Jorge Martinez: credit and training. "We believe it is necessary to give people access to money by offering loans. To give people handouts creates dependence." World Bank studies indicate that 80 percent of all new jobs in the Third World are created by small businesses. Opportunity loan recipients, who are not infrequently illiterate, can receive training in all aspects of business management from the local partner of Opportunity.

Juan Voltran lost his entire tailor shop in the El Salvador earthquake of 1986. Based on his sewing experience and good references, he received a $1,000 loan from Opportunity to buy a sewing machine, material and an electric iron to reopen his tailor shop.

Because of his lack of education, Juan required extra on-site visits to teach him the basic skills of management and control. His sewing business now has five sewing machines, a second location and four employees.

In the United States, substantially more new businesses fail each year than succeed. The Two-Thirds World is no different, yet over ninety percent of the micro-businesses funded by Opportunity succeed. The entrepreneurs who get Opportunity loans are properly financed and trained—that is what Opportunity is there for. Loan applications are screened to identify people with the ideas and energy necessary to succeed. Most applicants have experience in the business they propose, most often the experience of working for someone else. The character of applicants is established by references from their church pastors.

In 1986 Gordon and I met for the last time at Spice and Easy. He had accepted the presidency of Opportunity International and was putting aside his plans to start his own business in favor of helping thousands of entrepreneurs like himself to start theirs. I had accepted an instructor's position at Northern Illinois University, formalizing commitment to a career I had dabbled in during that year of transition.

"Give a man a fish and he eats for a day. Teach him to fish and he eats for a lifetime." Opportunity has taken the saying an additional step—"Loan a man funds to buy a fishing boat and others in the community will be provided jobs and dignity and food for a lifetime."

Isolino Micolta of Columbia worked as a fisherman and eventually was able to start a small fishing business of his own. Wanting to expand, he went to Opportunity and obtained a small loan for a fishing boat and additional nets. Isolino got the boat, paid back the loan, and today has a business employing 25 workers. Funds from the fishing business have been reinvested into a saw mill which employs another 30 workers.

Opportunity gives no handouts. It makes business loans to entrepreneurs to whom no bank will talk. The only other source of credit to the poor in the Third World, the loan sharks, charge up to 20 percent interest—that's 20 percent per day—according to Jorge Martinez. Opportunity's partner lending agencies charge interest too, but at market rates for business loans.

In a most unusual arrangement, the Board of Directors and the Board of Governors of Opportunity have agreed to underwrite all the administrative and fundraising costs of its U.S. headquarters. That means that 100 percent of other contribution goes into programs to help the poor in developing nations to establish their own businesses.

Also unusual is the very high degree of name recognition on Opportunity's Advisory Board, worthy of an organization one hundred times it size: James F. Bere, CEO Borg-Warner Corp.; Dr. Anthony Campolo, author and lecturer, Eastern College; Millard Fuller, Executive Director, Habitat for Humanity; Theodore M. Hesburgh C.S.C., President Emeritus, Notre Dame University; Martin E. Marty, University of Chicago; Emmanuel Palaez, Philippine Ambassador to the U.S.; Robert A. Seiple, President, World Vision; Paul Simon, U.S. Senator; and Clayton Yeutter, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture.

Opportunity currently operates in twelve countries. The lending agencies fall into two categories, those of developing partner and mature partner. Developing partners are funded by Opportunity which pays salaries, office expense and provides grants for loans until the partner grows large enough to be self-sustaining, that is they have cash flows from loans and interest sufficient to fund overhead and new loans.

Currently there are 13 develop-
ing partners in Jamaica, El Salvador, India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Philippines. Seven mature partners are located in Honduras, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Peru, Columbia, Indonesia and the Philippines. Plans call for the opening of partner lending agencies Africa this year, in Zimbabwe or Botswana. Agency partners are added only when it seems probable that they can grow to be self-sustaining within five years.

In the Philippines, Opportunity has one of its largest efforts. Seven partner agencies lent $835,000 last year to businesses which created 2,244 jobs. That's $250 per job. Plans have been established to create fifteen more partner agencies in the next five years with goals of loaning $25,000,000 to 15,000 low income entrepreneurs. These loans will create over 100,000 jobs and bring benefits to the lives of over 500,000 people.

Guadelupe Turcia of El Salvador borrowed $635 from Opportunity to purchase a corn grinding machine. She now has five such machines and ten employees and supplies fresh ground corn to local restaurants for tortillas.

Nancy and I sit at the same table with Gordon and his wife, Cheryl, at Opportunity's annual dinner meeting. That was the plan anyway. Gordon has been dashing about performing host duties. Finally he gives up his chair as there are more guests than expected. Jorge Martinez is at this table as well, though I don’t know who he is yet. He speaks Spanish with his dinner partner who announces that she will interpret if anyone wants to speak to him.

We talk to Cheryl and catch up on what’s happening in the Glen Ellyn church, where my wife Nancy had been pastor. We’ll catch up on Gordon’s news another time, at Phil Smidt’s restaurant in Hammond, halfway between Glen Ellyn and our new home in Indiana.

"Please remember, to promote small business development is to promote dignity and self-sufficiency. It is to promote an economic system which provides for all its members, and not only for the rich. To promote small business development is to promote the unity of the family. It is to promote democracy, respect for human rights and demilitarization. To promote small business development is to promote peace in my country and in other countries in the Third World."

"And for those of us who serve in the name of Christ, to promote the development of small enterprise is to promote an understanding of our God, a God of love, justice and peace. Thank you and may God continue his blessings on this beautiful nation to the north of my country—El Salvador."

Jorge Martinez has finished his speech with this benediction, and the hundred people in the dining room stand to applaud. I gather up extra copies of Opportunity’s annual report to show my finance students. On the display table outside I pick up a copy of the financial statements and, I am pleased to see, a printed copy of Martinez’s speech. It was a year ago, at last year’s dinner, that I said I was going to write this article.

Perhaps Opportunity International is the type of thing that can only happen on a small scale and as a private undertaking. Its strength in Christian commitment would surely ebb, if not vanish, if its functions were transferred to a government agency. Nonetheless its success bears close study as we consider national policy in a world filled with jobless and hungry people. As we open the last decade of our century, more and more oppressive governments are yielding to freedom and looking toward free enterprise to provide food and jobs and dignity for their people. We will have more than enough opportunities to help.

Next month in The Cresset...

- The Colloquium on a Theology of Creation: Robert Blomquist, Betty DeBerg and Philip Gilbertson contribute the first three of five articles on nature, religion and law in America

- Norbert Samuelson asks what The Adventures of Baron von Munchausen, Do the Right Thing and Crimes and Misdemeanors have in common, and answers his question.

- Jim Combs describes the Global Pillage: multinational corporations and culture

September, 1990

It is difficult for me to review a book that I like as much as this one. Reviewers should not, I have been told, give such unqualified praise. Yet I find in Carter Heyward’s latest offering an outstanding model of theology at its best: it is conversant with and knowledgeable of the tradition; it is bold and creative; it is both affirming and critical of the wider culture; and it is written with deep and faithful passion, capable of inspiring the same in its readers. Heyward admits early in the book that she wanted to “write fire,” and she has accomplished it. Were I to recommend several of the best books produced by feminist liberation theologians since 1970, this would be among them.

A theology of sexuality, *Touching Our Strength* is not simply sexual ethics but rather a portrait of the divine and divine activity that has as its prime metaphor right, or mutual, human relationship, particularly as it finds expression in empowering and passionate sexual intimacy. She images God as “power in right relation” (3), “our relational power” (23). Such power for relationship has a trinitarian shape:

God is our relational matrix (or womb). God is born in our relational matrix. God is becoming our relational matrix. . . . God is our relational power. God is born in this relational power. God is becoming our power. . . . It is a paradox: God is becoming our relational matrix insofar as we are the womb in which God is being born. This may be easier if we substitute the word “love” for “God.” Love is becoming our relational matrix if we are the womb in which love is being born. Love is becoming our home if we are lovers. God is becoming our power in relation to the extent that we are coming into our power as lovers of one another. (24)

The predicament from which humanity needs salvation is, within Heyward’s theological construct, “the vast, global character of the structures of domination and subjugation that permeate the foundations of our lives together” (91). Salvation from these alienated and unjust structures is “ourselves in right relation,” the possibility for which arises only from God, the power that makes such goodness possible, and that lives within and sustains it (11). This notion of salvation has an already-but-not-yet quality typical of Christian eschatology. Our experience of right relation, of the deep and divine desire for connection and justice, is experienced from time to time but never completely nor permanently. She reinterpreted the symbol “eternal life”: what we truly want and need is “undying friendship” (138). Our response to such a God should be virtue and faith. Heyward is critical of traditional individualistic notions of virtue:

We need to move beyond the scholastic understanding of moral “virtue,” or goodness, as the self-possession of a (normally male) individual. Goodness is a gift we share. It comes to us through mutual relation, and we can only have it together. (126)

Faith is courage and perseverance despite these dreams unrealized and these goals never fully achieved:

Faith is the tenacity to keep on believing in the power of mutuality/justice/friendship, despite the NO being spoken, all around and within us, to this radical and sacred possibility. (153-54)

For Heyward, theology is a radically moral enterprise. Theology is “critical, creative reflection on the patterns, shape, and movement of the Sacred in our life together,” work with words and images that best reflects experience of God. But God is misidentified if theology has nothing to do with justice: “The pattern of the Sacred in our life together is justice. The shape of God is justice. The movement of the Holy in our common life is toward justice” (22). Because the work of God and, hence, of theology is justice, theology is radically political. To participate in relations of justice and passion, one must stand opposed to and help defeat the powers and principalities of domination and oppression. A theology of right relation must name as evil those social structures and dynamics.

Heyward is especially concerned to name the sexist oppression of women and the heterosexist oppression of lesbians and gay men.
Such injustice is omnipresent in our culture because of two major factors. The first is the social construction of "evil." Dominant (and oppressive) culture has decreed as evil

that which challenges the established order of alienated power relations. So, for instance, while hunger may be a problem, communism, which threatens the individual white male's autonomy and his right to private ownership, is evil. While wife-battering may be too bad, gay sex, which threatens the established order of male control of female sexuality, is evil. While incest may be a shame, lesbian mothers embody the forces of evil that threaten to bring down the entire sacred canopy of alienated power. (55)

A second major factor which functions to maintain oppression is cultural sadomasochism. Our imaginations, our vision of relational possibilities, have been damaged sometimes beyond repair by the actual twisted relationships we experience:

Ours is a sadomasochistic society, quite literally, in that we have learned to sit back and enjoy the fruits of domination and submission. It is, for many of us, most of what we know to be relationally possible. (56)

Heyward, an Episcopal priest and professor at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Mass., chooses to work within the church, but as a reformer:

I am working on behalf of institutional transformation, planted in a willful and, I pray, intelligent and faithful refusal to accept the traditional church's "no" to womanpower as sacred and to sexual pleasure as a delightful relational happening that needs no higher justification. (5)

Challenging the erotophobia she sees in most Christian theology and ethics, and the all-too-frequent alignment of the church with systems of dominance and oppression, Heyward's exhortation, we know intuitively as we read it, is on the mark, both visionary and revisionist: "We do not need to justify pleasure. Let us rather have to justify pain."

Betty A. DeBerg


When Jesse Jackson compared the American people to pieces of a patchwork quilt at the 1988 Democratic convention, many of us nodded and applauded the comparison. And when a mammoth quilt became the means whereby we collectively mourn the loss of friends and family to AIDS, it again seemed appropriate. For most of us, homemade quilts hold positive associations, and Jackson and the AIDS Quilt Project used those good feelings to promote sympathy for their respective causes.

Yes, a quilt is often more than just a useful item to those who own them. A quilt may awaken memories of a grandmother or of a distant childhood. It may remind one of a long illness or of a summer of picnics. But a quilt is not the mystical magic carpet which Sue Bender makes it in Plain and Simple: A Woman's Journey to the Amish.

Plain and Simple (which might better have been entitled Zen and the Art of Quilt Making), is a slender volume with wide margins, doublespaced between paragraphs, and a black-and-white Ninepatch design above each of the 152 page numbers. All this white space, along with whimsical sketches of folksy items, is calculated to bring peaceful feelings to the reader. Sue Bender claims to have achieved her own peace by living briefly with Amish families and by learning to appreciate the simple beauty of Amish quilts.

Bender's journey to the Amish began in 1967 when, at the age of 33, she first learned about quilts and quilting. The crazy quilt became a metaphor for her own life, which was lived on two coasts (Berkeley and Long Island), with two careers (potter and therapist: graduate degrees from Harvard and Berkeley, as we learn already on p. 5), a husband, and two sons. She is unhappy with her crazyquilt life and strives, during the following twenty years, to transform it into a calm, simple Ninepatch design.

Bender believes that her journey and transformation have been completed, that she is "purified," that her soul is no longer starving, and that she has achieved a new, simpler state of mind. But I'm not persuaded that the frantic, self-promoting, competitive self, which she describes so convincingly in early chapters of the book, has in fact been left behind. She tells us of her former self, "I liked to stand out. Usually I wore distinctive old Arabic and pre-
Columbian jewelry and liked people to ask me where it came from" (88). Isn’t she still trying to stand out? What great attention-getting stories about the Amish she must now be able to tell. She was shocked to find, at her first post-epiphanal dinner party, that each of the fifteen guests was busy throughout the evening “staking out their territory” (89). Bender stakes out her own territory, though, by mentioning to the reader that each guest was more outstanding than the next and included a best-selling author, a respected psychoanalyst, and a world-famous artist—her intimate friends, we are expected to assume.

Despite my frustration with Bender’s failure to recognize the superficiality of her transformation, Plain and Simple does offer anecdotal information about life in the Amish community. Tales of quilting and cleaning, gardening and canning, all done by the Amish women in a matter-of-fact and unselfconscious way, help mitigate Bender’s own pride at the telling. It is a shame that Bender tries to persuade herself (and us) that a clean kitchen can bring an “altered state of consciousness” (40) or that handmade dolls could overcome a person with “the collective energy radiating from them” (24). The Amish would plain and simple laugh at such talk.

Sarah DeMaris


One reads this book with some anticipation, both for the topic and for the authors. The book boldly steps into the very middle of one of the most difficult political and religious issues of today: the relationship between the Israeli state and the Palestinian people. And the authors have impressive credentials to investigate this topic and share new insights. Well-known as a theologian on the cutting edge of Christian feminist theology, Rosemary Radford Ruether earlier authored Faith and Fratricide, an influential work exposing anti-Semitism in traditional Christian theology. And Herman Ruether is a political scientist who formerly was acting director of the Palestinian Human Rights Campaign. In this book, these two scholars combine to analyze the politico-religious dimensions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to suggest a new perspective toward healing this tragic situation.

The book grows out of the authors’ strong conviction that the Palestinian people have suffered deep injustice. And they hold that this injustice has been abetted by Zionist ideology, sponsored both by the Israeli state and by western Jewish and Christian people, insofar as this ideology has fostered fear and contempt for the Palestinians. The Ruethers hold that a whole network of falsifications about the two peoples has grown up in support of the Zionist ideology, accepted unquestioningly by many. The authors believe that the solution to the conflict must entail a deep change of heart, and they propose to aid in this by “telling the truth” about the history of both peoples and about the religious and ideological underpinnings of Zionism.

This is a courageous project, and it will be met with dismay on the part of many. It is extremely difficult to tell the whole truth accurately, and the Ruethers also have many weak points in their story. Yet at this point in the tragic impasse, it seems important that their challenge be heard.

In outlining the historical, social and political origins of the conflict, the authors present the foundations of the three faiths involved—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—and give a historical survey of the roots of Zionism. They also analyze Palestinian nationalism, countering the view that discounts any sense of peoplehood among the Palestinians.

An important section analyzes Christian responses to Judaism and Zionism. The authors show that, while there still is much anti-Judaism embedded in Christian views, many Christian groups have given uncritical support to Zionist ideology, including its anti-Arab elements. The authors also study some characteristic Jewish and Christian theological responses to the Holocaust, including views of Rubenstein, Fackenheim, Greenberg, the Eckhards, Littell, and van Buren. These views, they find, typically share assumptions about the Arabs as eternal enemies of the Jews and of the divinely-redemptive character of the state of Israel in Palestine.

At its ideological base, the Ruethers consider Zionist ideology to be a “false messianism,” based on the key ideas that the Jews are a nation, that they have a divine right to create a Jewish state in the ancestral homeland of Palestine, and that the establishment of the state of Israel is a key messianic event. Since this false messianism victimizes the Arab Palestinians, the Ruethers propose that Jews and Christians alike focus instead on “prophetic hope.” That would mean, like the biblical story of Jonah, telling the truth, even if it means exposing contradictions and injustices, and showing love for the Jewish people in the context of a universal concern for justice that also embraces the Palestinian people.

This book has an abundance of information and insight into this terrible problem. Unfortunately, it is not particularly well-written. The authors spend much time outlining political and historical factors but
do not support convincingly their thesis that this is primarily a problem of religious nationalism. They jump around from topic to topic without showing how they are interlinked. They sometimes make statements or draw conclusions without providing convincing support, as, for example, repeating the suggestion that the Abu Nidal group has become a front for the Israeli intelligence (119). Their review of theological responses to the Holocaust is superficial and one-sided, focusing only on the issue of the Jewish state of Israel. Through no fault of the authors, the book is already outdated, as the book was completed just as the Palestinian intifada was beginning. It might be said, of course, that the experience of the intifada makes the authors' basic thesis more compelling.

Even with serious shortcomings, the book raises important questions that simply cannot be ignored. It is past time that the truth about the struggle be told as accurately and completely as possible, that ingrained ideologies on all sides be challenged, that radical new solutions be found. Since religious ideologies are so intertwined in the problem, Jews, Christians and Muslims need to help transform the political problem by developing new religious perspectives that affirm and support Jewish identity but at the same time do not promote the continued abuse of the Palestinian people. Perhaps this troubling book will stimulate others to work toward that transformation.

Theodore M. Ludwig


The subtitle of this book will, no doubt, set the teeth of some Cresset readers on edge. The fact that Richard Mouw is provost at Fuller Theological Seminary may simply confirm for most their initial negative judgment. But if contemporary Lutherans and Lutheran university folk find it discomfiting to talk about Satan, deception, and truth, Luther did not, and just for old time's sake we moderns might spend several hours with a book like this one to remind ourselves what the fuss was all about.

Those who get beyond the dust-jacket of this book will be pleasantly surprised. This is no strident evangelical polemic, what we have come to associate with the popular apologettes of conservative and fundamentalist evangelicalism. Instead we discover Mouw's Augustinian evangelical Christianity dressed in the casual pastels of middle-America. Mouw, a philosopher, seeks to engage the intelligent Christian in reflection upon contemporary worldviews or thought-systems that compete with the Christian worldview for the hearts and minds of Americans.

The premise upon which Mouw's enterprise is based is St. Augustine's prayerful observation, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee" and G.K. Chesterton's reaffirmation of this Augustinian insight in his claim that a man who knocks upon a brothel door (the early twentieth century equivalent of a person who loiters in laundromats or stalks prey in single's bars) is seeking God. The question Mouw seeks to answer is what are the hopes and fears of individuals that attract them powerfully, but mistakenly, to today's popular "isms"?

To answer this question Mouw examines humanism, monism, occultism, nihilism, and relativism. In each case he finds present in these worldviews an answer which can go some distance in satisfying a contemporary human longing. Spiritual monism, for example, satisfies the longing for something more than a cold sterile reductionist approach to human existence provides. The universe has a meaning, the monist affirms, all things participating and re-uniting in some Oneness. The distorted truth here, Mouw suggests, is the misidentification of who the One is and a failure to recognize the difference between the Creator and the creature.

Mouw's creative and deft integration of classical philosophers—Parmenides, Plato, Berkeley, de Beauvoir—is impressive to one who tries to make these philosophers come alive for today's students. More impressive yet is the practical wisdom, the Christian humility, the greatness of soul that Mouw exhibits in his discussion.

Tom Kennedy


Thanks to some unlikely history teachers named Gorbachev, CNN and Hussein, the West's attention has been drawn outward to include areas which have long and rich cultural history. Though many American high school graduates have trouble believing it, this history actually pre-dates the Second World War.

Along with the impetus of intensely interactive current events, world history has been given a legislative shot in the arm in at least two states, California and Texas, which have mandated its teaching in high schools. New high school macrohistory textbooks have been quickly produced, a new Journal of World History is now being published, and more scholarly works like Krejci's are appearing in book-
stores. This is good news of course, but high school teachers are now armed with material they have not learned to use because American colleges and universities do not teach truly comparative history.

It is difficult, at best, to study world history in a university. This, as pointed out by William McNeill recently, is because university historians are very busy with other, "comparatively tiny and even trivial questions." The Ph.D. dissertation is not a broad work, but one confined by time for research, a narrow chronological period, or a particular theme.

Krejci, like McNeill, Toynbee or Paul Kennedy, explores a broad subject by painting a comparative picture of civilizations. Krejci looks at several 'Great Civilizations' of Asia before their confrontation with the West. He writes of entire cultures, reviewing their economic, religious and political structures, but also gives the reader a series of interesting, if arguable, asides concerning much more recent history.

The book itself has an interesting history. It was conceived, Krejci writes in his introduction, in a labor camp in Czechoslovakia where he was imprisoned as a dissident. After years of work, his flight from the communists and the hardship of exile, Before the European Challenge was written.

This book consistently captivates. Political histories of Asian cultures can be opaque, filled with names and dates of so many important incidents that the reader loses sight of any real humans on the landscape. Krejci translates information into clear pictures of people and cultures far removed from the later European developments most of us are so familiar with. Throughout the text he brings up important information about cultures off the beaten path, not just, as Eric Wolf put it, the history of victorious elites and the subjugation of dominated ethnic groups.

His coverage of religion in these diverse cultures stands out. Starting with a comparative look at Mesopotamia and Egypt, Krejci explores both cultures' mythopoetic world-view. Drawing parallels to later Christian thought, he explores some of the moralism in Egyptian thought, then contrasts it with the regimented disquiet of Sumer. Multi-ethnic Syria, the identity of early Judaism and the rise of the Jewish state are quickly but well-told individual stories. This approach, at which Krejci excels, reveals deep and interesting differences between cultures often lumped together by purely geographic or chronological studies.

From the transformation of Persia (a neglected area of study in the United States) to Islam under attack, the book turns on several points which have been explored in more detailed works. The difference here is that this is a macro-historical work—one which does not trudge through the sands of a distant land. The point of view which the reader must take is an open-eyed curiosity. Krejci brings to bear so many elements, so much material, that even the most jaded Eurocentric has to be interested. For that reason alone this book is worth the substantial paperback price.

In writing a broad historical work any historian subjects himself to the slings and arrows of those who feel that something crucial has been overlooked. Perhaps for that reason "The Chinese Path," Krejci's rambling chapter on, as he puts it, the "China of a hundred schools" is his weakest. While developing a readable overview of dynastic struggle, decline and re-birth—no small feat—he seems to give up on Ming China. After replaying the same litany of errors and squanderings that plagued Ming leadership, Krejci offers no new insight as to why a culture could achieve such a level of sophistication, rising beyond even the great Sung dynasty, only to close and turn inward again before the first European traders arrived.

Immediately upon this wandering section covering century after century of religious and political struggle, Krejci winds up the book on a lucid, sharp series of notes on Korea, Vietnam and Japan. His writing is focused, topical and balanced in what he calls "the rhythm of the Far East." Japan's adaptation of Chinese culture and the Japanization of Buddhism takes shape in the form of a new Japanese school—Zen. For Krejci it is simply another adaptation for the Japanese, a technique they have used for centuries. He ends with a consideration of this adaptive, vibrant culture rather than a more conservative inflexible regime, leaving the reader's mind focused on the purpose and grand scale of historiography.

Eric Wignall

The Cresset
Capping the Joke

So, now it seems to dawn on you
That there is something to be said
In favor of the scandalous view
("If so, I'd better off be dead!")
That life is pretty much a joke.

A truer word you never spoke.
But then, may we be wise to laugh?
Is the joke a good one, finally?
May wheat be winnowed when we chaff,
And do we fall by gravity?

Being made your laughter, highest God,
And rising, in your Comedy,
Against the slight and spurious,
May I attain completed joy
Within the one thing serious.

Charles Strietelmeier