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"And with Thy spirit." I feel better when I hear those words. When I worship in an unfamiliar church and the congregation around me responds to the salutation, "The Lord be with you," with the old familiar phrase, the language of the old prayer book puts me at ease and makes me feel at home. When instead I hear the newer formulation, "And also with you," I become concerned. It is a small change, but enough to raise my guard. If they changed that, what else might they have messed with?

It's silly. I know that. I can't even remember when this change happened, but I'm still not completely comfortable with it. I admit that my distaste for the new response is not legitimate, because it is not theologically informed. While I'm sure that gallons of ink have been spilled in theological journals over the respective merits of "And with thy spirit" and "And also with you," I lack the virtue necessary to familiarize myself with this undoubtedly fascinating literature. My preference comes down to this: I am an incorrigible traditionalist, and I just don't like the new response. Those who know me will confirm that I handle change poorly. (Did you know that they added a color other than green to the twenty dollar bill? What next?!)

Of course, there is more to tradition than the irrational preferences of your obstreperous editor. Our traditions contain the wisdom of the ages and are not to be taken lightly. Although the modern mind is proud of its escape from superstitious tradition (and modern Christians are proud of their escape from inhibiting traditions), it is not possible to jettison all tradition and start afresh. Traditions sometimes represent only the values of ages gone by, but, as C. S. Lewis wrote in The Abolition of Man, "[M]any of those who 'debunk' traditional or (as they would say) 'sentimental' values have in the background values of their own which they believe to be immune from the debunking process." An attempt to reform or reject traditions is little more than an act of raw will, unless it is itself rooted in the same tradition it claims to amend. Is it "better" to respond, "And also with you"? Perhaps this formulation better expresses the communal nature of the church's worship; however, the notion of communal worship itself comes to us through Christian tradition. If the change is done for the right reasons, then we have not rejected tradition but instead reaffirmed one aspect of it.

The Cresset is pleased to publish four addresses from the Lilly Fellows Program National Conference, held on 29 September—2 October, 2005 at College of the Holy Cross. The conference theme, "Keeping the Faith: Four Religious Perspectives on the Creation of Tradition," is addressed by distinguished scholars representing four distinct religious traditions. We learn from these essays that tradition is central to a faith's identity and sense of community, but also that it cannot be a static or rigid thing. Although traditions must have stability, in many ways the process through which they change is as important as the content of the tradition itself.

This issue on tradition presents an appropriate moment to inaugurate a new column, one in which we hope to promote discussion of a religious tradition well known to many readers of The Cresset. In the first issue of Being Lutheran, David Weber asks if Lutheranism has become "the church of the transition"—a stopping place on the road between evangelicalism and Catholicism. In this and future columns, we will consider what remains distinctive about Lutheranism. What in Lutheranism's traditions remains both true and vibrant for present-day believers? And how can Lutheran traditions be rearticulated in a manner sensitive to the needs of the present without being sacrificed to the fads of present? We hope this column will be a welcome new tradition for The Cresset's faithful readers. ¶

--JPO
THE STUDY OF RELIGION IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES aims to give students a comprehensive understanding of the social, cultural, theological, and intellectual processes through which people make sense of the world around them. In this context, examination of a diversity of religions is exceptionally important. Through the study of people who are different from us, we gain deeper insight into the nature of humanity—and of ourselves—than study of our own tradition alone can provide. This is because our evaluation of the other reveals something more significant than the obvious fact that different groups have distinctive philosophies and theologies. More important than this, study of the other reveals the extent to which the questions different peoples ask and the challenges they face are largely shared. Through the example of the other, therefore, we come to recognize the ways in which our own religious ideologies and practices are the results of choices, the products of our ancestors’ and our own choosing of one path among a range of possible approaches to constructing a meaningful reality. Recognizing that one religion made one choice and ours took a different path is the beginning of the critical evaluation of our faith. This evaluation must begin in the recognition that our faith is not a simple given and did not have to develop exactly as it did. All religions are, rather, the products of human choices, made in response to the social, intellectual, and political environments in which people live from age to age. Our ability to see that is heightened by our study of diverse religions, a study that highlights the range of paths that have worked and continue to work for the peoples around us.

The following treatment of tradition in Judaism means to do more than provide some information about what Jews do and believe. The point, rather, is to facilitate reflection on and to deepen understanding of many different traditions. Surely your own community has needed to apply its core theology in a variety of different and perhaps radically changing historical circumstances. How has it done that? How has it discerned legitimate from inappropriate change? How has it maintained a sense of continuity with the past even as it has proposed beliefs and practices that respond to the needs of the present? Judaism has survived over thousands of years in radically disparate historical settings. It therefore provides a striking example of how such questions might be answered. These comments about Judaism are intended to raise your consciousness to the evolving history of your own religion and to that religion’s potential theological and spiritual evolution.

the nature of a traditional religion

The term tradition signifies the theological and ritual content of a religion: the beliefs, doctrines, cultural values, moral standards, and especially the particular behaviors through which individuals and communities express their commitment to an inherited way of life. By tradition, we may refer to everything from theological and ethical premises, to language, modes of dress, and choices of cuisine. Most important is that, insofar as these elements of communal life are transmitted from generation to generation, the term tradition signifies not only the content of a religious culture but also the process through which that culture is passed down from age to age. The designation of religious beliefs and practices as tradition implies that religious culture preserves a past way of life, transmitting that inherited worldview and set of social and cultural norms from antiquity to contemporary times (see Yagod 1972, col. 1308; on this topic in general, see Avery-Peck 2000, 1458–1465).

True to this definition, Judaism associates the term tradition with its concept of Torah. The word
Torah, which might be translated “divine instruction” or “revelation,” refers in Judaism to the code of law and practice that Jews understand God to have revealed to Moses at Mt. Sinai, as described in the biblical book of Exodus. Moses ascended Mt. Sinai, met face to face with God, and was instructed regarding all aspects of the proper belief and the correct lifestyle that would comprise the religious civilization that came to be known as Judaism. As the Bible’s own mandate required and as later forms of Judaism insist, this revelation subsequently was transmitted—whether in writing, by word of mouth, or through example—from generation to generation. The sources of Judaism from antiquity and to modern times accordingly describe Judaism as a “traditional” religion. These sources comprehend the rituals, lifestyles, and theological underpinnings of Judaism to conform to a transmitted system of law and practice.

And yet it is here that a critical evaluation of the content of Judaism must be introduced. At stake is the question of what it actually means to assert that a religion such as Judaism is “traditional.” How can a religion that has so evidently evolved be called a tradition at all? The concept of religion as tradition sees the religious individual always as standing “in a long process of thought, with the sole task of refining and defending received truth” (Neusner 2003, 1920). This concept of religion and tradition would understand all Jewish thought and practice from Sinai and to the present to be nothing more than an articulation of the content of God’s original revelation. And yet, as is clear even to casual observers, Judaism, whether in antiquity or in its contemporary manifestations, is hardly a simple reiteration of the religious thought and social practices introduced in Scripture. It is, rather, a product of the evolving thought and shifting structures of ritual through which Jews have responded to the problems, issues, and questions of each particular age. That, of course, is the opposite of what a strict concept of tradition demands.

To speak meaningfully of tradition in the context of Judaism, we must delve below the obvious fact of Judaism’s focus on the concept of Torah. At issue is how we explain the manner in which, in Judaism, inherited practices or ideas actually have been used within successive historical periods. How have the details of tradition been manipulated to create a sense of continuity, and hence of authenticity, within the diverse settings in which they have been placed? How has a sense of traditionality survived within what are creative and often independent systems of Judaic belief and practice?

An examination of one of the central shifts in Judaism—the shift from the beliefs and practices described in the Hebrew scriptures to the postbiblical, Rabbinic religion that has defined Judaism from the first centuries CE into our own day—will help us answer that question. The larger point of this historical survey is to show that our usual idea of religion as tradition is not useful in helping us understand the historical experiences of the Jews. We see that we can neither speak of a single monolithic religion, Judaism, nor attempt to characterize Judaism overall either as traditional or not traditional. Judaism has survived and survives because of its adherents’ willingness over the years to respond to the diverse circumstances in which they have found themselves. They have done this sometimes by foregoing the inherited system within which ancient traditions made sense, by forsaking the demands of tradition altogether. But in other circumstances, they have found strength by focusing intently upon inherited patterns of thought and behavior, that is, by being traditional. Traditionality is not a fixed component of Judaism but one potential response to the changing historical circumstances in which Jews over the ages have found themselves. Fully to comprehend this idea and to understand the ways in which tradition has functioned, or failed to function, in Judaism, we begin at the beginning of the story, with the biblical system and its distinctive perspective on and attitude toward tradition.

the biblical system

Scripture’s story of Egyptian bondage, the Exodus from Egypt, and the events of Sinai is at the heart of the biblical system. It is an appropriate place to start because the Exodus theme is mentioned in Scripture approximately 120 times, more than any other historical event or theological concept. While Scripture clearly encompasses other—even contrary—ideas, this is incontestable evidence of the Exodus’s centrality in the religion
of Israel. Most important for our purposes is the extent to which, in Scripture, the victory over Egypt established God's sole and absolute power over history. As a result, history was to be recognized in general as an arena of divine activity. What people experienced was a sign of the divine will, and so was endowed with theological meaning. Ancillary to this point is that the Exodus narrative, with its miracle working God, sets out the idea that, “knowledge of God's qualities and of his demands on Israel can be acquired only insofar as God takes the initiative in revealing them” (Sarna 1992, 698–99). What God wants us to know about him, God tells or shows us directly.

By focusing on these points, Scripture established what unequivocally was to become a traditional religion. In that religion, all personal and communal practices replicated that which was passed on from generation to generation, authenticated by their ultimate source in the divine. In the biblical picture, knowledge of and faith in God did not result from theological or philosophical speculation, and this means that humans were not empowered either to discover new aspects of the reality of God or to create new modes of serving God. Rather, knowledge of God and the proper modes of worshipping God and living in the community created by God were revealed in full at Sinai. All future religious activity was to demarcate the religious individual as standing always “in a long process of thought, with the sole task of refining and defending received truth” (Neusner 2003, 1920).

It bears noting here that even as Scripture established a religion insisting on the exacting maintenance of tradition, it did not itself emerge out of a commensurate commitment to tradition at all. Scripture's authors and editors, of course, preserved a host of inherited practices. But they legitimated those antecedent norms by placing them in a new theological context, in an explanatory framework distinctive to their own view of the world and their own societal needs. Thus the old agriculture holidays, for instance, were given totally new explanations, situated now within a theology that focused not on the “rhythm of nature and the life of the soil” (Sarna) but on the path of redemption that led from Egypt, to Sinai, to the Promised Land. Scripture, rather than a reflection on and affirmation of the past spoke to a present age in a new and distinctive voice, creating a system that centuries after the Exodus explained who its readers were as Israelites, how they got to where they were, and what they could expect should they adhere to the laws set out in their holy book.

What is important as we turn to the Rabbinic period accordingly is not simply whether or not the Rabbis continued to insist upon Jews' adherence to biblical law. This, without doubt, they did. At issue, rather, is how they understood this law, how they imagined the law was to be determined, their perception of the source of its hold upon the people, and their definition of its purpose within the life of the community. If these perceptions remained the same as in Scripture, we can argue that we are dealing with a traditional religion. But if they did not, then, no matter what traditional actions or rituals were retained, the evolved religious system as a whole cannot be deemed traditional. When we move forward from the Scriptural period to that of the Rabbis of the first centuries CE, we see in fact that, even as the Rabbis maintained the practices of biblical Judaism, they, like Scripture's authors before them, placed those traditions within a newly imagined systemic structure, a structure quite foreign to anything that had existed previously.

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the Rabbinic period

Scripture encouraged the Jews' adherence to the traditions of their nation by insisting that following the words of Torah would assure national sovereignty and security. The problem was that the Israelites' actual experiences in history did not conform to what the biblical authors
had promised. The united monarchy created under David was short lived, and the separate northern kingdom that emerged at the end of David's son Solomon's reign soon had succumbed to Assyrian domination. In 586 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia conquered the remaining southern kingdom and destroyed Solomon's Temple, the enduring symbol of God's presence within the nation. Surely, the ensuing exile of the Jews, understood as God's punishment for the nation's sinfulness, was followed some fifty years later by permission to return and the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple under the Persian leader Cyrus. These paired events of exile and return undeniably supported the biblical view of God's power in history and of the inextricable relationship between apostasy and punishment, atonement and reward. But the roughly five hundred-year period between the rebuilding of the Temple under Cyrus and the destruction of this Temple in the course of a Jewish revolt against Rome in 66–73 CE, made it increasingly difficult for Jews to accept without modification the inherited biblical theory. The physical dispersion of the Jewish nation and the people's governance, whether in the Promised Land or elsewhere, by foreign rulers meant that Scripture's explanation of the need to follow inherited practices ceased to make sense. The emergence in this period of diverse Judaisms—new worldviews and ways of life that competed for individual Jew's loyalty—was natural in a period when the inherited system increasingly explained the circumstances of the dispersed Jewish nation.

But it was primarily the Second Temple period's end point, the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in the war with Rome in 70 CE, followed in 133–135 CE by a failed revolt under a Jewish messianic general called Bar Kokhba, that made it clear that diaspora, foreign domination, and the growing irrelevance of the Temple-cult would become permanent aspects of the Jewish condition. The beginning of the Second Temple period had taught Jews to live as Jews far from their national homeland. The end of this period made firm the message to which many had begun to respond even while the Temple stood: Jews now would need to worship God and practice Judaism without the priestly service and with no expectation of an immediate return of Israelite sovereignty over the land of Israel—no more prophecy, no more miracles, no more God-driven military victories.

These facts, not surprisingly, stand at the foundation of the new and central form of Judaism of this period. Rabbinic Judaism arises at the end of the Second Temple period and, in the subsequent five hundred years, becomes the dominant mode of Judaism practiced by all Jews. This Judaism faced squarely the challenge presented by the reality of Jewish existence in the post-biblical period, a reality depicted forcefully by those events of the first centuries CE that led Jews to evaluate carefully who they were and what they believed. To summarize:

1. Rabbinic Judaism was conceived in the period following the war with Rome that, in the first century, led to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple.

2. The Rabbinic program for Judaism was shaped in the immediate aftermath of the devastating Bar Kokhba Revolt of the second century, which left as many as half a million Jews dead and which resulted in Jerusalem's being turned into a Roman colony, with a Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus erected on the Temple Mount.

3. Rabbinic Judaism achieved its classical formulation and gained control over the Jewish nation as a whole in the fourth through sixth centuries, the period of the firm establishment of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman world.

The destruction of the Temple, the failed Bar Kokhba revolt, and the ascent of Christianity potentially meant the end of the Jews' perception of their destiny as a great and holy nation—the chosen people. The Temple's destruction meant that, as in the period of the Babylonian exile, the cult ceased operation. But this time, the failure of the Bar Kokhba revolt meant that any expectation of the rebuilding of the Temple or of the return to the way things had been was unrealistic. And the success of Christianity, which claimed to embody a new covenant, meant that even the notions of Israel's chosenness and unique relationship to God were subject to significant challenge.
In these ways, both the political and theological contexts in which Judaism's inherited practices had made sense were altered dramatically. The Temple, for the Jews the visible sign of God's presence and dominion, was gone. The cult, through which the people had acknowledged God's lordship and appealed to his mercies, had ceased. The land of Israel was now under foreign rule, with little hope for its return to Jewish sovereignty. As a result of these events, the nation lost the symbols of its power, the sign of its place within the family of nations, and the physical representation of its stature before God. Clearly, in the face of such historical developments, people had good reason to question their continuing covenantal relationship with the one who had created the world and who controlled all history.

While little evidence survives to describe how the Jewish people as a whole responded to this question, it is clear that the nation faced contradictory needs. On the one hand, the tradition would hold. The memory of the Temple and nationhood could not easily be erased. Any new direction would need to reflect the inherited attitudes, practices, and institutions that represented the heart of biblical religion. On the other hand, now the tradition would seem somehow deficient. The devastating wars caused by the belief that God would fight on behalf of his people meant that new theologies and new leaderships that followed quite different paths were most likely to succeed (Freyne 1980, 122–123; Avery-Peck 1992(a), 409–431). In the context of our discussion of the meaning and power of tradition, this point is central, for it suggests the extent to which a new historical reality demanded a new formulation of Judaic belief and practice. We do not fully comprehend Judaism if we reflect only upon the traditions and rituals Rabbinic masters insisted the people continue to follow. At issue, rather, are the reasons for and purposes of those practices within a newly created Rabbinic system.

Rabbinic Judaism succeeded not because of its continuity with the past but because it completely refocused biblical ideology, creating a mode of Judaic identity and practice appropriate to the distinctive circumstances of its own age. Like the biblical religion it replaced, Rabbinic Judaism, is not really a traditional religion at all. Rather than focusing on and working to preserve what is historically authentic, it presents a new systemic context for the conduct of Jewish life. Let us look at the details of how this was accomplished.

### the Rabbinic program

In line with the contradictory needs of an evolving Judaism, under Rabbinic leadership Judaism continued to be shaped by the model of the Temple-cult. Jews fervently prayed for the rebuilding of the Temple, the reestablishment of animal sacrifice, and renewed Israelite sovereignty, to be achieved, as the Bible had promised, through God's personal intervention in history. But in the Rabbis' day, these occurrences seemed increasingly distant and unlikely. And so the return to the way things had been was no longer viewed, as in Scripture, as an expectation of our history but, instead, was depicted increasingly as a signifier of the advent of a messianic age. These were events that would occur only at the end of time and that, contrary to what the biblical thinking had suggested, could not be instigated by the Israelites' own actions, for instance, through a military rebellion such as had taken place under Bar Kokhba. The people, even as they prayed for Israelite sovereignty and the rebuilding of the Temple, thus were to imagine these events as part of the culmination of history, quite distinct from the reality of their everyday life and not immediately affected by their fulfillment of quotidian religious and communal obligations.

This means that Rabbinic ideology entirely refocused the people's concerns and rethought the purposes of their traditional practices. Judaic life no longer focused on the events of political history, which are, after all, far beyond the jurisdiction of the individual. People came to be
concerned only with events within the life and control of each person and family. What came to matter were the everyday details of life, the recurring actions that, day-in and day-out, define who we are and demarcate what is truly important to us. How do we relate to family and community? By what ethic do we carry out our business dealings? How do we acknowledge our debt to God not only or primarily for the events of past history or the awaited future but for the food we eat and for the wonders of the universe evidenced in the daily rising and setting of the sun?

In this way, the Rabbis created what would in fact be a religion of traditions. This Judaism demanded that each Jew authentically maintain the communal practices and norms handed on from the past, through the long years of diaspora life, remaining true to the original revelation at Sinai. And yet, in order to accomplish this, the Rabbis also completely reworked the ideology that stood behind Scripture's insistence on observance of Torah. No more were the people to see an immediate relationship between conformity to tradition and God's saving of the people. The point and purpose of Torah-tradition was to create a social and ethical environment in which the people would prepare for the salvation that would come at some future time, in some undisclosed manner, God's methods and ways—contrary to the central theme of the Bible—being inscrutable.

This shift, in turn, entailed the invention of many practices that stand today at the heart of all so-called traditional modes of Judaism. The people, as Scripture had indicated, were to live as a nation of priests. With the demise of the Temple-cult, this came to mean that common people, non-priests, would eat their food as though it were a sacrifice on the Temple's altar and would see in their personal daily prayers and in their shared deeds of loving kindness a replacement for the sacrifices no longer offered. So the detailed Jewish traditions of ritual cleanliness, along with a host of synagogue and home rituals, while associated with practices found in Scripture, derive from the post-biblical world in which these customs helped create the close-knit community that Scripture, for its part, imagined as emerging from a monarchical governance and priestly leadership. The Rabbis thus sowed the seeds of a Judaism that, in the following 1500 years, would be increasingly steeped in and dedicated to the preservation of tradition. But they did not accomplish this simply or primarily by focusing on and preserving the traditions they had inherited. They did it by systematically rethinking the content and nature of Judaism. They created a religion of traditions. But, from the perspective of Scripture, theirs was not a traditional religion.

sources of knowledge in Rabbinic Judaism

This point is made clear when we examine the theologies through which the Rabbis legitimated the dramatic changes they made in biblical ideology. How, we ask, did they claim to articulate an authentic vision of God's will even as they offered approaches to Judaic thinking and practice foreign to the norms expressed in Scripture? While this is a question that all religious reformers must answer, the issue was particularly pressing for the Rabbis, given inherited Judaism's insistence on the role of God as the sole arbiter of required practice.

The Rabbis, of course, were not the first leaders of innovative movements within Judaism who had to answer this question. But, interestingly, prior Judaic innovators represented, for instance, in the Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphal literatures as well as in the Dead Sea Scrolls, had answered the question in a quite traditional manner. They had taken up Scripture's own language and literary styles, indeed used the names of those to whom, in Scripture, God had spoken directly. In this way, they claimed to speak with the authority of the revelation recorded in Scripture. Prior iterations of the biblical system had asserted their legitimacy by claiming to stand in direct succession to, or, more accurately, simply to be a part of, the biblical system.

Rejecting such traditionalism, the Rabbis took a different tack. Expressing their own sense of crafting something new and different, they used new languages—middle-Hebrew and Aramaic—and new literary forms, dialectical discussions of law rather than historical narrative and apodictic commandments. More important, rather than claiming to record God's words, with their obviously authoritative stature, the Rabbis focused on and recorded their own perspectives and legal opinions, in their own names. Just as, in its

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theology, Rabbinic Judaism stands outside the context of prior Israelite tradition, so the Rabbis' literary forms express the extent to which they were doing something new and independent. The dramatic nature of this shift is clear when we examine a passage of the Babylonian Talmud, the document that, by the sixth century CE formalized the Rabbinic program. Even before we begin our discussion, several points deserve attention.

First, in this passage, the Rabbis argue about a familiar issue from Scripture's priestly code, concerning the susceptibility to ritual uncleanness of a certain kind of oven. While the details of the issue need not detain us, we should remain conscious of the fact that such uncleanness once mattered only in the setting of Temple ritual. Yet the discussion before us takes place some sixty years after the Temple's destruction and the cessation of the cult.

Second, in ancient Judaism, the Temple-priests were the authorities on Judaic law and the arbiters of all issues of ritual practice. But in the passage before us, Rabbis—non-priests—assert their right to debate and establish cultic law.

Third, by the second century CE when this discussion takes place, there had been over one thousand years of Temple history, during which rules of ritual cleanness would have been established and known to the priests. But the Rabbis before us debate the issue without reference to any inherited norms and with no interest in turning to priests or anyone else who might, through tradition, know the answer to their question. So even as the Rabbis claim to articulate a divinely sanctioned law, they clearly are working entirely outside the scope of inherited norms of tradition. The Rabbinic radicalism is even more apparent as we turn to the specific content of our passage (Babylonian Talmud Baba Mesia 59b):

A. On that day [in the context of the debate over the susceptibility to uncleanness of a certain type of oven], R. Eliezer brought forward all of the arguments in the world, but they [that is, the other Rabbis] did not accept them from him.
B. Said he to them, “If the law agrees with me, let this carob-tree prove it!” The carob-tree was torn a hundred cubits out of its place.
C. They said to him, “No proof can be brought from a carob-tree.”
D. He said to them, “If the law agrees with me, let the stream of water prove it!” The stream of water flowed backward.
E. Again they said to him, “No proof can be brought from a stream of water.”
F. Again he said to them, “If the law agrees with me, let the walls of this house of study prove it!” The walls tilted, about to fall.
G. R. Joshua rebuked the walls, saying, “When disciples of sages are engaged in a legal dispute, what role do you walls play?”
H. Hence, they did not fall, in honor of R. Joshua; but nor did they resume the upright, in honor of R. Eliezer.
I. Again [Eliezer] said to them, “If the law agrees with me let it be proved from heaven!” An echo came forth [from heaven] and said, “Why do you dispute with R. Eliezer? For in all matters, the law agrees with him!”
J. But R. Joshua arose and exclaimed [citing Deuteronomy 30:12], “It [the law] is not in heaven!”
K. [Later] R. Nathan met Elijah [the prophet] and asked him, “What did the holy one, blessed be he, do at that time?”
L. [Elijah] replied, “He laughed, saying, ‘My sons have defeated me! My sons have defeated me!’”

The Hebrew Bible, we recall, asserts that God's demands on Israel are known only because God takes the initiative in revealing them. Strikingly, the Rabbis here reject this concept, denying that overt revelatory acts of God, illustrated in this text by God's attempt to intervene in the activities of the study house, have any place at all in establishing tradition. Instead, this story asserts, the law is determined only by a vote of the majority of sages, who establish proper conduct based upon their wisdom and knowledge. In making their decisions, they are to give no heed to supernatural interference. Human beings, not God, thus have the capacity to determine the content of Torah. More important in exercising this capacity,
the sages even bind God to their decision. They, and not God, are the ultimate arbiters of what Judaism demands.

At issue is the nature of the “defeat” about which God in the end will laugh. Surely, God chuckles over the unexpected result of his own success as a parent. God has created and nurtured children, imbuing them with such a sense of responsibility and intellectual cunning that they insist on living in a world of their own making. In their original setting in the book of Deuteronomy, God’s words, “It is not in heaven,” mean only that people cannot deny that they know the law and are able to follow it. Now these words come back to haunt God. If the Torah is on earth and not in heaven, if it is in the people’s mouth and heart, then God may interfere no longer in its interpretation. The law is among the sages. They are empowered to engage in reasoned debate and then to vote. They thereby take over the role of God in revealing Torah.

But there is an even more significant way in which God’s children have defeated him, a way that also has direct implications for our comprehension of tradition in Judaism. This is in the fact that God, as much as the people, is bound by the rules of Torah. God, just like the people, must accept and follow the logically decided view of the sages on earth. That which they deem holy and right becomes, in a cosmic sense, even in God’s mind, holy and right. The human mind and intellect come to determine the content of God’s mind and intellect. Human beings define the ultimate reality in the world and hence shape the content and substance of Judaism.

The Rabbis legitimated their authority to speak in the name of God by reconceptualizing the very concept of revelation. They understood that, at Sinai, God had revealed to Moses more than the material that came to be included in the written Scripture, the content of which had been transmitted in writing and made accessible to all of the people of Israel. In addition to this, the Rabbis asserted, God had revealed to Moses a second corpus of law, a body of knowledge that was formulated for memorization and transmitted orally by successive generations of sages, from God to Moses, to Joshua, to “elders,” to the biblical prophets, and so on, ultimately into the hands of the Rabbis themselves (Mishnah Abot 1:1ff.).

In the Rabbincic theory, the Written and Oral Torahs are part of a single, uniform revelation and are, accordingly, of equal authority and importance. This means that when a second-century, fifth-century, or even a contemporary rabbi responds to a question from his own day, his, or in our times, her, judgment does not comprise simply an analysis—an interpretation—of the Written Torah found in Scripture. Rather, though expressed in his own words and responding to a question or issue raised in his own time, it is part and parcel of the divine revelation of Torah to Moses at Sinai. The rabbi’s thinking in every respect has the same authority as the written revelation contained in Scripture. This means that, in the hands of the Rabbis, traditions of practice are not only transmitted but also created and legitimated as sanctioned by, even demanded by, God.

The point of this observation must be clearly stated. It is not that extra-biblical traditions regarding ritual practice and the meaning of Scripture did not exist in pre-Rabbinic antiquity. Certainly the communal and religious life of the Jews depended upon traditions of how specific biblical precepts would be followed. So the point is not that, prior to the Rabbis, Jews did not transmit extra-biblical “traditions” from age to age. It is, rather, that the Rabbis did not simply take up and preserve those traditions, as would be anticipated in the case of any traditional religion. Nor did they try to legitimate what they consciously made up as part of the inherited set of norms. Rather, the Rabbis developed an entirely new and, from the perspective of Scripture, unanticipated stance toward the very nature of revelation and the legitimating of tradition (Avery-Peck 1992(b), 34–37).

The biblical system, we recall, cherishes God’s brilliant acts in history, the signs and miracles that show the people God’s power and dictate God’s will. Living in a period in which such signs are elu-

Central to Rabbincic faith is the individual’s coming to find God through contact with the compelling divine word, through knowledge of and adherence to the Torah revealed through acts of human intellectuation and debate.
sive and in which historical circumstances no longer seem to reflect God’s will, the Rabbis rejected the old approach, not simply as obviously flawed but as an inappropriate path to piety.

The Rabbis rejected the coercion implicit in a theology that understands God to force belief and conformity to his will through displays of power. Central to Rabbinic faith, instead, is the individual’s coming to find God through contact with the compelling divine word, through knowledge of and adherence to the Torah revealed through acts of human intellectualizing and debate. In an odd way, exactly by placing the power to define tradition in human hands, the Rabbis made the powerful point that, despite the way the events of history made things seem, God still exists, still rules over the people, and still can be depended upon to bring redemption. It is only for these reasons that Torah still matters at all, still must be explicated, still must be followed. But in the Rabbinic system, the God who had been understood to make and destroy nations is pictured instead as responding to everyday Jews who engage in the study of, and therefore the creation of, revelation. In essence, Rabbinic Judaism makes possible life in the variety of cultural, social, economic, and political contexts in which Jews have lived for the past two thousand years by saying that, at heart, the Jews themselves have the power not simply to interpret but to reveal God’s will. The invisible God is present in the mind and intellect of each Jew. And in following the practices they themselves uncover, they assure continuity with traditions of Judaism going back to Sinai.

**the concept of tradition in the evolution of Rabbinic Judaism**

Notably, it is exactly this systemically distinctive and theologically innovative program for Judaism that created the Jewish culture that would survive in the diasporic circumstances of the subsequent 1500 years. The Rabbinic system facilitated this survival through two related processes. On the one hand, the Rabbinic conception of revelation meant that Rabbinic leaders could initiate and legitimate the practical changes that would allow Jews over time to accommodate to the varied cultures in which they lived (Marcus 2004). At the same time, the Rabbinic system’s establishment of a Judaism based more in law and practice than in theological debate meant the creation of an exceedingly distinctive Judaic culture. Under Rabbinic leadership, Jews became increasingly dedicated to the preservation of traditional communal norms. Distinctive diet, dress, language, and a host of cultural and ritual behaviors represented to Jews both their adherence to the divine will and their differences from the outside, non-Jewish world, a world that, in all events, for much of pre-modern history, had little tolerance for them.

Indeed, within the setting of Rabbinic Judaism, the very concept of tradition took on a meaning that, in Scripture, it could not have. This was the idea that a practice could become authoritative not because it was demanded directly by God but because of its having been legitimated through its acceptance by the community. “Tradition”—in the sense of a required practice of Judaism—came to encompass both that which derives directly from Torah and from customs, folkways, and other practices that were created and accepted as mandatory by the people. Rabbinic Judaism, while increasingly a religion of tradition, thus remained pliable and susceptible to developments and adaptations that would allow it to shape and be shaped by the real life circumstances of its adherents.

For those who see as central to a structured religious community the consistent application of a unitary and unchanging divine law, this attitude of Judaism certainly appears odd. Along with sanctioning sometimes dramatic changes in practice, it establishes a system in which diverse communities can develop quite distinctive ritual and cultural norms, each arguing on the basis of Rabbinic law the validity of its own particular approach. What then demarcates authentic statements of Jewish belief and practice, and what legitimates one direction of development while precluding as inauthentic a different one?

There are two answers to this question. The uninteresting answer is that during the medieval period, the relative openness of Judaism to diverse rituals and practices threatened a communal crisis. As the centers of Jewish life spread throughout Europe, local customs became more and more divergent, portending the danger of schism. This problem led to the emergence among the Rabbinic class of a critical program of
tracing the origins and reasons for individual customs and, on this basis, establishing some uniformity of practice (Greenstone, 397; Avery-Peck 2000, 1464–1465). While hardly eradicating the differences between local customs of nearby communities, let alone communities around the world, this codification established a method of evaluating specific practices so as to determine what was and was not acceptable.3

But there is a more interesting, and I think more accurate, answer to the question of what establishes legitimate thought and practice within Rabbinic Judaism. This answer emerges from the recognition that, at its foundation, the Rabbinic conception of revelation itself takes into account the potential for divergent interpretations and practices and so tolerates the existence of diametrically opposed views claiming to represent the divine will. Thus the Talmud comprehends the differing legal perspectives of disputing authorities all as representing “the words of the living God,” and it even imagines, in one example, that Rabbis who engaged in a bitter dispute over the nature of the dietary requirement in all events ate at each other’s table. Be this as it may, what seems beyond dispute is that the very circumstance of Jewish communities from Talmudic times and on, living as minorities among other religions and lacking a central structure of authority, would both lend itself to and be strengthened by the diversity of approaches and the acceptance of differences and change that the Rabbinic system promoted.

At stake within Rabbinism was not so much the specifics of practice but the fact that individuals accepted the larger structure of the system for determining law. Living under and accepting what has been termed the “yoke of the law” meant much more than the specifics of how a community defined that law. Based on the Rabbinic theory that revelation is a product of human debate and discovery, that different Rabbis and communities reached different answers on important questions of practice and theology was for the most part not seen as a threat to Jewish unity. Rather, sometimes dramatic differences in responses even to important issues were an important aspect of the survival of a people that was, despite these divergences, united by a single, fundamental shared value: dedication to the ideal of Torah and to the role of the human intellect in advancing an ongoing chain of study from the time of Scripture to the present.

**Tradition, traditionalism, and modernity**

In the end, the best way to convey this point is to illustrate the distinction between forms of Judaism that are traditional—focusing on past theologies—versus those that are systemic and non-traditional—developing innovative and internally cogent ways of thinking about the tradition in response to contemporary needs. Oddly, the former, traditional, approach is exemplified when we look at some of the most radical manifestations of Orthodox Judaism today. In the SoHo area of Manhattan, for example, now exists an orthodox place of worship referred to by those who designed it as a “boutique synagogue.” Its goal is to bring a contemporary singles-club style to classical Jewish practice. “You might have to RSVP. There might be a roped line. It will totally be a scene. But it’s all Kosher,” Rabbi Dovi Scheiner, its orthodox founder, is quoted as explaining (Liebman 2005, 17). As dramatically as Rabbi Scheiner's institution diverges from the expected character of a synagogue, its proponents have no desire to challenge the inherited tradition or the specifics of traditional practice. There is here no rethinking or reevaluation of inherited theologies, only a focus upon and an attempt to maintain the inherited traditions within the community of today.

An even more radical example is the recent emergence of orthodox prayer groups that require the separation of the sexes—a prime signifier of Orthodox traditionalism—but that allow women to act as prayer leaders for certain parts of the worship service—something heretofore unheard of within Orthodoxy (Sege 2005, C1, C8).
Striking is that this practice has emerged exactly among the groups of young Jews most dedicated to the preservation of the system of Rabbinic legislation. Their approach, that is to say, is limited to and legitimated by what contemporary Rabbinic authorities find to be acceptable under Torah-law. We find dramatic changes in ritual practice emerging as a clear response to the cultural norms of the contemporary West. At the same time and most important within Orthodoxy, these shifts in practice are overlaid on the retention of the theory of revelation, the preservation of the concept of Rabbinic authority, and the strict adherence to trajectories of practice allowable within the structure of the inherited tradition. These may, therefore, be deemed traditional modes of Judaism.

But as with the emergence of Rabbinism two thousand years ago, there are alternatives. The fact that, alongside the preservation of traditionalism, modernity has engendered a dramatically contrary response clarifies my larger point. Rabbinism's rejection of the traditionalism of its age occurred in a period when large segments of the Jewish community had good reason to find the inherited Israelite faith unworkable. Similarly, dramatically changed social, political, and economic circumstances in the late eighteenth century and beyond made Rabbinic Judaism unsuitable to the goals and worldviews of vast numbers of Jews in the nascent modern period. These Jews no longer saw themselves as different from the peoples around them and could not find meaning in a religious system that demarcated them as different. Jews who wished to participate fully in the non-Jewish cultures suddenly welcoming them could not accept the received tradition's claims about the character of revelation, the nature of the relationship between the people of Israel and God, and about the ultimate disposition of history. Even where these Jews continued to follow some practices of traditional Judaism, their reasons for selecting the retained practices marked them as outside of the traditional religion. Within early Reform, a practice's legitimacy was decided not by its place within Rabbinic ideology but by whether or not the modern mind found the practice edifying. This central hallmark of Reform yielded a Judaism that is systemically distinctive, designed to solve the theological and cultural problems of a new period in the life of the Jewish people without regard for inherited religious ideologies.

Rabbi Alfred Gottschalk, Chancellor Emeritus of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, the seminary that ordains Reform Rabbis, states simply what he believes determines authentic Jewish practice (Gottschalk 2000, 236): “[A] Jewish religious experience or practice is authentic by virtue of its ‘living center’ and because of the fact that it expressed itself in accord with the genuine need of the time.” Judaism, in this view, is the religion Jews create to meet their contemporary needs, not to conform to ancient ones. Recognizing the distance between this view and the traditional Rabbinic one, Gottschalk continues:

Orthodox Judaism rejects this or any similar view. It asserts that these [contemporary] expressions of Judaism are not genuine, that somehow they are merely “copies” of the environment, issues merely of time and place, and not in consonance with the vast matrix of Torah handed down from Moses and Sinai... (236)

But it is exactly the view that Gottschalk challenges and rejects, which upholds the immutability of two thousand years of Rabbinic Torah-teaching, that has, since the first centuries, defined Rabbinic Judaism as a traditional religion, however innovative that Judaism was in its own period of formation.

The point for us is not to judge who is correct, the Orthodox or the Reform, in their setting out of visions for contemporary Judaism. The point, rather, is to recognize that traditionalism cannot be defined simply by the practices a community of Jews chooses to follow or reject. At stake, rather, are the modes of thought and theological contexts within which individual rituals or encompassing sets of communal practices are given meaning and importance. The issue is not just what a religious community does but why its members do it—the system of thinking within which behavior has meaning and makes sense. Jews, we have seen, have had the capacity over long periods of time to adhere to monolithic and relatively unchanging systems of practice and belief. Perhaps more
interesting is that, in periods of dramatic social, political, economic, and intellectual change, they have shown an equal capacity for creating systematically new and innovative approaches to comprehending their relationship not just with their traditions but with God. It is as much this capacity for systemic change as the dedication of generations of Jews to an unchanging set of traditions and beliefs that has vouchsafed Judaism's survival from antiquity to today.

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Notes

1. Referring to Exodus 20:5-6 and 34:6-7, where God describes himself as compassionate and gracious, yet visiting the sins of the parents on the children, Sarna puts things as follows: "These descriptions are presented as God's self-revelation, not as the product of speculation or experience. The same idea that, to know God, man must depend on God's self-disclosure is implicit in Moses' request, 'Let me know your ways' (Exodus 33:13), and it is inherent in the obligations of the covenant set forth in the Decalogue, which is portrayed as being the content of a great national theophany. It governs Israel's understanding of the law. All the legislative complexes of the Pentateuch are formulated as a series of divine commands to Israel, albeit mediated by Moses."

2. This issue was phrased succinctly and emotionally shortly after the destruction of the Second Temple. The author of IV Ezra asked (3:32-34, 6:59): "Have the deeds of Babylon been better than those of Zion? Has any other nation known You besides Zion?... If the world has indeed been created for our sakes, why do we not enter into possession of our world? How long shall this endure?"

IV Ezra's question directly challenges inherited biblical beliefs about the way in which God carries out his will through the control of history. The Jews had known God and followed the path of Torah, and yet they had been dispossessed by nations who had not known God at all. How could this be?

3. Note the significant difference between this approach and that suggested by Scripture. At Exodus 18:13-27, when Moses sets up of a system of judges, he explicitly tells the appointed leaders that they may pass judgment only in cases in which the rule to be followed already has been explicitly stated. These judges have no independent legislative or even broadly interpretative function. To deal with any new circumstance, they must come to Moses, who presumably will inquire directly of God regarding the law. In general, when confronted with legal issues, e.g., in the case of the daughters of Zalaphhehad, Moses brings the question to God. The Rabbis, by contrast, comprehend the product of their own thinking to be coincident with what is in God's mind.

Bibliography


LIKE YOUR VOICE ON A LONG-DISTANCE CALL

Like when stuffing slips from a cushion that's grown threadbare
my grandmother's soul found a frayed edge that permitted passage orientation shifting from one life to another

Like a radio tuned to a different frequency or a dog's floppy ear twitching with sounds beyond our range her mouth fell open eyes brightening comprehending something we didn’t

Like a pathway in her mind for her soul to return upon my grandfather opened the hymnal of their lives pouring tea & snatches of song for her tongue to trace back as steam rose & disappeared somewhere near the ceiling

Like your voice on a long-distance call or a child crying out in a dream my grandmother's soul went walking some distant shore past present or what was then yet to come

D. S. Martin
faithfulness to tradition  
a Roman Catholic perspective

John E. Thiel

For moderns, the question of what it means to be faithful to a religious tradition is a good example of question-begging. Answering the question of faithfulness presupposes that one knows what the tradition is to which one might be faithful. But in modernity, in the West at least and perhaps even globally by now, religious traditions have become precarious things, contested spaces where the issue of faithfulness has been subsumed by the ambiguity of traditions themselves. The traditional notion of tradition itself has become questionable in light of our heightened awareness of the historicity of traditions and their often surprising pluralism. Historical investigation of religious traditions through time and culture reveals the remarkable changes they have undergone in belief, doctrine, and practice, the living constituents of a tradition. This same historical sensibility grasps easily the synchronic implications of this diachronic fact. Any religious tradition broadly construed by a singular name is, in any present moment, actually a remarkable variety of smaller communities that possess clearly distinguishable beliefs and practices, however much they might share a family resemblance. For those intellectually aware of the problem that historicity poses for tradition, and for many more who emotionally feel its effects, being faithful to a religious tradition has become as difficult as saying what that same religious tradition is.

My own Roman Catholic Christian tradition is a very good example of this twin problem of identifying and being faithful to tradition. One could argue for several reasons that it is the very best example of this problem. The Catholic tradition faced a powerful assault from the great Protestant Reformers in the early modern period. That attack, promulgated in the name of Christian truth, produced a rich history of Catholic reflection on what tradition is and how its authority functions in the life of the religious community. Furthermore, the Roman Catholic tradition has adjudicated the modern problem of traditional identity by managing to hold together many styles of Roman Catholic belief and practice. These styles of faith and practice have not formally splintered into separate congregations, each with its own understanding of traditional identity, as has modern Judaism. Because Catholic Christianity has had to defend its claims for tradition against these vibrant criticisms and places such a high premium on unity, it is a confession in which the problem of tradition and traditional faithfulness is especially highlighted.

This essay will begin by considering the classical understanding of Catholic tradition and proceed by presenting the development of a modern Catholic theology of tradition. It will conclude by considering how central the issue of faithfulness is to the identity of tradition itself.

A classical understanding of Catholic tradition

The word “tradition” derives from the Latin “traditio,” which, in verbal form, means “to hand on.” The New Testament Greek word “paradosis” conveys this event of handing on the faith, written testimony of which we find as early as Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians in the middle of the first century: “For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures and that he was buried, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve” (1 Corinthians 15:3–5). In this first mention of tradition in Christian writing, Paul understands the handing on of the faith to be an interpretation of Jewish scriptures, an interpretation that had been passed on to him orally by the earliest believers and that he, in turn, was now shaping into scriptural form in his epistle.
From the time of Paul until the present moment, tradition has been imagined both as a content, the "good news" of salvation, and as a process by which that content is transmitted to the next generation of believers. The content of tradition materialized slowly in sacred persons, sacraments, relics, and places, but especially in the writings accorded a place in the New Testament canon as the inspired word of God. The process of tradition unfolded in the events of believing, practicing, and witnessing.

Both of these notions of tradition—as content and as process—took more determinate shape in the early Christian practice of clarifying the faith in doctrine. Fundamental disagreements among early Christians about the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ were settled by ecumenical councils, meetings of bishops in which a majority vote defined the Church's orthodox faith. These councils expressed their orthodoxy in creeds, and later councils expressed their orthodoxy in teachings or condemnations of positions judged to be contrary to the belief of the Church. Thus, conciliar doctrine presented the content of tradition in normative sentences that had powerful implications for belief and practice as well. While Christianity closed its biblical canon rather early in its history, by the turn of the third century, conciliar teachings contracted canonical closure even more, functioning as a "canon within a canon" that set tighter limits for the faithful interpretation of God's revelation in scripture. Paradoxically though, the process of creating tradition through interpreting the canon supplemented the biblical narrative with language, concepts, and, eventually in later Catholic history, with substantive beliefs that did not appear explicitly in the New Testament (see Tavard 1959). Emerging Catholic sensibilities ascribed authority to this process by claiming that the Holy Spirit inspired the work and teaching of ecumenical councils (Congar 1960, 157–59).

The clarity of the conciliar definition enabled later generations to accord traditional authority to Christian writers whom they judged to represent the orthodoxy of the settled doctrinal tradition. These Christian writers, like Augustine, John Damascene, and Thomas Aquinas, were viewed as possessing a corporate authority, as though they spoke with a single voice on all matters of traditional faith. God was the author of divine revelation in scripture and tradition, and the authorities of the tradition mimicked God's inspired voice in their collective authorship. The Platonic cast of Christian theology assumed that all these authorial voices were unchanging and one, for so was God's truth. Thus, diversity and novelty were seen as the marks of heresy. The rising authority of the bishop of Rome beginning in the late fourth century led to the increasing addition of papal writings to the harmonious chorus of authorities, and the development of the Catholic belief in papal infallibility from the thirteenth century on increased the register of the papal voice in this chorus, even when it spoke in a fallible way, sotto voce.

It was this homogeneous understanding of tradition that the great Reformers of the sixteenth century challenged as human invention, and so as sinful corruption. Whereas medieval Catholic sensibilities saw an inspired unity in a single Holy Writ that comprised both biblical scriptures and ecclesial scriptures whose sacred truth informed every belief and practice, the Reformers distinguished disjunctively between biblical writings and church writings, understanding the former as the inspired gospel and the latter as its betrayal. Expressing this judgment succinctly, Luther's slogan "Sola scriptura" not only advocates the singular authority of the Bible but also decries Catholic claims for the authority of tradition. In the polemical rhetoric of the sixteenth-century debates, both sides identified Catholic claims for the authority of tradition with the authority of the Pope, and for that very reason, the Catholics embraced these claims as true and the Protestants rejected them as false.

In the wake of the Reformation, Catholic belief in the authority of tradition has been shaped by the force of this Protestant attack. In its decree on divine revelation, the Council of Trent (1545–1563) took pains to rebut the Protestant scripture principle. According to the Council Fathers, the "truth and rule" of Christ "are contained in written books and in unwritten traditions which were received by the apostles from the mouth of Christ himself, or else have come down to us, handed on as it were from the apostles themselves at the inspiration of the holy Spirit..." The decree goes on to equate the authority of tradition with the authority of the Old
and New Testaments, insisting that the same “feeling of piety and reverence” accorded to the biblical writings be shown toward “traditions concerning both faith and conduct, as either directly spoken by Christ or dictated by the holy Spirit, which have been preserved in unbroken sequence in the catholic Church” (Tanner 1990, 663).

After Trent, Catholic theologians typically articulated the conciliar heritage by speaking of God’s revelation in “Scripture and Tradition,” a conjunctive formulation that at once reflected the medieval conception of a homogeneous Scriptura sacra, while yet placing in relief the distinctiveness of the authority of tradition. This classical conception of Catholic tradition was re-affirmed and clarified at the Second Vatican Council (1963–1965) in its “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation” (Dei verbum). The Council Fathers rejected an earlier draft of this document that portrayed scripture and tradition as two sources of revelation. This “two sources” conceptualization had appeared in different forms since the time of Trent as an effective way of asserting the power of the magisterium, the collective teaching authority of the Catholic bishops, most visibly expressed in the authority of the Pope. Instead, Vatican II taught that “[s]acred Tradition and sacred Scripture” flow “from the same divine well-spring, [and] come together in some fashion to form one thing...” As much as Vatican II insisted on the mutual co-inherence of scripture and tradition as divine revelation, it refused to acknowledge that tradition is circumscribed by the content of scripture. Tradition, Dei verbum taught, “transmits in its entirety the Word of God.” And yet, the document continues, “the Church does not draw her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone” (Dei verbum, 755, no. 9). The Council affirmed the long-standing Catholic belief in the charismatic power of the magisterium as the sole authentic interpreter of the Word of God, itself testimony to how the process of tradition most visibly and authoritatively unfolds in the life of the Church.

**The new understanding of tradition**

*As the realm of new occasions for appreciating the meaning of God’s revelation, and tradition as the developing encounter between Gods Spirit and the community of faith in history.*

Modernity broke decisively onto the world stage in the eighteenth century in the intellectual, political, and cultural movement of the Enlightenment. The main goal of the Enlightenment’s attack on tradition was to undermine the authority of feudal culture. But to the degree that the authority of feudal culture was bound up with the authority of the Christian churches, Enlightenment thinkers launched a devastating assault on the tradition was re-affirmed and clarified at the Second Vatican Council (1963-1965) in its “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation” (Dei verbum). The Council Fathers rejected an earlier draft of this document that portrayed scripture and tradition as two sources of revelation. This “two sources” conceptualization had appeared in different forms since the time of Trent as an effective way of asserting the power of the magisterium, the collective teaching authority of the Catholic bishops, most visibly expressed in the authority of the Pope. Instead, Vatican II taught that “[s]acred Tradition and sacred Scripture” flow “from the same divine well-spring, [and] come together in some fashion to form one thing...” As much as Vatican II insisted on the mutual co-inherence of scripture and tradition as divine revelation, it refused to acknowledge that tradition is circumscribed by the content of scripture. Tradition, Dei verbum taught, “transmits in its entirety the Word of God.” And yet, the document continues, “the Church does not draw her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone” (Dei verbum, 755, no. 9). The Council affirmed the long-standing Catholic belief in the charismatic power of the magisterium as the sole authentic interpreter of the Word of God, itself testimony to how the process of tradition most visibly and authoritatively unfolds in the life of the Church.

The new understanding of tradition

In telling the story of the classical Catholic understanding of tradition, this essay has stressed the consistency in teaching from Trent to Vatican II and has suggested that, understood historically, that consistency derives from a Catholic desire to defend and define its belief in tradition in the setting of post-Reformation polemics. A more complete version of the story, however, would need to consider another dimension of conflict that has brought us to our present historical moment: the Enlightenment attack on the authority of tradition itself.

The new understanding of tradition

As much as the Catholic Church saw time as the realm of new occasions for appreciating the meaning of God’s revelation, and tradition as the developing encounter between God’s Spirit and the community of faith in history, whether by scripture alone or by scripture and tradition. The rise of a Newtonian worldview did much to discredit the miracles that filled the pages of the Bible and that were, lest we forget, the surest proof of Christianity’s truth. Historical-critical investigation of the biblical text and church history demonstrated that the sacred page and sacred time could be parsed in utterly secular ways that fractured the unified resonance of God’s inspired voice. Incisive Enlightenment critics of traditional Christianity—whether Locke, Hume, Jefferson, or Kant—all assumed that the truths of human existence were naturally inscribed in reason, and that the traditional Christian modes of revelation were, at best, obsolete metaphors for the timeless truth of reason that humanity gradually would outgrow. Since reason alone could discover and, in some explanations, construct truth autonomously, history was judged to be superfluous and so dispensable as a realm in which God revealed the meaning of life.
In the early nineteenth century, Catholic theologians like Johann Sebastian Drey and Johann Adam Möhler responded to the challenge of the Enlightenment critique by rethinking the nature of tradition. They found a valuable resource in the burgeoning intellectual and artistic movement of Romanticism. Disenchanted with the Enlightenment's glorification of critical reason and its banishment of providence from history, Romantic thinkers instead turned to the faculty of imagination to fathom the temporal unfolding of supernatural truth within the dynamism of natural events. Catholic theologians embraced this worldview and its rhetoric by portraying the act of faith as the imaginative discernment of the Holy Spirit's unfolding presence to time and circumstance. Countering the Enlightenment understanding of a history devoid of sacred meaning, Catholic theologians now reclaimed history as the realm of a developing tradition. This is not to say, of course, that Catholic thinkers gave up the age-old Christian belief that God's revelation was given once and for all in the apostolic age. Very much like a classical understanding of tradition, the new idea assumed the essential timelessness of divine truth. Unlike the classical understanding of tradition, though, the new idea did not see time as a mirror dimly reflecting the timelessness of God and revelation's truth, and did not see tradition as the sequential repetition of the unchanging deposit of faith. Instead, the new understanding of tradition saw time as the realm of new occasions for appreciating the meaning of God's revelation, and tradition as the developing encounter between God's Spirit and the community of faith in history.

Thus was born the very modern notion of the development of doctrine, a principle that has become an axiom of modern theology. Catholic theologians have explained the notion of developing tradition in any number of ways. Drey proposed a dialectical model that imagined tradition not simply as the orthodox past but as an ongoing, fruitful exchange between the fixed authority of the past and the relevance of the Church's present moment. Möhler offered a decidedly organic model that conceived tradition as a life form animated by the Holy Spirit and growing in time. John Henry Newman's *An Essay on the Development of Doctrine* (1845) chose a noetic metaphor that compared the movement of tradition to the clarification of an idea over time. (For a detailed presentation of these models of tradition, see Thiel 2000, 57-76.) Catholic theology in the late twentieth century has favored a reception model that understands tradition as a process in which the entire Church gradually believes and practices new understandings of divine revelation in history. This reception model has been encouraged by the teaching of Vatican II that the "whole body of the faithful" possesses a supernatural sense of the faith "aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth" that guarantees that all the faithful "cannot err in matters of belief." This teaching on the corporate infallibility of the faithful is an interesting complement to Vatican I's definition of papal infallibility, and clearly reflects the Romantic assumptions that attend the modern conception of tradition.

**ambiguous authority**

Change is the great problem that all traditions have had to face in modernity. This observation is especially true of a traditional religion like Christianity, which bore the brunt of Enlightenment criticism and which, following its Platonic assumptions, regards change as inimical to truth. Any tradition purports to be a meaningful continuity that resists the corrosive effects of change. Roman Catholic Christianity understands its tradition to be a sacred continuity imbued with the authority of divine revelation and assured in its truth by the changeless God. Those beliefs make change a threat that any Catholic understanding of tradition will need to negotiate in some way.

Christianity did not have to face the problem of change prior to the Enlightenment. In Medieval Catholic understanding, tradition eclipsed any notion of change or difference, or defined it as the heretical other. The chorus of traditional authorities in all times sang in perfect harmony with God's inspired voice, even though, as the twelfth-century maverick Peter Abelard had the audacity to demonstrate, they did not. As much as the Reformation shook the previous hegemony of Catholic culture, the Tridentine response to the Protestant clamor for change and to the fact of Christian difference was excommunication. This point is made to emphasize again that the
Enlightenment changed all this. The compelling results of historical criticism applied to scripture and tradition, the rise of new and quickly canonical forms of knowledge in the natural and social sciences, the irresistibility of democratic revolutions, and the growing power of market capitalism all worked together to make modern change undeniably threatening to traditional religions, and perhaps especially to Roman Catholic Christianity. Capitulation aside, there are two responses that traditional religions have made to the modern problem of change: fundamentalism and rapprochement. Fundamentalism is a modern phenomenon that responds to the Enlightenment valorization of profane time by simply denying the integrity of modern standards of knowledge. Much in the post-Enlightenment history of Roman Catholicism can be identified with this fundamentalist response, such as Catholicism’s early, ultramontanistic regard for liberal political philosophy; its conduct in the Modernist controversy; the narrowness of its Neo-Scholastic philosophy, taught as a template for all forms of knowledge in Catholic colleges and universities throughout the first half of the twentieth century; and the attraction of many kinds of reactionary Catholicism today whose deep suspicion of the modern world does not preclude their extensive use of the internet and media to communicate their message (witness Cardinal Schönborn’s recent enlisting of a conservative public relations firm to place his article on evolution on the Op-Ed page of The New York Times!). Fundamentalism is on the rise in all traditional religions because its nostalgia for a premodern understanding of fixed, unchanging authority is comforting to many in a quickly-changing, ambiguous world. Rapprochement, on the other hand, moves in the opposite direction. It tries to think the thoughts of traditional authority and change together, affirming the truth of each in their mutual relationship. An excellent example of the way of rapprochement is the modern notion that doctrine under-

Kierkegaard was right when he described the life of faith as repetition. But modern assumptions also ascribe to faith an ability to see new manifestations of the Spirit that are more than just occasions of grace but burgeoning moments in the unfolding of a truly sacred time that one day will be remembered as the time-honored past.

goes “development.” The very use of the word “development” draws the threat of anomic change under the purposeful auspices of divine providence. From a fundamentalist perspective, “development” cannot rescue “change” from its irreligious and capricious wanderings though history. But even those inclined toward the way of rapprochement must admit that the adoption of “change” as “development” involves the acceptance of new ideas about the workings of tradition that are as unnerving as they are exciting. Three such new ideas attend a modern Catholic theology of tradition. All disturb traditional sensibilities since they suggest that authority of the highest order is ambiguous. All three point us toward the issue of faithfulness to tradition in our closing reflections.

The first idea is the authority accorded to the supernatural sense of the faith shared by all believers in the teaching of Vatican II, mentioned earlier. The sense of the faith apprehends infallible truth when it is attuned to God’s presence in history. But as an experience, and a corporate experience at that, the sense of the faith is thoroughly temporal and often rather amorphous, qualities that make the discernment of tradition on the part of the whole Church a most debatable practice. Even though the Council teaches that the sense of the faith is properly guided by the magisterium, such guidance is far from assurance when there is significant disagreement in the Church about the Spirit’s truth.

That there may be such disagreement brings me to the second idea. The very notion of a developing truth in the experience of the faithful valorizes newness in tradition, a very untraditional idea. When Catholic communities throughout the world recite the Nicene Creed at Sunday mass, they together affirm the past about which there is a settled consensus of belief. Once one concedes the development of tradition, the door is open to the ambiguous authority of the present in which believers, in good faith, sometimes make new claims for the Spirit’s infallible truth. Historical-
critical investigation supports the value of traditional novelty, since the history of doctrine clearly shows that nearly every claim of tradition appeared *de novo* at a certain moment in time, and then, as a minority view, developed authority and consensus over time. The third and final idea is the way that a developing tradition makes room for creativity in the experience of faith as an act of discerning traditional truth. Kierkegaard was right, of course, when he described the life of faith as repetition. But modern assumptions also ascribe to faith an ability to see new manifestations of the Spirit that are more than just occasions of grace but burgeoning moments in the unfolding of a truly sacred time that one day will be remembered as the time-honored past. We could describe this endowment of faith as a kind of creativity, a talent on the part of believers to apprehend God's truth in history, in the "signs of the times." We would do well to see this creative dimension of faith as a supernatural gift, as a communal power at work in the sense of the faith that all believers share. We would also do well, though, to understand the sense of the faith as a capacity for discernment at work in individual believers, effective whenever they authentically apprehend the Spirit in history, whether in the past or the present. This is not to say that the authority of the present moment can ever be recognized as fully as the authority of the past. Novel claims by definition have never before appeared and yet, as claims for tradition, they clamor for recognition as the age-old faith of the Church. Their witness seems anomalous and their authority profoundly ambiguous.

It should be no surprise, then, that the exercise of traditional creativity stirs debate and even conflict in the Church. Whether the novel claim for tradition is that women should be ordained to priestly ministry or that the Church's continuous practice of restricting priestly ordination to males is divine revelation and for that reason unchangeable, the newness of the claim likely will engender disagreement that seems to threaten the unity of the Church. Their witness seems anomalous and their authority profoundly ambiguous. Faithfulness is a task that must negotiate the Scylla of fundamentalism and the Charybdis of secular capitulation.

**faithful to tradition**

What does it mean, then, for a Roman Catholic to be faithful to tradition? And what implications might our answer have for the broader issue of being faithful to any of our traditions?

Fundamentalist yearnings may be understandable in uncertain times, but they hope for something unreal. A tradition is not an unchanging continuity, in time but not of it in some magical way. Time is one of the most wonderful dimensions of God's creation, and to regard it with Platonist eyes...
is unworthy of any religion in the tradition of Abraham. Traditions, like all things created, are thoroughly temporal and therein lies their created goodness. If we remember that the issue of faithfulness is bound up with the reality of tradition, then faithfulness too must be temporal through and through. It is in faith's temporality that we can begin to answer our concluding questions.

One might think that the matter of faithfulness to tradition would be adjudicated by first determining the content of tradition and then professing its truth, but in reality the relationship between faithfulness and tradition is exactly the other way around. A tradition is an act of faith that a community of believers affirms together. That communal act of faith, however, is enmeshed in time. It is always made in a present moment that passes quickly into another and that into another again. Each of these acts of faith makes tradition by affirming a particular pattern of sacred continuity. Even though a tradition can be conceived chronologically, from past to present, its sacred continuity is actually affirmed in faith retrospectively, looking backward into the past. Believers in every present moment profess tradition from where they stand, claiming a Spirit-filled continuity aligned from their own standpoint back to the earliest Christian faith. In other words, traditional continuity is a belief about the present's relationship to the past, and only indirectly then about the past's relationship to the present.

This image of retrospection contrasts sharply with the typical way that both the classical and developing conceptions of tradition imagine sacred continuity. As different as they are in other respects, both the classical and developing conceptions view tradition prospectively. They imagine an idealized observer standing in the apostolic age and gazing forward into the future, seeing the same content of divine truth defining traditional continuity in all times. In the classical conception, this continuity is complete from the beginning and faithfully handed on to each next generation. In the developing conception, this continuity is latent in every moment and gradually appears historically. But in both instances, continuity is visible or latent in all moments running from the past into the future. As we look more closely at this prospective optics, we realize that human beings cannot “see” in this way. No human gaze can penetrate the future. The idealized observer in this prospective optics is God. And while the eternal God may be able to see traditional continuity in this way, believers cannot.

A retrospective understanding of tradition offers a realistic account of how believers actually shape lines of meaningful continuity. The continuity of tradition is an act of faith in which believers together affirm their meaningful relationship to the faith of past believers. Past believers, of course, did exactly the same. They affirmed tradition in their own day by retrospectively configuring lines of continuity to the faith of previous generations, who did the same again. Most of these retrospective acts of faith in any present moment repeat the claims of the previous present moment, which accounts for the continuous stability that we expect a tradition to be. Even this repetition, though, develops in ever-renewed acts of faith in passing time. Through repeated acts of faith of claiming the continuity of tradition, the tradition grows or develops in time. This means that what we call the “continuity” of tradition and what we call the “development” of tradition are exactly the same thing. The continuity of tradition is not alien to development, as was thought under classical assumptions. Nor is the continuity of tradition an essential content manifesting itself in historical developments but from which it remains distinguishable, as has been thought under modern, Romantic assumptions. Rather, the continuity of tradition is claimed in a communal act of faith that is utterly temporal and so develops in every passing moment as the tradition-shaping act of faith is made again and again. Tradition, we might say, continuously develops (see Thiel 1999; 2000, 84-85).
Now at first glance, this might seem to be the assertion of the worst kind of relativism. How could traditional continuity be real or trusted or truthful if it were indistinguishable from development? This question and these concerns evince how easily we can forget that a tradition is an act of faith and that all the practices attending that act are being made and remade in time. The traditional continuity that faith ever affirms is as real as a tradition can be, and anyone who troubles about the staying power of such acts of faith need only consider the history of any culture. Once we think of continuity as being remade in every moment as believers realign their relationship to the past, we begin to appreciate the openness of tradition to novelty. Retrospective claims for traditional continuity reaffirm nearly all of the sacred past. But any present act of faith may also discern the presence of the Spirit in new ways that lay claim to tradition. And if such a discernment is perceived as truthful by growing numbers of the faithful, then, sooner or later, the faith of the whole Church may weave the once novel claim into the lines of age-old continuity where, now as the deposit of faith, it may be professed as tradition.

Let us consider a couple of examples. Historical studies show that Christologies of the early Christian centuries were typically subordinationist, holding that the Son of God was inferior in divinity to God the Father. In the middle of the third century, literary evidence appears of a new belief that the Christ is fully divine. By the early fourth century, the novel belief in the undiminished divinity of the Son of God had grown considerably and to the point that this novel retrospective claim for the continuity of tradition clashed with the chronologically older claim for subordinationism. The Arian controversy was adjudicated over time by the Church’s common affirmation of the new claim as the age-old faith of the Church.

A second example is more recent. The Second Vatican Council taught in its “Declaration on Religious Freedom” (Dignitatis humanae) that freedom of religious belief is a sacred right revealed by God, and so a truth entrenched in the apostolic deposit of faith, even though this teaching was neither believed nor practiced in the Church until shortly before it was retrospectively claimed as tradition by the Council fathers.

These examples of novel claims also demonstrate how retrospection can undo the belief of the past by making new claims for continuity. Occasionally, a present-day generation practices development by refusing to believe in long-standing claims for tradition which previous generations regarded as central to the faith. Arius was genuinely surprised that he taught heresy and, in the midst of the Arian controversy, it was he who had chronological history on his side. Nevertheless, affirming the high Christology of Nicea entailed the rejection of subordinationism, the typical belief of the early centuries. The teaching on religious freedom repudiated continuous beliefs and practices laden with the violence of inquisition. Other Catholic examples of lapsed continuity are the Church’s teaching that lending money at interest is sinful, that slavery is permissible (see Noonan 1993), and the post-Tridentine doctrine that Protestant believers are outside the true Church of Christ, a teaching reaffirmed by Pius XII and reversed just a few years later by Vatican II.

Amidst all this talk about the shifting vagaries of development, it might seem as if this essay amounts to a deconstruction of traditional continuity, rather than an argument for its defense. The argument did try to deconstruct a fundamentalist understanding of tradition. The challenge for any adequate conception of tradition lies in showing how continuity can abide in development in a way that is intellectually defensible and in a way that can be justified by the facts of history. This essay has proposed that the continuity and the development of tradition are the same thing and that their common identity derives from the ongoing acts of faith in which they are professed. Perhaps an
analogy can demonstrate this developing notion of continuity more clearly. We might think of traditional continuity as the kind of sense that any reader of a novel makes of its plot at any particular point along the way. In this analogy we will presume a skillful and trustworthy author, who, of course, represents God, the divine author of tradition. The author will not betray the integrity of the plot at any point in its unfolding. The reader will encounter new insights and real surprises as the plot of the novel unfolds, for without these features there would be no story. Yet these insights, surprises, and developments will be aligned in a meaningful way with what has already preceded in the plot. The reader's understanding of the continuity of the plot will be made and remade in each passing present moment. Like all analogies, though, this one reaches its limit. A novel's continuity eventually reaches closure in time as the reader turns the last page. The tradition's narrative continuity never ends in time, for the book of tradition cannot be closed on this side of the eschaton.

Catholic belief understands all the acts of faith in which tradition continuously develops to be discernments of the presence of God to time and place. Baptism endows all believers with a charism for tradition-affirming and tradition-seeking faith, and in Catholic belief the Holy Spirit has endowed the magisterium, all the bishops teaching together under the primacy of the Pope, with an extraordinary charism in guiding the Church in the course of tradition. As all believers exercise these charisms, they must face the temptation of thinking that their discernment of the Spirit is true in principle, as though real authority transcends ambiguity. Authority remains ambiguous precisely because tradition makes claims about the immanent mystery of God. The false desire for unambiguous authority is stirred by our natural impatience. All in the Church can easily forget that closure to tradition happens only as this world passes away and, for that reason, the faith that makes tradition is properly humble and as open to the new as it is loyal to the old.

Faithfulness is exciting because through it traditions are continuously made. Tradition is a function of faithfulness. The act of faith both affirms what a tradition has been and imagines what a tradition might be in order to fulfill what it already is. Faithfulness is not simply passive reception. It is also a constructive activity. Teaching this lesson to our students is important, for it shows them their own responsibility to the past and to the present in making their tradition truly their own. A valuable dimension of that lesson is that discussion, disagreement, and argument are always legitimately present at the cusp of the tradition, in the unfolding present moment (Tanner 1997, 151-55). Even though Western Christian history is rife with discussion, disagreement, and argument about the faith, something in the Christian mentality is scandalized by such practices, thinking perhaps that the Church most resembles the heavenly kingdom when it is peacefully silent. In this regard, we Christians have much to learn from our Jewish brothers and sisters who have valued argument, even at times with God, in the search for truthful tradition. For all we know, silence may be the most appropriate disposition before the Beatific Vision. But for the Church in history, believing, discerning, and even arguing are the activities of faithfulness that bring tradition to life and nurture it into the future.

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Bibliography


LATE ELEGY
for Charles Alaimo

April is the kindest month.
Pale star and lilac fire.
Month of my coming.
Death always walking beside me.
Month of his going
into the soft soaked ground.

No poems for you, my father.
I was always too afraid.
Your quick fury, your dark days,
lonely writhing on the bare floor
seized by the hectic in your brain.
It gripped me, too, held me fast and long.

Now I am no longer afraid.
In Lenten love I fast and long
for your forgotten face, those lost days,
search my heart and sift my brain,
old photos piled along the bare floor,
hoping to find you quick again, my father.

Beyond the glass birds pair, becoming
one, each clutch of eggs fresh fire.
April comes, first birth month.
Life always walking beside me,
gripping my arm in my steady going
while I tread again this kind returning ground.

Angela O'Donnell
ASK A REFORMED PERSON TO TALK ABOUT TRADITION, and their first response probably will be a blank stare. As a cradle Calvinist, I was taught that tradition was basically an add-on. Tradition was that endless adiaphora of scholastic speculation and papal pronouncements that the medieval Church had piled onto the simple honest truths of the Bible. We, the true heirs of John Calvin and his iconoclastic followers in Geneva, Scotland, the Netherlands, and Massachusetts Bay, preferred our religion straight up and unadorned, dispensed directly from the word of God itself.

Reformed worship, architecture, and spirituality became notoriously spare and plain. I am often asked at the Congregational Library for an old “order of worship” or “communion service” so that present-day heirs of the Puritans can put on an historically-accurate Sunday program. But of course, these were people who constitutionally despised set forms and written rules. They left behind a lot of paper, but not much of the kind that my callers are looking for. Within the Reformed churches more generally, anything that smacked of ritual or, even worse, a rule imposed by some external authority became anathema. Church sanctuaries avoided all representations of God, the communion elements grew smaller and smaller, and the Bible on that large central pulpit loomed ever larger.

But of course, most sensible Reformed Christians recognize that they do indeed have a “tradition.” There is no such thing as a faith based on the Bible only. All Protestants recognize the Bible as their central authority, but they also realize that it always comes within an interpretive framework. Especially in those churches that originated in the Calvinist wing of the Protestant Reformation—the Dutch, German, and Hungarian Reformed, the New England Congregationalists, the Scotch Covenanters, and Presbyterians of many hues and stripes—the “tradition” really means the Christian story as it has been summarized and systematized in a variety of creeds, confessions, and catechisms.

These avowedly human documents were never meant to replace the Scriptures and were not regarded as “inspired” in any particular way, but they were certainly central to the way the faith was passed down from one generation to the next. Scholars and churchmen endured the laborious process of grinding out confessions and creeds in order to enable ordinary church people to understand the Bible’s essential teachings. The Fifty-Two Lord’s days of the Heidelberg Catechism created an ordered framework for weekly proclamation of the Word in the context of corporate worship. The many shorter catechisms written by Calvinist reformers offered a trustworthy rubric for parents to teach the faith to their children at home (Ozment 1983, 132–77).

Though not all branches of the Reformed family share the same enthusiasm for standardized formats, these documents have long provided them with a readily definable intellectual framework. Being Reformed, however various emphases are defined, means dealing at some level with the catechetical structure of the faith. As a former Calvinitte, graduate of a Christian elementary school, and non-voluntary participant in many a Sunday afternoon study of the Heidelberg Catechism, I easily can attest to the Reformed affinity for didacticism. Now an adult Congregationalist, in a faith community historically aversive to proscribed creeds of any kind, I catch only fleeting glimpses of the Calvinist certainties I once (partially) memorized. But in either case, confessions and catechisms present Reformed tradition as a definable and relatively stable body of content, in most respects shared with the larger body of Christ across time and space. They are meant to provide...
both a specific identification and a series of ecumenical touchstones.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given this somewhat austere approach to tradition, Reformed churches have a well-earned reputation for traditionalism, an aversion to change for change's sake alone. Some of this conservatism is simply built into their theological DNA. Anyone familiar with Calvinist doctrine certainly knows something of its famously taut intellectual structure: the so-called “five points of Calvinism,” the tripartite questions and answers of the Heidelberg Catechism, the measured paragraphs of the Westminster Confession, and the solemn affirmations of the Canons of Dordt. These are not documents that invite nitpicking by amateurs. Large and weighty doctrines like “total depravity” and “divine sovereignty” do not stand alone for critical inspection but fit together like interlocking pieces in an arch. If you are going to have a God who is completely sovereign over all of creation, you logically have to take some form of election and irresistible grace as well. God cannot be all knowing and all powerful while a sinner sits around and ponders his options. In theory at least, there is no such thing as a “cafeteria Calvinist.”

But as is true of many other Protestant bodies—and most religions everywhere—Reformed writers also recognize that tradition is more than just static doctrine contained by ink and paper. It also describes a long, complex, and continually evolving conversation about those seventeenth-century confessions and catechisms. It is the work of a church both reformed and reforming, to use the famous phrase. In a fundamental sense, tradition is both a noun and a verb, defining not just a body of doctrine, but the ongoing work of Christian people dead, alive, and yet to be born. Tradition thus requires a living, breathing community of people who recognize it as genuine revelation. Imagine, says theologian John Leith, that a holocaust of some sort had wiped out all traces of the Christian community, and then that someone walked through the ruins and found the Bible in a sealed box. The chances of that Bible alone giving rise to a new Christian community would be, in Leith’s words, “very small or nonexistent” (Leith 1977, 17–19). Tradition, in other words, has a social history. It is not simply a common body of information that people inherit, but a common ground from which they can ask each other interesting questions.

Of course, that social history of Reformed tradition is not necessarily a pretty story. For all their famed iconoclasm, Calvin’s heirs have not been shy about imagining what their tradition might look like in earthly form. In the early decades of the Reformation, Calvin’s achievement was to take the spare, existential piety of Luther and frame it into an aggressive social program. Philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff has described “original Calvinism” as “a passionate desire to reshape the social world so that it no longer would be alienated from God” (Wolterstorff 1983, 21). Those basic principles of Calvinist theology, that the world was fallen but God remained sovereign, and that believers were to be God’s agents of creation renewal, spurred some fantastic new visions of cities on a hill. They propelled people across oceans and continents, and launched a continuous stream of armies of soldiers, missionaries, and merchants (see, for example, Benedict 2002).

Perhaps not surprisingly, not everyone was thrilled with the project. Soaringly spiritual and powerfully earthbound, early Reformed thought demanded that the world be remade, and that theology take institutional form, as it did for good or ill, periodically wreaking havoc on the unjust or unwary. Wolterstorff aptly described “that most insufferable of all human beings, the triumphalist Calvinist, the one who believes that the revolution instituting the holy commonwealth has already occurred and that his or her task is now simply to keep it in place” (Wolterstorff 1983, 21).

In some quarters, therefore, references to Reformed “tradition” carry a powerfully negative subtext. As George Marsden writes, the “greatest fault” of American Reformed communities has been a tendency toward “elitism,” assuming that “Reformed people have been endowed with superior theological, spiritual, or moral merit by God himself” (Marsden 1985, 11). In worst cases, the Reformed social program becomes an instrument of oppression. South African critic John de Gruchy writes of the “fundamental ambiguity in the Reformed tradition, its evangelical and transfor-
mative witness on the one hand, and its dominating imperialism on the other” (De Grunchy 1991, 19). Though there is no direct link between Calvinism and apartheid, a mythic reading of the Dutch Reformed community in South Africa as God’s chosen people was a bad idea with an obvious social consequence.

The Reformed story offers an opportunity to name some of the starker issues about tradition—both the intellectual creativity it generates and the tendency toward coercion. Being faithful to tradition in a Reformed setting certainly has an ambiguous subtext. On the one hand, tradition is a moving theological target, a series of confessions constantly being redefined by a community of believers. It draws off an expansive view of Christian vocation in a world over which God is involved at every level. What could be more inviting to a scholar and an educator? Yet Reformed tradition also has a strong didactic undertow, in which truth becomes a series of propositions that can be memorized and taught. It has been mediated all too often by an inward-facing community with a tendency to identify itself as God’s specially chosen people. What could be more daunting to honest intellectual searching?

Yet it is just these built-in forms of resistance to modernity and simultaneous embrace of modern culture that make Reformed institutions such interesting—and often frustrating—places to work. What follows, then, is an attempt to describe some of that ambiguity, acknowledging ways in which tradition operates both to liberate and to confine, and then some thoughts about the peculiar opportunities and challenges that modernity presents within a Reformed context.

**freedom in tradition**

Here is one good thing right off the bat: the Reformed dynamic is not, in its essential sense, moralistic. Reformed theology speaks less of “sins” as individual acts of transgression and more of “sin,” Augustine’s great existential category of human alienation from God. Thus, a regularly updated inventory of personal wrongdoing is not technically possible, as the problem is far more extensive than any single person could enumerate. Total depravity is a doctrine of width more than depth, more comprehensive than simply cumulative.

Reformed confessionalism also means that the believer’s public affirmation of faith is technically enough for admittance to membership—or at least that it is more fundamentally important than an emotional experience of conversion. Certainly, over the years this notion has been eroded, especially as Reformed thought has commingled with American evangelical piety (“ideal types” simply do not exist). But within a strict Reformed understanding, signing your name to a seventeenth-century confession, as I did upon becoming a faculty member of Calvin College, is not primarily a statement of one’s individual beliefs. Rather, it is a signal of membership in a larger Christian community, a statement of final loyalty.

Moreover, Reformed communities recognize that confessions are always subject to revision and reinterpretation, that they have “only a provisional, temporary, relative authority” (Presbyterian Church (USA) 1992, 25). They are, as we have seen, “talking points” for further discussion, not orthodoxy frozen for all future time. Thus Calvin College’s book of signatures includes a few points of exception, particularly those of faculty who did not wish to go on record as despising the errors of the Anabaptists, as the Belgic Confession would have them do.

In a practical sense, this means that Reformed thinkers can enjoy a fairly broad intellectual freedom. Once you have affirmed the standard outlines of the faith, your loyalty should be forever above suspicion. In a best-case scenario, a teacher in a publicly-identified Reformed institution does not need to provide a spiritual x-ray of any heartfelt emotion. Behavioral standards are not insignificant, but they are not primary. So it is not beyond the pale to ask uncomfortable questions—
questions that might not even occur to a scoffing unbeliever—and to expect an honest discussion. Theoretically at least, Reformed confessionalism creates ample ground for an articulate and free “loyal opposition.”

This implied permission for critical questions also grows out of the Reformed emphasis on God’s sovereignty over creation. Abraham Kuyper, the turn-of-the-century Dutch Prime Minister and patron saint of what is commonly known as neo-Calvinism, once famously declared the need for Christians to claim “every inch” of creation for God (Kuyper 1998, 488). In practical terms, this meant that no subject area, however mundane, was off the table for intellectual exploration. Kuyper believed that all ideas were interrelated, and at bottom, a function of one’s particular world and life view. In his view, there were no strictly secular or religious areas of study. Though no postmodernist, he understood truth as perspectival—all statements of “fact” were traceable to a particular set of theological commitments. Taking Calvin’s capacious idea of Christian vocation to the next level, Kuyper laid a foundation for complex, long-term intellectual work, proceeding not by theoretical mile-long leaps, but by a leisurely, painstaking march of tiny inches.

Calvin and Kuyper’s idea of Christian transformation meant that it was necessary to take the created order seriously. The world was important because it emphatically belonged to God, who eagerly awaited the searching exploration of busy, curious people. It was far more than a mere backdrop to the ultimate drama of salvation. Indeed, Reformed theology requires attentiveness to context. The complex interplay of divine will and human agency raises all kinds of good questions about the “constructedness” of our earthly reality, and the true proportions of our role in the world. History, as James Bratt has described it, is a kind of rising, densely-woven double-helix in which it might be possible to tease out what is “Christian” but wrong to extract it entirely (Bratt 1998, 166).

In Reformed communities, this implied respect for the details of God’s creation lies behind some formidable skills in institution-building. Examples abound, from Calvin’s Geneva to the ordered villages of Massachusetts Bay, from Harvard and Yale to the myriad of smaller denominational colleges and institutes established across the United States in the nineteenth century. There are some concrete theological reasons behind their famous passion for doing “all things decently and in order”—real live things matter. But this means more in scholarly terms than just having the xerox machines run on time. Respect for institutions, for something bigger and more important than ourselves, is not historically strong in American Protestantism and certainly not within the individualistic milieu of American culture. At its best, the Reformed propensity toward building schools and churches is an acknowledgement that the work of other people is as important, maybe even more important, than the work of a single person. And again, at its best, this implicit awareness has generated resistance to the individualism of modern life, the tendency to see our lives as endless projects of self-creation.

Thus in this sense, Reformed tradition has often been a platform for creative, useful thinking, offering a rich vocabulary of common references and providing a powerful solvent to the acids of modernity. A Christian scholar can walk pretty far out on an intellectual limb because that branch is firmly connected to a strong supporting treetrunk and held down by deep roots, tested by winds from every direction. Historian Jaroslav Pelikan puts this idea into a musical metaphor, arguing that tradition provides the “perennial themes and key metaphors” for creative expression. As every musician knows, it is the discipline of repeated practice that lifts us beyond the “banality and trivialization” of a “total immersion in the here and now.” Tradition, in other words, allows us to be genuinely innovative without being merely unintelligible (Pelikan 1984, 78).

freedom from tradition

But of course, the real question is, what does tradition look like in my 8:00 AM freshman history class? What happens when these dynamic, exciting ideas meet the mind of a sleepy, restless eighteen-year old—in my experience some of the most intellectually conservative people in the world? Can one of those fortunate few, raised by attentive parents, nurtured by a theologically-literate congregation, and often educated within a Christian school system, ask authentic,
interesting questions? Ancient Greeks, African tribesmen, Asiatic nomads, and all of those people across time and space who knew nothing of Abraham Kuyper's world and life view—what could they possibly mean to a kid from Hudsonville, Michigan, far too early on a dark and cold winter morning?

I worry sometimes that the very cogency of the Reformed world and life view obscures rather than illuminates the outside world. Even the specific literary forms used to organize Reformed teaching subtly discourage open-ended questioning. Every existential question posed by the Heidelberg Catechism—why are we here and what is our purpose?—has at most a paragraph of response. The compact, simple format itself suggests there are no other answers to be found.

Indeed, even that famed intellectualism of Reformed communities can retard the kind of painful questioning that moves tradition forward. The more smoothly and comprehensively the system works, the easier it becomes to engage in self-referential conversations with people who know your vocabulary, and who will not, in the end, raise any questions that the two of you cannot answer. Specifically Christian scholarship all too easily becomes a game for insiders, not a path into any seriously dark night of the soul.

And, finally, that very embeddedness of Reformed thinking and its attention toward context can suggest that "what is" is "what we have made," and thus it is "what should be." We lose important critical distance between, say, American middle-class values and the demands of Holy Writ. Or, in an even worse case, divine providence is secularized into manifest destiny. God's will becomes a blanket justification for an aggressive nationalistic program. These are certainly not uniquely Reformed sins, but, I would argue, a peculiar set of theologically-driven Reformed temptations.

**liberating reformed tradition**

So how can we be faithful within and to a Reformed tradition—or any other for that matter—under the rising barometric pressure of modernity? Is it necessary to batten down the hatches, hammer down those creeds and confessions, and hope for the sunrise? Or should we simply give in to that long slow trickle of relativism that promises eventually to overwhelm us all?

That dualism is, of course, impossible and unnecessary. There is no authentic position "outside" of modern culture. We cannot reject it any more than we can reject light or air. And why would we? Modernity has taught Christians important lessons about human rights and tolerance, reminding them that the Bible does not condone slavery or require the subjection of women. As Mark Schwehn and Dorothy Bass have commented, paraphrasing Alfred North Whitehead, it is necessary to "seek [the] Enlightenment and then distrust it" (Schwehn and Bass 1995, 295).

Nor is relativism really the problem. For many religious communities, and perhaps especially Reformed people, the real challenge of modern culture is its fragmentation. It is now technically possible to select all of one's news, entertainment, political debates, even food choices and never have to encounter an opposing point of view—computers, cell phones, and cable television allow us to live quite comfortably in self-constructed little bubbles. The consequences for religious bodies are considerable. Especially in groups with a strong "chosen people" ideology, the issue is not so much maintaining a stable body of doctrine, but resisting the drift toward sectarianism.

One of the great moments in Dutch-American cinema is the scene in Paul Schrader's underrated film "Hard Core," in which Michigan onion farmer Jake Van Dorn tries to explain the five points of Calvinism to a Las Vegas prostitute. The two are sitting together in the airport, both in search of Jake's daughter, who has gone missing from a Young Calvinist Convention (yes, there once were such things) on the West Coast. It is a difficult conversation. To a self-proclaimed "Venusian," Calvinism looks downright bizarre. Even Jake has to admit that the "TULIP" acronym makes a bit more sense on his front porch in Hudsonville than it does in the Las Vegas airport. Needless to say, he does not win her to the Reformed world and life view (Mouw 2004).

A tradition that is truly worth perpetuating should propel us energetically into the world, but not like the Calvinist crusaders of old. It is no longer possible to imagine "the world" as neutral.
territory waiting to be claimed and reconfigured by God’s providentially chosen people. Over the last four centuries, people in the West have slowly begun to understand that the entire planet is already inhabited by other people. Our new pluralistic awareness demands new ways of establishing righteous communities that are not simply walled off to keep out the unelect, but full of light and air.

The image that appeals most to me in this respect is the ethnic neighborhood, especially as it emerged among turn-of-the-century immigrants to the United States. For all the negative stereotypes, those were vital, culturally porous places, where newcomers quickly learned “the ropes” of American culture, but not at the cost of their original identity. At the end of the day, you could always go home and talk about what was really important in a familiar language that allowed you to express your deepest thoughts and feelings. Religious people today have a similar opportunity to learn to think in two languages—not just their particular tongue of Zion, but also the idiom of our surrounding culture. Most of us probably always will carry a particular accent from the old country, but that is no reason why we cannot try to speak in ways that others can understand and find compelling.

In this respect, the pluralism of modern culture is a gift, offering meaningful, invigorating conversation partners to even the closest-knit covenanted communities. Since my Calvinette days, I’ve learned a lot from sojourns among evangelicals, mainliners, Baptists, Episcopalians, Catholics, and charismatics. From each one, I learned something new and important about my Christian identity. But I spent some of my best times among Mennonites, and I am convinced that there is something special that happens when Calvinists and Anabaptists start talking to each other—when those who have so long considered themselves to be the “custodians” of American culture meet up with people who have long viewed that culture with theological suspicion. Indeed, as Richard Mouw suggests, much of the historic antipathy between the two is based on similarity, not difference. He argues that Anabaptist theology is really a “radicalization” of the Calvinist social vision (Mouw 2001, 22). And in fact, Reformed communities need to be reminded that sometimes “what is” should not be. They need to listen to the Anabaptist critique of American capitalism and accept the dare to be prophetic, maybe even unpopular. Anabaptists can learn a lot from Reformed people too, and in conversation these two traditions have much in common with which they can explore the paradoxes of being both “in and not of” the modern world.

But not all conversation partners need be religious. Our pluralistic world both demands and facilitates a deeper appreciation for the old and often unappreciated Reformed doctrine of common grace, the idea that God bestows favors not only onto a chosen people, but blesses the world through any means that God so chooses. This has been a controversial notion among Reformed folks. How do you reconcile the doctrines of total depravity and common grace? Is it really “grace”? Is it special revelation? But stated carefully, common grace does not simply baptize the standing order. It asks us to see and appreciate God’s work in unlikely places, that is, outside the immediate control of God’s chosen people—handicapped bathrooms, government programs to fight AIDS and malaria in third world countries, even a well-crafted, thoughtful television program. Common grace insists that Reformed people see themselves as emphatically human and in authentic solidarity with all the other inhabitants of planet earth.

There are many ways to measure the value of tradition, but in the end, it simply has to make a difference in the world. It has to have a transformative ethical impact on the people who hold it, and it has to make the world a better place. Thus Reformed tradition does not exist just to make Reformed people happier and more smugly aware of their distinctiveness.

It can, and probably should, make them a little bit weird. During the 1950s, a decade devoted to Protestant healthy-mindedness, Martin Luther King once commented that the American ideal of being happy and well-adjusted was terribly overrated. We should never “adjust ourselves,” he said, to a fallen, unjust world. “I call upon you to be maladjusted,” King declared in one of his most memorable speeches, “for it may be that the salvation of the world lies in the hands of the maladjusted” (King 1958, 36). The imperative of tradition today is to live gracefully in the world,
maintaining balance with a light touch. That is not easy for Reformed Christians, who value things done decently and in good order, and who have often envisioned Christian vocation as a kind of godly conquest, but it is hard to imagine a good alternative. A liberated Reformed tradition should be, in the end, liberating for all people.

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Bibliography


John Wesley (1703–1791), the founder of that Christian tribe we generally identify as Methodists or Wesleyans, was a stouthearted Protestant. Epistemologically he believed in sola scriptura as embedded in a wider vision of divine revelation that was generally skeptical of natural and speculative theology. His ponderings on the insecurity of natural theology left him at one stage thoroughly unsettled and close to suicide. It is true that his ponderings on the veridicality of religious experience brought him to an aggressive commitment to genuine perception of the divine that was organized in and around a novel appeal to the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. Yet even these ponderings, to be valid, had to be secured by appeal to scripture. Hence he developed his epistemological ramblings through exegesis of scriptural texts like Ephesians 2:8, Hebrews 11:1, and most especially Romans 8:15-17. So Wesley’s spiritual empiricism, while it was foundational in the sense that it posited a form of perception of the divine that was direct and noninferential, was also derived from scripture. Wesley wanted nothing less than revelatory foundations for his foundations. Every thought, including our thoughts about thought itself, had to be brought captive to Christ.

Tradition was important, but it was altogether secondary. By tradition, Wesley meant the nonbiblical tradition of the church developed before the fourth century (Constantine was the great Corrupter), a tradition that was recaptured by the Anglican Reformation. Its role was hermeneutical, not epistemological. It enabled one to read scripture better; it was radically subordinate epistemologically to scripture. Reason also was subordinate to revelation. It was conceived not in a substantial sense but in a functional sense as a means of inference from data given in revelation and as a means of testing consistency and coherence. Reason fed off scripture; it had no content wherewith to challenge it (Miles 1997).

William J. Abraham

Protestantism is, of course, a contested tradition, but Wesley is clearly a Protestant. Yet he is a Protestant with a difference. For Wesley might also be described as an Anglican pietist or a catholic mystic. For him, the heart of Christianity was the encounter with and participation in divine holiness. Thus the material doctrines that became the driving force of his life were original sin, repentance, new birth, assurance, justification, and sanctification. He was constantly in search of the best way to capture the journey to a merciful, healing God. He was wedded to no slavish set of concepts at this point, but he was not diffident about the heart of the matter. Creation is in ruins through sin; forgiveness and new life have come through Christ; and the effects of Christ’s healing work are available now through the work of the Holy Spirit, who characteristically but not exclusively works through a network of effective means of grace given to the church. Critical for Wesley was that every person in sight should come to experience personally the love and grace of God. The real enemy then was nominal and external religion. Forms (works of piety and mercy) were critical, but in themselves without the Spirit they were dead and dangerous. It was life in the Spirit, made possible by the work of Christ, made available now through grace, and expressed in a life of holiness that took Wesley’s breath away. He is best described as an evangelist, a spiritual director, and a Father in God. He was not and never claimed to be a theologian or a philosopher (Abraham 2005).

Nor did he really want to start a new church. In fact, he had very limited abilities in this domain. He would have been happy to remain a renewalist, recovering for his day the heart of the Christian faith, reforming the nation and church, and spreading scriptural holiness across the land. His genius as a leader and organizer forced his hand precisely because he could not bear to leave
those who had come to faith through his movement without the sacramental helps necessary for effective salvation here and now. So he crossed the controversial Rubicon for his spiritual children in North America and set them lose to form a new church. They were, as he put it crisply, at full liberty to follow scripture and primitive tradition. They gladly took him at his word, and at one point took him off the membership lists when he protested what he saw as unacceptable developments. Ever since then, those who can trace some measure of continuity of faith with Wesley and his early Methodist People have been divided both formally and informally on how best to carry on and express his legacy. 2 In this, they have been like every other tribe of Protestantism that has shown up since the Reformation. It will take some radical medicine to cure this disease, a disease for which there is currently no end in sight.

The challenges that hit the heirs of Wesley were both internal and external. 3 There was initially the challenge of holding to any serious version of sola scriptura. Sola scriptura was really constitutive of Methodism as a version of Protestantism. It was the touchstone of the tradition. The threat from this angle was there from the beginning. It was dramatically visible in the musings of the Irish theologian, Adam Clarke (c.1760–1832), who taught himself over twenty languages, was three times president of the Conference, and had unquestionable credentials as a biblical scholar, preacher, and leader. Clarke denied the eternal generation of the Son from the Father on biblical grounds. It was not the adjective that bothered him but the noun. “Generation” signaled origination and dependence, and the Son could not be divine if this were the case. Tritheism is clearly lurking in the wings here, but Clarke as a self-confident biblicist probably never noticed. It was the first systematic theologian in Methodism, Richard Watson (1781–1833) (now reviled and despised), who saw the problem and tried to fix it. His solution was on the same level as Clarke’s: do better exegesis, systematize the results in a set of Theological Institutes, and show that Clarke was wrong. But the problem is now out in the open for all to see. Sola Scriptura is a kind of blank check waiting to be filled in by the latest expert in biblical scholarship.

Methodism has suffered the standard fate of modern Protestant denominations over the last two centuries: the experts (even when they share a common methodology or set of background beliefs) disagree, so the tradition is constantly torn asunder internally by disputes about its material commitments. The arrival of historical investigation of scripture simply inflames the situation. Historical criticism does not start the fire, because the fire was there from the beginning. It simply adds fuel to the fire by providing explosive materials that blow up the whole content of the tradition and, given certain philosophical assumptions, undermine the very idea of divine revelation on which the tradition rested.

This problem was brilliantly captured for the last generation by Van A. Harvey, initially a Methodist theologian, in his The Historian and the Believer (New York: Macmillan, 1967). Harvey later abandoned theology for religious studies. He provided poignant accounts of this transition in essays published in 1970 and 1981. The final paragraph of the latter essay is worth quoting at length.

One might say that the unbelieving theologian finds himself in the situation of Barabbas as described in the novel by Par Lagervist. Barabbas has his own knowledge, or what he thinks is knowledge, that Jesus did not arise from the dead on the first Easter. Barabbas was in the garden that first Easter morning and saw absolutely nothing. But he is deeply moved and attracted by the spirit of the little band of Christians, a spirit which is captured in the phrase “love one another.” He also is repelled by what he considers to be their false and fantastic beliefs.... In short, what we have in Barabbas is the doubt of someone who knows, or thinks he knows, that the Christian claims are false but who is drawn irresistibly by the form of life of those who do believe.... Barabbas, of course, was not a theologian, that is, someone trained to be an intellectual spokesman for the community of which he is an outsider. Thus, he could
remain silent while forced to walk apart. The dilemma of the unbelieving theologian is that insofar as he remains silent, he is not a theologian, for a theologian is, virtually by definition, one who speaks. Therein lies the paradox. For insofar as he speaks, he also is not a theologian, because he does not speak to or for the community.

The Methodist drive towards holiness and corporate discipline was highly likely to create division as well, for these ideals were crucial to the tradition. The divisions come with the break from Wesley's autocracy, with the problem of slavery, and with rival accounts of what to do with Wesley's vision of sanctification. So we get African Methodists, Zionist Methodists, Union Methodists, Republican Methodists, Reformed Methodists, Primitive Methodists, Stillwellite Methodists, Wesleyan Methodists, Free Methodists, and Nazarenes. Even before that, we had splits between Calvinistic and Arminian Methodists. Later the Holiness Movement within Methodism helped give birth to Pentecostalism. Pentecostals in time showed up inside the tradition repackaged as Charismatics. In both cases, we had further occasion to divide over the legacy. Throughout this history, we have a running debate over the relative merits of social justice and personal piety, a debate that now has been reincarnated in complex ways in terms of liberation. It is extraordinary that we have not formally divided over the debate in and around gay liberation. Clearly the tension between tradition and change has been volatile and divisive.

To be sure, all these disputes were shaped and flavored by wider developments in the culture. North American Methodism and its offspring have until recently been quintessentially modern. Motivated for evangelism and reform, Methodists have been determined to get the faith across to each new generation and were convinced that we could save not just the individual but society itself. So when the world went modern, we went after it in order to persuade it to come to faith. It is likewise when the culture becomes postmodern. We became and we become all things to all people that we might win some. Over time, this leads to worries about whether the faith we profess after a host of readjustments really is the faith, and we are off again on the merry-go-round of dispute and division. Conservatives swell forth to challenge what they see as apostate progressives and to reclaim the ancient tradition in the name of authenticity and faithfulness. Our efforts to fulfill the mandate to save souls have the unhappy consequence of driving us to relentless change and inescapable alienation. We are a dysfunctional family in which every proposed solution becomes the occasion for estrangement. Teetotalers by profession but not in practice, we simultaneously experience happy drinking bouts and painful hangovers. Yet, we manage somehow to keep up a good face in front of the neighbors.

One of the cheerful results of this unpleasant state of mind and soul is the creation of universities. Indeed, we scarcely could identify where we are religiously and epistemologically without formation in a host of disciplines that are central in the modern university. History, sociology, philosophy, and, of course, theology (with its plethora of sub-disciplines) all are needed to keep the drink flowing. Intellectual work is both the result and the cause of attempts to resolve our disputes.

The initial reasons for the creation of universities by Methodists were, of course, thoroughly prosaic. Methodists wanted to provide vocational training for themselves and their neighbors, and they were keen to climb a rung or two on the social ladder. They also had a sense from the beginning of the intrinsic value of education, and this disposition undoubtedly fueled the building of universities. However, once created, the schools of theology in universities and the freestanding seminaries became sites of both theological revision and retrieval. Places like Boston, Drew, Garrett,
Vanderbilt, Southern Methodist, Duke, Emory, and so on, developed their own ways of coping with the tension between faithfulness and change. So the merry-go-round was and is kept in motion by seminaries and universities that were built and sustained by Methodists. Those who love the life of the mind and its place in western culture should raise a constant toast to religion and theology, to the disputes they naturally cultivate, and to the educational institutions that have to be created in order to address the cognitive dissonance evoked by such disputes. To be sure, we all know that theology is banished now from the state universities, and its place in private institutions is precarious. Last year, I had to fight hard (but I trust with good humor) to hold a university-wide colloquium in my own university on the relation between robust faith and teaching. The cleverest opposition came from a brilliant colleague who presented himself wittily as both Jewish and atheistic. Even in those private institutions that were originally generated by primal religious identities, it is a constant challenge to create the continuing space where the deepest of human questions can be pursued with real freedom and gusto.

The crisis engendered by the intellectual vertigo we rightly and naturally associate with religious and theological diversity hit mainstream Methodism in the 1960s. This was a very exciting time for Methodism. Mainline Methodists found their champion in the extraordinary efforts of Albert Cook Outler, a leader who was at one and the same time a historian, theologian, ecumenical leader, brilliant raconteur, enthusiastic teacher, and ecclesiastical engineer (Parrott 1999). Through Outler, Methodists discovered tradition and worked mightily to make it into virtue in the normative landscape of theology. By Outler's time the conservatives had been packed off to the backwoods in Kentucky, leaving all the other options to be brought together in a big-tent version of Methodism. The vehicle for Outler's strategy was a wonderful mixture of fresh historical work on Wesley, a badgering espousal of pluralism and diversity, an unmatched rhetorical commitment to church unity, and above all the invention of the quadrilateral of scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.

The quadrilateral basically proposes that we resolve theological disputes by a judicious appeal to scripture, tradition, reason, and experience (see Outler 1991). To put it crudely, mix and stir and the result will be both faithful and relevant. The quadrilateral was crucial at several levels for Methodists. It provided the appearance of continuity (and hence faithfulness) to Wesley; it gave everybody a place at the table (the contesting parties could latch onto their favored element); it settled once and for all the problem of the authority of scripture (even those who questioned scripture had to use the elements of the quadrilateral, hence it was pragmatically if not transcendentally secure); and it provided a self-confident but actually declining church with a proper standard of doctrine for all time (or at least for the next two hundred years, as Outler once told me in private conversation).

Another way to think of the quadrilateral is to see it as solving the problem of continuity and change, of faithfulness and updating, of authenticity and relevance, of past and present. Scripture and tradition take care of continuity, faithfulness, authenticity, and the past; reason and experience take care of change, updating, relevance, and the present. This formulation is strikingly Methodist, but it is also at the heart of all progressive and liberal forms of Christianity in the modern period in the West. The fundamental challenge is formulated in terms of how to be robust enough to be identified as Christian and yet flexible enough to meet the challenges thrown up by a changing culture. Overplay the robustness and one falls into fundamentalism; overplay the flexibility and one becomes the fleeting expression of the receding present. The quadrilateral looks like a godsend when seen from this angle. It is no surprise, therefore, that both conservatives and progressives have championed it enthusiastically. It was invented precisely to provide a middle way between extremes that every sensible person wanted to avoid. After some initial sniveling and sneering, it now has become commonplace even in the homeland of Methodism in England (see Marsh et al., 2004).

Has then one of the last and least of the tribes of Protestantism resolved the problem of continuity and change with a handy formula? Have we at last found a way to fix the challenges of change?
that nobody can deny? Should we all become Methodists, or failing that, pay Methodism the ultimate compliment by stealing its quadrilateral, as many are doing? Happily my questions are entirely rhetorical. The quadrilateral is no solution to the problems we face; it is a snare and an illusion. The challenge is to find a way below and behind the question it answers and then to move on to a better future. We go below the quadrilateral to the epistemological worries that led to its creation and deal with these comprehensively.

The key to diagnosing this as a bogus solution to the deep problems we face in the epistemology of theology is to note the ambiguity of the term "Methodism." "Methodism" can mean a version of modern Christianity, or it can mean a very particular school in epistemology. Methodists, as Roderick Chisholm argued in a seminal essay, are those who insist that our fundamental epistemological crises can be resolved only when we hit on the right method (Chisholm 1982, 61–76). The crucial problem, of course, is then to find the right method; and there is the rub. Methods are at least as contested and disputed as the particular propositions they are supposed to undergird. One way to think of the end of modernity is to think of it as a deep disillusionment about the quest for the right methodology. Another way is to see it as the end of epistemology conceived as the search for the right criteria of rationality, justification, and knowledge. Post-modernity can be understood readily as a placeholder for the intellectual responses engendered by disappointment with modern forms of epistemology. It is as if we have fallen into a black hole and do not know our way around anymore.

It is very easy to comfort ourselves at this point with claims about the inevitability of historicity, fallibility, perspectives, discourses, contingency, and the like. It is also very tempting to make our way forward by presenting our wares in the language of intellectual virtue and vice. We must be both faithful and open; we must strike a balance between authenticity and accommodation. We can even mask our announcements by disguising them as profound truths about the human condition itself and then offer the study of religion as the solution to the riddle of being human. If we want to launch an intellectual nuclear strike we can work up a charge of idolatry: any robust claims to knowledge (most especially knowledge of God) are self-serving idols.

The crucial point to register in all of this is that when we fall into these traps we have fallen into the black hole of epistemology. The only way forward when confronted with black holes in history or science is to keep on doing history and science; likewise the only way forward when confronted with black holes in epistemology is to keep on doing epistemology. The deep problem with the quadrilateral is that it is epistemology on the cheap. It is a slogan made up of abstract entities that is suitable at best for high school students, and it inhibits precisely the kind of careful work in epistemology that is essential. (On the current state of epistemology, see Moser 2002).

Commitment to the quadrilateral also destroys Christianity from within by betting the store once and for all on getting the epistemology right. The final outcome of this process for Methodists has been a matter of death by our own hands. We turned our religion into a theory of religious knowledge and in the very process ran the risk of losing friendship with the living God. Commitment to the right epistemology eclipsed our commitment to God. We can see the move towards a theory of knowledge in Methodism at its very inception and across the years. Methodism began as a hiccup in the history of Protestantism. Almost simultaneously the well-educated and eccentric Wesley brothers stumbled upon the reality of God in the spring of 1738. This staggering into the reality of God is (if anything is) the secret history of Methodism. It was primal knowledge of God as one's creator, lord, friend, consoler, lover, preserver, provider, judge, and savior. This is one reason our elder brothers and sisters in Protestantism and Roman Catholicism have found it so difficult to take Methodism seriously as an intellectual tradition. We are pietists, mystics, activists, and pragmatists. We always have been half-baked intellectuals in search of a tradition to house a treasure that is constituted by wonder love and praise. Our central doctrinal and practical concerns gravitated around participation in the life of God here and now. Without this participation we are as
good as dead. (This dimension of Methodism is missed in Richey, Campbell, and Lawrence 2005).

So Methodism was not initially knowledge of this knowledge of God. It was knowledge and love of God (and then neighbor) *simpliciter*. But by the eighteenth century in the West as a whole, it was never enough to have primal knowledge; one also had to have metaknowledge. It was not enough to be acquitted and justified before God; one also had to be justified about justification. Wesley was trapped in this world from the beginning, and he never found liberation from it. Everything had to be derived from scripture as lodged in a theory of divine revelation. He was smitten with a deadly virus that he passed on to his offspring. They received his epistemology of theology joyfully as good Protestants. When that epistemology ran into trouble they invented or borrowed other theories (Chiles 1965). The climax of this process was the invention of the quadrilateral, when they fooled themselves into thinking that they now were fully grown up with an epistemology all of their own that would solve the conflict between traditional commitment and contemporary credibility.

The upshot of this analysis now can be stated plainly: the very attempt to name and resolve the conflict between faithfulness and change, between authenticity and relevance, is an epistemological response to the ongoing epistemological crisis of modernity and now postmodernity. Modernity itself is an effort to rid us of theological anxiety in the wake of endless theological disputes that began with first-order disputes about God and developed into methodological disputes about how to resolve those disputes. Postmodernity in its various guises is one more effort to resolve our anxiety by closing off debate or by making a virtue of our misery. The whole debate is exhausted and exhausting. Yet the intellectual dexterity and fecundity on display is a feast for sore intellectual eyes. Without this history our culture and our lives would be drastically impoverished. Happily, it will continue after we are all long dead and buried.

It now looks as if I have dug the grave of my own tradition and then fallen into it myself. I have insisted that Methodism as a theological tradition fell into Methodism as an epistemological tradition and hence committed suicide. So what do we do now?

By its own lights, Methodism is nothing without knowledge and friendship with God. In this respect, it is the carrier of pivotal strands of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam across the centuries. The core of the tradition is encounter, liberation, inner-illumination, and salvation by the living God. It is existing in fear and trembling, in humility and confidence, in the midst of divine judgment and mercy. I am not here resurrecting the dead vestiges of liberal Protestantism or existentialism. These are ultimately artificial and reductionistic theories that seek to tame and accommodate a fearful and joyful encounter with God. This personal knowledge of God as experienced initially within Methodism was not some generic knowledge of God but knowledge of God evoked by encounter with Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. It was knowledge tied to the name of God identified as the Holy Trinity. This is the very core of Christianity as developed by Wesley within Methodism. The proof for this, should it be needed, is to be found in the extraordinary combination of piety and doctrine developed within Charles Wesley's hymns, a standing monument to the heartbeat of Methodism.

Clearly one way to operate on the other side of such knowledge is to try to cut it lose from its original moorings in the tradition of the church. This is the way of liberal Protestantism. The agenda is to go below the surface to the experience and then rethematize and reform the tradition to meet the intellectual and moral challenges of each new generation. Many Methodists tried this attractive experiment over the last hundred years and more. Whatever the gains of this trial, it has run its course, only surviving where there are enough traditional evangelists to bring folk to faith in the first place. Theological liberalism is essentially a home for intellectually disillusioned evangelicals and fundamentalists. Both parents and offspring are addicted to epistemology. The challenge is to transcend epistemology and then to let epistemology fall back naturally into its place in human existence. This is a radical revolution of reversal. Confessional and canonical commit-
ment are distinguished and separated out from epistemological commitment.

The radical reversal begins by insisting afresh on robust, concrete media of living faith incorporated in liturgy, scripture, saints, martyrs, sacraments, teachers, icons, creed, and the like. Just as we encounter human agents through their actions mediated through physics and chemistry, we likewise encounter God in concrete phenomena like creation, scripture, prayer, sacrament, conscience, singing, fellowship, preaching, and holy conversation. If these fail us spiritually, we are in the dark and nothing can save us. We become empty wine bottles. Tradition is a name we give to the networks of materials, persons, and practices that function soteriologically. Rather than cut back on the moorings, the challenge is to retrieve the old ones and invent new ones. The retrievalist half of this challenge calls for a complete rereading of the early history of Christianity; the inventive half of this challenge calls for sustained attention to the despised offspring of Methodism known as Pentecostalism (on the Pentecostal dimension of Methodism, see Lyall and Schubert (2005) on the Chinese Methodist, John Sung). Put the two halves together and we get an agenda for the renewal of the church today.

Notice here that this resists the move to make tradition into an epistemological category. What is handed over is a network of materials, practices, and persons in a community that dares to say that God can be encountered and salvation can be found here and now. This is offered in faith with lots of promises and testimony but with no epistemological guarantees, with no officially canonized theories of knowledge or proposals about authority. “Taste and see that the Lord is good,” is the motto. In this way of handing over the faith, we recapitulate the development of the canonical heritage of the early Church. Deeply revisionist historical work is needed at this point to bring out the way in which the materials, practices, and persons of the Church were transmuted into items of epistemology that then became the site of endless debate and alienated us from the media of divine encounter and manifestation (see Abraham 1998). The very terms scripture and tradition were recast as criteria of justification to show how right we were in the face of those who disagreed with us. Theories of authority, of biblical and papal infallibility, are the necessary accoutrements of this tragic transposition of the inner life of the Church. Happily, God has mercy upon us and still meets us even in the media that we have turned inside-out and upside-down. Speaking humorously, we can lend God a hand by putting first things first and reversing this whole way of thinking and acting.

What has all this to do with life in the modern university or with our vision of education? From the days of Wesley, Methodists have been committed to living and dying in the world as we find it. To know this world we need all the resources that university education can supply. We are a people who think and let think. We insist on being open to truth wherever we may find it. Hence, if we stay with the dialectic between tradition and relevance, we are decidedly in favor of relevance. Because of our initial minority status and the sustained (and often violent) opposition of the establishment, our relationship to the great tradition of the church has been relatively robust, especially in the early years, but it has also been conditional. If the tradition and our theories about it get in the way of converting and redeeming the world, then the default position has been to abandon or to change the tradition. In this sense, we have been liberal, progressive, and revisionist. Playing out this default position over two centuries has left us scrambling anew to make sure we do not lose the first half of the dialectic, namely, the core of the tradition that made us what we were. It is that side of the conversation that now requires attention. With the failure of the ecumenical movement and with our collapse into interest groups, caucuses, and renewal movements, we are now at a point where we have to ask again: Who are we? and How do we preserve such treasures as we possess?
are the burning issues below the surface that are being formulated behind closed doors.

The implications of this analysis for university education are as follows. First, we need a deep recovery of nerve in Methodist theology. We require what Professor John Webster (1998), in an Anglican context, has called “theological theology,” that is, theology that is unapologetic about exploring the nature of God as encountered in the life of faith within the great canonical heritage of the Church as received within Methodist. In a way, this is nothing new. It is in an obvious sense a recovery of “faith seeking understanding.” The emphasis falls, however, at this point in our history on faith, and it is faith both as living faith in God and faith as the great heritage of the church as refracted through Methodism. Without this faith we have nothing to bring to the table in the exploration between faith and the contemporary world.

Second, given that we want to understand all of creation in the light of faith, we need every tool and discipline we can muster to make sure that we understand all of creation and history as they really are. This is not to offer blank checks to every non-theological discipline to fill in with anything its heart desires. Such non-theological work has at least two constraints: first, there is the formal constraint of truth; and second, there is the material constraint of whatever truth theology brings to the conversation. This argument assumes that understanding is linked to truth, and that theology has truth to offer. It also assumes that in coming to faith we cross over a threshold into a new world of divine revelation that has the potential to illuminate everything.

Third, it is obvious that these are controversial claims that will be resisted in the academy for a host of reasons. We should expect turmoil and trouble if we proceed down this road. However, life in the academy is much the same as we find it elsewhere: it is more often than not marked by conflict, competition, power struggles, cognitive dissonance, turf wars, and strife. Truth of any sort is a hard-won achievement wrung from unending dispute and debate. So this proposal is offered as an asset, not as a liability. The challenge is to make sure that we do not allow this empirical reality to displace a wholehearted commitment to intellectual virtue as the heartbeat of all education.

Fourth, given the secularization of mainline Protestant colleges and universities, implementing this kind of proposal will require creativity and money (see Cuninggim 1994). We need intra-university programs and centers to bring together persons of all religious faiths (and sympathetic secularists) so that they can pursue their specialist inquiries in the light of their deepest convictions and insights. In this arena, thoroughly robust forms of faith (including Methodist forms) must be empowered to find their voice in the wider arena of scholarship. Thus the narrowness and intolerance inescapable in university life can be both exploited and countered for the sake of inquiry as a whole.

Fifth, and finally, given that in all of this work epistemological inquiry is inescapable, we need to ensure that appropriate philosophical expertise is on hand. The debate about the relation between tradition and change is in crucial moments an epistemological debate. It requires careful reflection (both historical and normative), for example, on the relation between revelation and reason or between tradition and divine inspiration. This is not to suggest that philosophy should be some sort of primary or privileged discipline. My claim is more modest: epistemological questions demand and deserve epistemological attention.

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Notes
1. The term mystic, is, of course, a thoroughly contested designation. Mysticism, as has often been observed, has been out late at night and has kept some very bad company. Wesley was well aware of this and aggressively rejected some of the forms of mysticism that came his way, especially in the middle of the 1730s. He was especially uneasy with the love of solitude, the rejection of means of grace, and aversion to works. However, he shifted his ground over the years. Technically Wesley would appear to fall within the cat-
egory of cataphatic mysticism. For an exceptionally good discussion, see Orcibal 1965.

2. Wesley himself gives various summaries of his legacy in his many treatments of Methodism. See for example his “On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel,” “A Short History of Methodism,” “The Character of a Methodist,” “The Principles of a Methodist,” “Thoughts upon Methodism,” and “A Short History of the People Called Methodists.”

3. Throughout this paper I shall refer to the heirs of Wesley and Methodism as simply Methodists. There is no agreed designation but this one has the merit of long historical precedent despite its absence in North America in the last generation. It also fits with Wesley’s own clear preference. I shall speak unapologetically for the version of Methodism I know best.

4. This is not to say that we did not also turn it at times into a deadening bureaucracy, a middle class club, a scheme for revival, an activist political movement, a foretaste of speculative metaphysics, and the like. Here I want to focus on what happened to us intellectually.

Bibliography


sympathy for you-know-who?

J. D. Buhl

It was a good sign that the first song from the Rolling Stones' new album *A Bigger Bang* to cause a stir was one of political content. Under the headline “Jagger: Song not anti-Bush,” an Associated Press story prior to release quoted “Sweet Neo-Con”:

You call yourself a Christian
I think that you’re a hypocrite
You say you are a patriot
I think that you’re a crock of s--t!

Artless as the attack may be, it is a relief to encounter Mick the social critic—he of the caustic, castigating voice—rather than Mick the sexual predator, even if only for one song.

Such lyrics as these get buried on albums this size (sixteen tracks, sixty-five minutes). They feel like an obligatory bit of spleen, expected of a world figure with an attitude. “It is certainly very critical of certain policies of the administration,” Jagger admits, “but so what! Lots of people are critical.” But few are critical the way Jagger can be. Calling his lyrics “social criticism” is like calling a slasher flick “cinema of dissent.”

There was a time when this lurid voice dominated Rolling Stones albums. It is prevalent on the band's most political albums, *Undercover* and *Dirty Work*, both made in the 1980s. The videos for songs like “Too Much Blood” and “Undercover of the Night” feature bloody images of crime, corruption, death squads, and torture, with the threat of more violence in every pumping hip and slashing guitar. Jagger’s way with both righteous anger and bored ambivalence makes sure everyone is implicated. Who killed the Kennedy’s? Well after all, it was you and me.

What many must find offensive about the old rocker is not his overstated sexuality, but exactly this sense of entitlement: Jagger the finger-wagging gadfly who lacks Socrates’ love of wisdom but sure can dance. Always the observer, Jagger exudes a cool that suggests he of all entertainers is above the usual corrupting contradictions—he’s got greater contradictions of his own. “Street Fighting Man” appeared to be a rallying cry, but, as demonstrated most memorably by his pitiful attempts at calming his “babies” in the Altamont crowd (caught on film in *Gimme Shelter*), Jagger is in fact the last performer to rally anyone. When people join up fists-in-the-air at a Stones concert, it is in celebration of the kick and swagger of the ne'er do well, not of the ideological thrust and discipline of the revolutionary.

Still, Jagger continues to try to place the Stones at the center of the world’s concerns. The first Gulf War brought us “Highwire,” a topical single attached to 1991’s *Flashpoint*. It flopped, but the song’s lamentations over “hot guns and cold, cold nights” approximate the same mix of futility and empathy found in Bruce Springsteen’s current “Devils and Dust.” In an excellent new blues song on *Bigger Bang*, Jagger finds himself where love and misery are “jammin’ side by side.” He considers “Goyas and paranoias” in response to a street-corner preacher:

He says there’s trouble
Trouble’s a comin’
I can read it like the back of my hand

The most moving moments on any Stones recording come when Jagger breaches his boundaries of irony and sleaze to join the rest of us in life’s trials, acting like he really cares about the woman who’s leaving him or the spiritual hunger that gnaws at his soul. While empathy seems beyond him, Jagger fakes compassion convincingly. You always get the feeling he’s trying.

The last time the Stones toured an album of new material—*Bridges to Babylon* in 1997—the ugly political voice was less in evidence. Instead, the lyrics of religious and personal maturity made it to the stage and the inevitable live album. “Saint
of Me" found Jagger coming to grips with his church upbringing, while still defining himself against it. "Out of Control" was his first truly honest appraisal of his past and present selves.

Jagger then introduced Christian and other religious themes into his most recent solo album, *Goddess in the Doorway*. His duet with Bono on "Joy" left memorable images of Jesus lighting a cigarette and casting a wary eye on today's world. But Jagger hasn't Bono's sincerity, nor does he command the trust enjoyed by U2's front man.

Bono has said that artists like Jagger are "much more dangerous men as they get older. They know their way around the world, and they have more to say." They are also more inconsistent. With all the knight ing going on, it is easy to see the whole of British pop as merely a bivouac and never the front lines of an ongoing movement. And in the dilemma between life-for-one self or life-for-others, Jagger clearly has chosen the former.

*A Bigger Bang* is an explosive album full of heartbroken ballads and glistening pledges of love, but for one brilliant moment the blood-splasher is back. Only His Ugliness Sir Mick could sneer "It's liberty for all, democracy's our style, unless you are against us, then it's prison without trial." Yes, Green Day could sing it, or someone on the folk scene, but only the Stones could get such sentiments heard. In the mounting battle between the new Christendom and an emerging Christian left, Mick Jagger would seem an unlikely ally. But somebody has to say it, and it may as well be someone with perfect diction and the world's greatest drummer behind him.

However, this is the stance where Jagger seems most unaware of his ineffectualness, where he is often most vulnerable and pitiable. In a recent interview with British rock magazine *Q*, Jagger's partner Keith Richards responded sadly when reminded of the band's 1960s image, one of seething non-conformism and sexual menace. "I know," he said. "But that's when you realize how tragic governments are. Why are they scared of four guitar players? Society is so fragile."

Wouldn't it be nice if society in all its fragility—and governments especially—could still be given pause by four guitar players? But the sweet neo-cons in Washington will hardly be quaking in their Guccis when the Rolling Stones come to town.

This is because their entrance is being financed by Ameriquest, the notorious mortgage company settling suits left and right for exploiting low-income and elderly borrowers in the name of the American Dream. According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Ameriquest's top executive, Roland Arnall—a billionaire ranked No. 106 in *Forbes* magazine's 2004 list of the wealthiest Americans—has been one of President Bush's top fundraisers, generating $12 million for his political efforts during the past four years. Sweet, indeed. Once again, the band that started corporate sponsorship of rock tours has, rather like the church, aligned itself with money and power.

And its friends have been turning out in legion to celebrate the death of rock as anything beyond spectacle. The Bigger Bang tour began last year with Arnall donating a few $100,000 opportunities to go "yeah, yeah, yeah, woo!" with neo-con Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in his luxury box in Boston. As it continues across the States through March, fans like Kelli of Charlestown, Indiana, are sure to get their ya-ya's out:

Ameriquest inflated our house appraisal value so bad that we have no equity and owe more than it's worth. They lied about our employment, saying I was a 401k investor, when in fact I had been at the same nursing home for 9 years with a monthly income of $1500. They wrote I made $6000 a month.

Damages: In debt-settlement program, considering bankruptcy, being sued by 3 credit card companies, losing the house that has been in my family since 1962. Very depressed (complaint filed against Ameriquest at ConsumerAffairs.com on 18 May, 2005)

Like the tour slogan says, "Anything else is just a concert."

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The Passion of the Christ—American Easter

Conrad Ostwalt

Two years ago on Ash Wednesday, Mel Gibson’s The Passion of the Christ opened for American movie audiences to resounding success. Churches rented movie theaters and packed the seats like pews on revival night. Many moviegoers attended not for entertainment but for a ritualistic remembering of Christ’s Passion. A remarkable film in many respects, Gibson’s movie was variously exalted for bringing the story of Christ’s suffering to film in all its brutal reality, excoriated for being anti-Semitic, praised for its faithfulness to the Bible, and critiqued for taking great liberties with the biblical text. The theology of the film was debated, and its violence engendered controversy. By the end of 2004, The Passion of the Christ was the third highest grossing film of the year. The Passion of the Christ is an important film for all the reasons cited above, but even more so because it brings into sharp focus the co-dependent relationship between religious and popular culture in America.

The fact that conservative Christians flocked to movie houses to view an R-rated film that looked much like the same Hollywood entertainment that religious groups often critique for excessive violence clues us in to the co-dependency between religious and popular culture in America. American popular culture and religious culture interact in dynamic ways, such that the boundaries between sacred and secular culture become flexible and permeable. Secular media, like popular film, television, and literature, promote and contain obvious or implied religious content. For example, The Passion of the Christ, the television show Lost, and the Left Behind series of popular, apocalyptic novels all are popular cultural products that carry explicit religious messages. At the same time, religious institutions use secular forms to promote theological messages and worship practices, using contemporary musical forms, computer technology, and sophisticated films in worship settings offering everything from aerobics classes to child daycare within the walls of the church (see Ostwalt, Secular Steeples, Trinity, 2003). Gibson’s film highlights this contemporary co-dependency between the sacred and the secular and is worth revisiting two years after its release to ask what it tells us about our culture—not about theology per se, but about American myths and beliefs.

In the first place, it is apparent that many Christians watched and admired the film because of its seeming veracity and faithfulness to the biblical Passion story. And in outward form, the film contains enough of the gospel Passion narratives to be recognizable to most people familiar with the broad outlines of the story. However, its plot is unmistakably informed by the ritualistic Stations of the Cross, a plot structure lost to many Protestant viewers. And one of Gibson’s important sources for the film’s focus on suffering was Sister Anne Emmerich’s Dolorous Passion (1833), not to mention his own traditional Catholic faith. All of this, in addition to the incredible visual effects, make this a very rich film. Gibson’s film employs multiple understandings for the sacred story of Christ’s suffering and brings the Passion into sharp visual focus in a way never before accomplished in film. Perhaps because our culture is becoming less textual and more visual, the film virtually supplants the gospel narrative in its effectiveness. Thus, its graphic and visual nature make it more real than the text for contemporary culture. A popular cultural product displaces the sacred narrative it is meant to depict.

And so it is with much of American popular culture—films, books, music, and even sporting events are saturated with religion in America and create religious messages. The lines between sacred and secular have become so blurred that we often cannot distinguish with any critical sophistication which is which and what is what.
Viewing *The Passion of the Christ* becomes a ritualistic activity, while some major American churches cancel Sunday rituals on Christmas Day in deference to the family. The secular functions religiously, and the sacred defers to secular Christmas. Many Americans receive religious tutelage and moral instruction from popular culture as well as from houses of worship.

In *The Passion of the Christ*, Gibson gives us a look at American Easter. The film captures a particular emphasis of the Passion narrative, namely Christ's suffering, and relegates the resurrection to a supporting role. After a long and intense depiction of Christ's scourging, agonizing walk to Golgotha, and crucifixion, the film gives us hardly a glimpse of the resurrection, indeed just enough to hint at a sequel, perhaps an apocalyptic sequel of equal violence and graphic suffering. So while Gibson's film may be an Easter story, it is not a resurrection story, but rather one of suffering, "redemptive suffering." Gibson's Christ is not primarily one who conquers death, but rather one who endures suffering, unwarranted but righteous suffering in the service of redeeming humankind. And although this is part of the Christian narrative, it is magnified to the point of eclipsing any other aspect of the Easter story. Thus, Gibson's film gives us a particular kind of Passion play, a passion of suffering, violence, and bodily mutilation, and in doing so situates the Christian Passion narrative in a way that can be acceptable in the context of American cultural myths and paradigms.

Indeed, the theme of suffering is to be found everywhere in the movies we watch; from *Shawshank Redemption* to *Braveheart*, many popular movies have at their heart an exploration or glorification of redemptive suffering. Films with and without religious overtones reenact the myth of heroic suffering in which heroes willingly endure pain and sacrifice for the good of all. This American myth has informed a work ethic, a war ethic, a political ethic, a civil religion, and, perhaps, even cultural racism. Redemption, salvation, and justice are bought by the sacrifices and suffering of our heroes, suffering that visual media can bring to life through special effects and graphics.

Gibson gives us an American Christ in his *Passion* (see Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003). This Christ boldly and willingly accepts the scourging, the sadistic torture, the hideous execution. He bears it courageously and with stoic determination as his flesh is pulverized from merciless blows from Roman guards. He endures pain as the boyhood heroes of my youth endured torture: without fear, without failure, without breaking, but with dignity even unto death. By situating the graphic torture of the Passion narrative at center stage, Gibson has cast the Christian story to appeal to an American audience, and his Passion story is ingeniously positioned for contemporary American popular and religious culture. It plays to popular audiences because Christ embodies the myth of cultural heroism; it plays to certain religious audiences because it reinforces visually and with great effectiveness the suffering of Christ that is central to the Passion story. In this sense, the graphic nature of the movie produces a cultural communion for the secular audience and a visual Eucharist for the faithful. And in reaching one audience, it speaks to the other, and the co-dependency continues.

Could this be the real reason why *The Passion of the Christ* was embraced by the evangelical community in America while another Passion story, *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988) was rejected and boycotted by conservative Christians? Martin Scorsese's film, based on the novel of the same name by Nikos Kazantzakis, portrays a Christ whose last temptation is avoiding the cross and enjoying a normal life of family happiness. While not giving in to this vision, the Christ of Kazantzakis is weak in comparison to Gibson's. He waffles and vacillates rather than pulling himself up off the scourging floor as Gibson's Christ does, ready for more torture. Gibson's Christ taps a heroic archetype and embodies the American mythic hero, while Scorsese gives us a Christ who, while more human in his misgivings and fears, is less heroic in his suffering.

*The Passion of the Christ* demonstrates how culture and religion interact on many different levels. With it we see a secular medium of entertainment perform a ritualistic and religious function. And with Gibson's depiction of Christ, we see a film present and glorify a cultural Christ, a Jesus tortured and crucified as much by cultural myth as Roman guards. As an Easter and religious film,
The Passion of the Christ will remain important, functioning more effectively than any Passion play or presentation in memory. But it functions in a certain way, with a certain nod to culture and with a certain theological slant. And as a result, as a film highlighting the intersection of cultural and popular religious belief, The Passion of the Christ will become a classic.

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AFTER HERBERT'S "EASTER WINGS"
(for Pat)

They arc into flight, wingspread of words
tough to wrestle, sinewy muscles
flexing beneath their down.
Two pairs of outstretched arms,
two stanzas rippling off the page,
a catch in the breath: there is no need for more.

So many poems you taught us,
the classroom churning with our unspent lives. What did we know of passion, loss,
or death? Last March when your letter came,
your signature stood bold as God's writing
on my brow, clear of old silt and snow.
Did you guess how glad you made me?
I might have walked beside you over thin ice,
testing the early spring. We would meet
in New York; we would meet in a foreign city.
It would not be too late.

Instead, you died. Each night, uncurling Dad's clenched fingers in the home, I press a cup against his palm and think: "There is no way to answer you." I comb the words you chose with care, hearing in their cadence your remembered voice, wondering if you knew what was going to happen. Were you hoping we would write again, both of us easing into our second wind? The pattern of your hand still rests across the paper, as if it folds on mine. Letter by curving letter, a field of bright lilies under your wing.

Diane G. Scholl
An authoritative local historian once made me promise always to walk the ground, and I have tried to keep the promise ever since. Whenever I do, I am amazed at what I can find.

Mrs. Elizabeth Morgan and I were, when she said this to me, on the site of a nineteenth-century industrial settlement in the New Jersey Pine Barrens, an extraordinary wilderness not sixty miles from Manhattan into which few people ever knowingly travel. Indeed, there were far more people living in the Pine Barrens and exploiting its resources a hundred years ago or a hundred and fifty years ago than live there now. Throughout the “Pines,” as the natives call the region, you come upon signs of their presence like those of a lost civilization. And, indeed, how many twenty-first century people will be able to understand artifacts from the curious, hot, dirty and highly skilled profession of charcoal-burner or that of bog-iron founder? Their tools and procedures are almost as strange and distant to us as is mummification, and probably not as well known.

Among local historians there is always the (highly understandable) urge to do one better than the next fellow, to elevate the beloved village into a might-have-been New York, when it is manifestly not even as lively as a single street-front of the Lower East Side. Mrs. Morgan was especially irritated that morning by a friend who recently had claimed that this site in the Pines had once been a town of some twelve thousand inhabitants. It was clear simply by looking about that this narrow peninsula of sandy land in between two bogs could not possibly have held that many people. This, said Mrs. Morgan with grim vehemence, was what happened when people wrote articles based on flawed deductive reasoning from a few scraps in the archives. “You must always walk the ground, Albert,” she said.

I think of that admonition often. In Oxford, England, walking allows you to understand what a medieval city was like simply because of the size of its walls. You understand the limitations and rhythms of medieval urban life. There is no division between public and private space, perhaps simply because there is so little space. All actions take place in a small arena in which everyone else is a spectator. Despite the distance of many centuries, one can understand the rhythms of medieval life because of the limitations of the space: the short distance to the market from any single house in Oxford; the shorter distance to any church; and the easy passage beyond the confining walls to the fields beyond. Nothing can be said about a medieval town that cannot be better learned through walking around modern Oxford.

Williamsburg, Virginia, is another place that explains the past by walking. I often have walked through it in stifling heat and would rather forget most of those experiences, but what sticks with me the most is a visit in December several years ago. What someone from the twenty-first century notices most about Williamsburg on a cold winter night is the profound darkness. Candles and baskets of blazing pine kindling are all very quaint, but they hardly provide the illumination to which we have grown accustomed. The Dark Ages did not end until gas lighting, and probably until Edison. The senses are, moreover, further bombarded with silence. True, there are not nearly enough horses or carriages passing by on the streets. Williamsburg in the eighteenth century must have had far more. Yet it has none of the familiar noises of the modern city. It is a profoundly alien place.

As I drive occasionally from Charlottesville, Virginia, to Williamsburg and back again, I realize that I am not walking but actually driving ground. In two hours, I travel 150 years of history. Beginning in Williamsburg on a summer evening,
I start at the Mesopotamia of American civilization. This is where the English settlers first arrived and where the British Empire really began; this is where the First British Empire ended, at Yorktown; and this is the site of numerous other events crucial to the history of the United States, including battles of the Civil War. From this peninsula, I travel temporally forward from Jamestown, and geographically upwards. At Richmond, I cross the Fall Line, the head of navigation of the rivers of the Mid-Atlantic, where the tides pushed upriver from the Atlantic meet the rocks deposited by the last glaciers. The soil changes there from the sand of the coastal plain to the red, rocky clay of the Piedmont. With the change of soil comes changes in trees, and with the different soils and plants comes—believe it or not—a different smell. Within a few miles, the ground begins to fold into hollows and hills. Finally, you come over a hill in the center of the Virginia Piedmont, and off in the distance are the Blue Ridge Mountains, shrouded in their eternal haze even when backlit by a peach sunset. In two hours, I have traveled the paths of decades of settlement.

I cannot say that I have learned anything from this in a cognitive sense. My lessons from that drive are not ones of rational thought. They are emotional or affective. They begin as impressions in the far reaches of my senses and slowly (if at all) work upon my thoughts. Yet no amount of reading can replace those faint impressions, nor produce such lasting results. I know something of Virginia in a deep and personal way. It is now a sort of acquaintance. Emotional understanding has shaped my cognitive knowledge.

This seems to me to be a profoundly Christian way of knowing the past. To walk the ground means to be embodied in that place. It means recognizing that you can understand a place only through your incarnate presence. This gives dignity to the scholar's body, not just the scholar's mind. The cognitive deliberations that come from the scholar actually have a body.

Graduate students and other novice scholars are often tempted to believe that they are engaged in a process that will result in the disembodiment and consequent perfection of their intelligence. Walking the ground is a salutary exercise against such a twisted conception of creation. It is, I find, a sort of spiritual discipline for the Christian historian.

Al Zambone lives deep in the heart of Virginia.
It is about 4:00 a.m. The power is off. I can’t get my sleep apnea machine to work, and it is so dark because the nightlight is off. It takes a while for my sleep-addled brain to make the connection that both these appliances are not broken by coincidence.

I go back to sleep.

It is 5:00 a.m. I am awakened by the sound of “guy-guys” (my three year old’s term for anyone who wears a helmet while working) speaking on their walkie-talkies in the backyard.

That I slept through the storm that toppled my next door neighbor’s seventy year old silver maple tree is a surprise to most people who hear this story. What can I say? I’ve got a hearing loss; I’m a sound sleeper; I have a clear conscience.

Four years ago, our power was knocked out for three and a half days by the last “storm of the century.” This storm wasn’t as bad. The guy-guys were on the scene in about two hours, talking into their handsets, swearing (especially the one on the utility pole) and trashing the garden that my wife has worked so hard on in the past few weeks.

It is Sunday morning, and we are off to a bad start. Mary and David have been up since the height of the storm, about 2:00 a.m. Peter, our older boy, inherited his dad’s imperturbability and has slept through everything.

At 6:30 a.m. Mary announces we are going to Perkins for breakfast. Perkins has become our family restaurant of choice this spring, but I suggest that we go to The American Table instead. It’s much closer to our home, just a few blocks from church. It’s locally-owned and serves the same sorts of breakfasts that Perkins does for the same price.

About 7:00 a.m., we arrive at the restaurant, needing coffee and the support of the community. Cindy is our waitress, and she is perfect. She guides us to the deals that will feed our boys for the least amount of money. She keeps my coffee cup full and even finds my wife some cranberry juice. She heard the storm but didn’t know that anyone had lost power.

I walk the remaining three blocks to church from the restaurant. There’s been no damage from the storm at church and the power has stayed on. This is a relief, because I won’t have to reset the church’s insecurity system. I have never been able to do this without accidentally summoning the police.

Elaine and Betty are setting up for coffee hour. Tomorrow is their mutual birthday. I instruct them to answer, “None of your damn business!” whenever someone asks them how old they are. Betty, a new member, pretends to be shocked at this counsel. It prods Elaine to tell me a mildly racy joke about a couple who pretend to be married. “Get your own damn blanket!” is the punch line.

As we close the service, everyone sings, “I have heard you calling in the night...” This line makes me laugh so hard I stop singing. “God’s going to have to do a lot better than that thunderstorm last night if He wants to get my attention,” I think to myself.

After worship, Marilyn asks how David is. His earache interrupted yesterday’s quilt meeting. “Fill that boy with enough Tylenol, and he’s good to go!” I respond.

Nick, the adolescent member of my air-band, tells me that he returned to the library the CD from last month’s performance a few days overdue. I tell him I can write off the fine as a business expense.

“I knew you’d have an angle, Pastor Tom!”

After worship and coffee hour (it is a strange array of treats honoring the birthday women at coffee hour: circus peanuts, cheese curds, Jell-o bricks, nuts, crackers, fruit spread), the congregation gathers to hear about the application for a sabbatical grant that we will submit in the coming week. I hope to explore the emerging field of New Urbanism and its implications for a church like ours that has chosen to stay downtown. The congregation is enthusiastic. One woman says that we
need to live into our new mission statement: Ministry from the Heart of Oshkosh, serving with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love. I’ve enjoyed the whole process of dreaming about what I would do, given three months away from work and up to $45,000.

On my one-mile walk home from church, I encounter only one person on the street, a realtor getting ready for an open house. I wish him luck.

After we survey the damage done by the storm (none) and the guy-guys (less than we first feared) and move the downed limbs off the grass, I decide to clean the gutters. I love cleaning the gutters. I have the clearest gutters in Winnebago County. You can’t keep me off my extension ladder when there might be blockage in my gutters. Luckily, the storm has blown down all the maple seeds, so I have a legitimate reason to climb my ladder.

As I’m on the ladder the chainsaw symphony starts. Many people on our block are out cutting big branches into smaller branches. Brian, the man who lives across the fence, is one of them. Brian is a good neighbor. He throws back the balls our sons hit over the fence. Today, for the first time, we learn his name, because the storm has brought us out, working on a common project.

While I’ve got my ladder out and I’m feeling community-minded, I walk down the street to the home for four developmentally-delayed women. City planners call their residence a LULU, for “locally undesirable land use,” I have to disagree with this characterization. When my boys and I walk the three blocks to the park to play ball, if we encounter anyone on the street, it’s one of these ladies. We always exchange pleasantries. One afternoon, the lady with the white hair asked if I could help with the zipper on her sweater. I’m a dad; it’s what I do! Not only did she get her sweater on properly, but I got to feel like a helpful good citizen and my sons saw that strangers trust dad and dad helps strangers.

I walk to the LULU and ring the bell. The ladies lurk in the living room until the resident helper answers the door.

“May I clean your gutters?” I ask.

“Uh...if you want to...”

“I do, thanks!”

Frederick Buechner has said that one’s vocation is “the place where our deep gladness meets the needs of the world.” For me, that is at the top of my extension ladder. For more than a year, I’ve noticed the rotting leaves in the valley of the LULU’s roof. I’ve noticed the leaves and maple seeds peaking out over the sides of the eavestroughs, and I’ve considered walking down the block and offering to clear the gutters. I’m glad I did. The gutter on the back of the house was clogged and filled with stagnant water. A quick application of my metal spoon and a forsythia twig releases a torrent of water onto the grass. The ladies are delighted!

After returning home I spot my neighbor two doors down the other way. We had bonded four years ago cleaning up after the last big storm. It was like a snow day in June. He couldn’t write his article because his computer needs electricity, so we spent the morning hauling branches to the curb and helping our neighbors do the same. The day after the storm was the high point of our friendship. We see each other regularly but never take each other up on invitations to get together.

Don is amazed that I slept through the storm. “I wanna be you in my next life!”

I’m thinking that’s a compliment.

It seems that every one of these encounters says something about community: the rich, thick community relationships I have formed with the members of my congregation; the professional relationship Cindy offered us as she served our omelets and waffles; the casual, haphazard relationships that form among neighbors; relationships that are strengthened, even nurtured by storms and adversity. Thinking about my neighbor ladies, I can’t think of a single “undesirable” thing about having them live on my block. They’re friendlier than anyone else. They are the only people we see on most of our trips to the park. They are kind to me and my boys. They accept our help and don’t even really ask for it. They even let me discover my true vocation.

Ten feet off the ground, up to my wrists in muck I recognize my place in the community. The joy I feel in being able to help is their gift to me.

The Reverend Thomas C. Willadsen pastors First Presbyterian Church in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.
being lutheran
the church of the transition

David Weber

"HE CONVERTED TO LUTHERANISM?" THIS WAS MY RESPONSE ON LEARNING THAT A THEOLOGY PROFESSOR (AT A NON-LUTHERAN INSTITUTION) RECENTLY HAD BECOME A LUTHERAN. I WAS INCREDULOUS, BECAUSE I AM MORE ACCUSTOMED TO PEOPLE LEAVING LUTHERANISM. THERE ARE, OF COURSE, THE NOTABLE EXAMPLES OF RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS, JARASLOV PELIKAN, AND, MOST RECENTLY, THE DUKE DIVINITY SCHOOL PROFESSOR, REINHARD HUTTER. CLOSER TO HOME ARE THE MEMBERS OF MY FAMILY WHO WERE RAISED LUTHERAN, AND WHO NOW HAVE BECOME VERY ACTIVE IN THEIR RESPECTIVE PRESBYTERIAN, BAPTIST, EPISCOPALIAN, AND PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES. WANTING TO KNOW MORE, I ASKED THIS NEW LUTHERAN FOR AN EXPLANATION. HIS RESPONSE, IN PART, GOES LIKE THIS:

"WE HAD BEEN DISCIPLES OF CHRIST... (BUT) I WAS NEVER REALLY AT HOME (AND) WE JUST DIDN'T KNOW WHERE TO GO. MY WIFE WAS RAISED CATHOLIC, AND DID NOT WANT, AT THAT TIME, TO RETURN TO ROME; I WANTED A CHURCH WITH MORE TRADITION, MORE RITUAL, MORE MYSTERY, BUT WASN'T READY TO CONSIDER ROME EITHER. EPISCOPALIANISM FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS NEVER MUCH APPEALED TO ME... SO THAT LEFT THE LUTHERANS... WE VISITED, AND IT WAS HARD AT FIRST, BECAUSE IT WAS A BIT "COLDER" THAN THE LOW CHURCH ATMOSPHERE I AM USED TO, AND IT WAS LIKE VISITING SOMEBODY ELSE'S FAMILY REUNION AT TIMES! BUT THE LITURGY IS RICH, THE SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM WAS BIBLICAL AND WELL ORGANIZED AND WELL TAUGHT, AND THE HYMNS ARE GREAT; AND I LOVE GOING TO THE ALTAR FOR COMMUNION, THAT WAS SO NEW TO ME, IT WAS GOOD FOR ME TO GET DOWN ON BENDED KNEES."

"WAY TO GO!" THOUGHT I. FINALLY SOMEONE WHO RECOGNIZES WHAT IS SPIRITUALLY GOOD ABOUT THE LITURGY, SACRAMENTAL FOCUS, MUSIC, AND TRADITION OF BIBLICAL EDUCATION IN LUTHERANISM. RETURNING TO THE LETTER, A BIT UPLIFTED, I CONTINUED, "BUT ALAS, I MUST TELL YOU THAT I LOOKED AT JOINING THE LUTHERAN CHURCH (THREE YEARS AGO) AS A STEPPING STONE TOWARD ROME, AND NOW THAT I AM USED TO THE LITURGY AND HAVE OVERCOME SOME OF MY LOW CHURCH BIASES AGAINST FORMAL WORSHIP, I THINK WE ARE STARTING TO MOVE IN THE ROMAN DIRECTION!!" SO THIS IS WHAT LUTHERANISM HAS BECOME IN THE CURRENT MIGRATION BETWEEN DENOMINATIONS. WE ARE NOT SO MUCH THE CHURCH OF THE REFORMATION AS THE CHURCH OF THE TRANSITION. HOW DID THIS COME ABOUT?

MAYBE THIS HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH OUR CLAIMING TO BE AN EVANGELICAL-CATHOLIC FAITH. SOME TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, I FIRST HEARD THIS DESCRIPTION FROM THE FORMER VALPARAISO UNIVERSITY THEOLOGY PROFESSOR, KENNETH KORBY. HE SAID THAT LUTHERANS WERE CATHOLIC IN THEIR CONFESSIONS AND SACRAMENTAL, LITURGICAL WORSHIP, AND EVANGELICAL IN THEIR EMPHASIS ON PLACING THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL OVER THE PRESERVATION OF AN INSTITUTION. THIS MADE SENSE OF MUCH OF MY LUTHERAN EXPERIENCE. PERHAPS IN BEING EVANGELICAL-CATHOLIC WE ACTUALLY CAME TO BE SITUATED BETWEEN THE EVANGELICALS AND THE CATHOLICS. THIS MADE SENSE OF THE CRITICISMS I HAD HEARD FROM EVANGELICALS THAT LUTHERANS WERE INDIFFERENT FROM CATHOLICS BECAUSE LUTHER FAILED TO PUSH THE LOGIC OF THE REFORMATION FAR ENOUGH. AND FROM THE ROMAN CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE, I HAD HEARD THAT LUTHERANISM IS CHURCH LITE (WITH HALF AS MANY SACRAMENTS) AND OBLIVIOUS TO THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CHURCH'S TRADITION AND INSTITUTIONS. SO SITUATED, LUTHERANISM MIGHT BE A GOOD PREPARATION FOR BECOMING EVANGELICAL OR CATHOLIC. SO NOW I SEE THAT I SHOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ASKING THE QUESTION, "WHY BECOME LUTHERAN?" BUT ANSWERING THE QUESTION, "WHY BE LUTHERAN?"

TO HELP ME THINK ABOUT THIS QUESTION, I TURNED TO A NEW COLLECTION OF ESSAYS, THE GIFT OF GRACE: THE FUTURE OF LUTHERAN THEOLOGY. THESE ESSAYS WERE FIRST GIVEN AT AN INTERNATIONAL CONVOCATION AT AARHUS UNIVERSITY, DENMARK, TO CONSIDER WHY WORLD LUTHERANISM IS SUFFERING AN IDENTITY CRISIS. THE ESSAYS SUGGESTED VARIOUS CAUSES OF THIS CRISIS, INCLUDING THE SHIFT IN ACADEMIC THEOLOGY FROM GERMAN TO ENGLISH SPEAKING UNIVERSITIES, A TURN FROM DOGMATICS TO ETHICS, AND THE POSSIBILITY THAT
the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification had muddied the distinctions between Lutherans and Catholics.

Some of the essays that caught my interest did not exactly give a rousing affirmation of Lutheranism. For example, the lead essay by Niels Henrik Gregersen, a professor of systematic theology at the University of Denmark, argued that we should not be studying Luther to arrive at solutions to contemporary theological problems. “Not even the doctrine of justification with all its exclusives (sola gratia, sola fide) should be treated as a core of Lutheran theology.” In his opinion, even Luther’s division between law and gospel—although a practically useful distinction—has been elevated to an overarching principle of theological interpretation that turns into the equivalent of dissection in biology. It might give knowledge about faith, but only by killing the thing being studied.

Gregersen says that Lutheran theology can contribute more today by paying attention to the Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth and post-Vatican II Roman Catholic theology rather than by revisiting Luther’s teachings. If being evangelical-catholic means borrowing from helpful thinkers and traditions, it is not a bad place to be.

Robert Jenson, perhaps the foremost North American Lutheran theologian, has focused on Karl Barth and Roman Catholic thinkers. He argues that the Lutheran account of grace tends to suffer from a “Trinitarian deficiency.” The central question for Lutheran theology today is, “How should we characterize God’s grace?” Aiming to make sure God’s grace remains clearly and solely God’s work, Lutherans have developed a standard formulation of grace as “God gives—the human being receives.” This formulation forgets that grace is “the shaping energizer and energy of believers.” And forgetting this, Lutheran theology becomes “experientially empty.”

Grace is sometimes understood as God’s favor and, at other times, as God’s gift. As favor, grace is God’s initiative in bringing us into a new relationship with the Trinity. As gift, God freely gives bankrupt sinners the fullness of his life. So far, so Lutheran. So why the deficiency? Because more needs to be said than the very real truth that God’s favor and gift has ultimately changed our status. Talking about our status does not address the very real concern of our present experience of God’s presence. A way of understanding this distinction between status and experience is in the two ways we talk about aging. The observation “Every day we are all growing older” says something that is true, perhaps important, and utterly dull. The observation, usually made in the morning when looking in the mirror, “I’m getting old” probably expresses a combination of regret and anxiety and usually is followed with a series of commitments to eat less and exercise more. When the truth becomes personal, the prosaic becomes passionate. Jenson points to ways that Lutheran theology can be more experientially focused.

Jenson grants that justification is a pivotal doctrine, but not the most important thing we can say about God. The most important thing we can say is that God is Triune. Overemphasizing justification, Lutherans have failed to pay sufficient attention to the richness of God’s grace in creation, in redemption, and in... You might expect the next word to be “sanctification,” but the word that characterizes the work of the Holy Spirit in these essays is “participation.” We live in the time of the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son, to live in us so that we might live in—that is participate in—the fullness of the life of the Trinity. So why emphasize the term participation?

The concept of “participation” might help Lutherans reclaim an experientially full theology and overcome our Trinitarian deficit. If we really have received God’s fullness, in what sense do we now experience this life as present participants in God’s fullness rather than under the conditions of bankruptcy and emptiness? The German theologian Hermann Deuser suggests that the hesitant Lutheran, Søren Kierkegaard, embodies just such a participatory theology.

I say hesitant because Kierkegaard is known for saying that Luther’s concept of grace lacked “ethical seriousness,” having little to say to our concrete decisions and actions. Criticizing the Danish church he said “it is easier to become a Christian when one is not a Christian than it is when one is already born into Christendom.” Kierkegaard, Deuser points out, had an acute awareness of the dread and despair which fueled his desire for a theology that was equal to the “existential conflicts that have to be lived
It was fine to have a theology of grace that confidently declared the truth about our ultimate fulfillment. What he wanted was a theology of immediacy, where the fullness was experienced while we are in the thick of anxiety and despair. The difference between an ultimate and immediate theology is evident in Kierkegaard's reflection on Abraham. An ultimate theology impatiently leaps to the happy conclusion where God surprisingly supplies the substitute sacrifice. The immediate theology of fullness is equal to the emptiness and despair that Abraham experienced on his way to obediently sacrifice Isaac. For Christians who really experience this same kind of emptiness, an experientially empty theology of grace is intolerable.

A theology of participation confidently expects God's fullness to be equal to our experiences of anxiety and emptiness. It is God who brought Abraham into the emptiness so he, and we, would better understand how this fullness would be manifested, in the fullness of time, when Christ came for our salvation. There is no better example of an experientially full theology of participation than Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Life Together. This book, written as the depth of the horrors of Hitler's Germany were beginning to emerge, confidently claimed that the practice of spending time alone in prayer and reading Scripture would sustain Christian hope, come what may! Bonhoeffer commends this time alone, saying, "There is a wonderful power of clarification, purification, and concentration upon the essential thing in being quiet." No matter how muddled with lies, polluted with brutality, and dis-integrated to the extreme the world would become, Bonhoeffer knew from experience that embedding the dreadfulness of this experience into the life of the Trinity would result in the greater fullness of that cleansing and illumination, which finally leads on to the ultimate integrity.

Has Lutheranism become a transitional tradition? The question is, in a way, unimportant because its focus is on the institutional survival of Lutheranism. We need the (re)discovery of an experientially full theology of grace as performed by Kierkegaard and Bonhoeffer who, for different reasons, gave little thought to the survival of institutional Lutheranism. They aimed instead to articulate how participation in Trinitarian grace was sufficient to transition through personal and political anxiety. If Lutherans can recover what Kierkegaard and Bonhoeffer understood as the beauty and usefulness of a theology of participation, we will be better able to live up to our vocation as the church of the transition. We could do worse.

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PENTECOST

Speaking by the tongues of flowers,
By the ten-tongued laurel speaking.

Emerson

When lilies finish their singing,
old roses resume the tune,
while blackberries well beyond

flowers now, quietly gather
the juices of their dark fruit.
Like bumble bees sluggish

with morning chill that buzz
among blossoms, the mind
listens for a chorus just

this side of silence.

Christian Knoeller
Easter marks the resurrection of Jesus Christ from death and the tomb. It is God's vindication of the Innocent One who suffered, died, and was buried three days earlier. Apparently fearing that the occupying Roman forces might attempt to quell any perceived threats to their rule, Caiaphas, the high priest, demonstrated a bit of consequentialist reasoning: "[I]t is better...to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed" (John 11:50; NRSV). Accordingly, the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, who wished to avoid a riot and who was led to believe that Jesus was a zealous insurrectionist claiming to be king, ordered Jesus' execution by crucifixion. Considered one of the cruelest, most humiliating methods of capital punishment, crucifixion was reserved for slaves who were thieves and for rebels who were not Roman citizens.

Indeed, Jesus was an innocent victim of capital punishment, but Easter does not let those who executed him on Good Friday have the last word. This most important of all Christian holy days affirms that Jesus' life—his deeds and his teachings—offers an alternative way of life that is the true way that God wills for the world. Indeed, this new life in Christ is what we celebrate and thank God for during worship on Sundays throughout the liturgical year. As the late Methodist liturgical historian, James F. White, put it, "Each Sunday testifies to the resurrection. Every Sunday is a little Easter or rather every Easter is a yearly great Sunday." Thus, for early Christians, as seen in the Epistle of Barnabas, Sunday was regarded as "an eighth day, that is the beginning of another world...." The octagonal baptismal font found in many churches symbolizes the genesis of a new way of life. St. Paul wrote, "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Corinthians 5:17)


Tobias Winright

Unfortunately, a quick glance at the daily newspaper—with its reports of violent crime, terrorist attacks, preemptive war, and state executions—calls into question this theological claim. Over two decades ago, I worked for four years as a corrections officer. During this time, I wrestled with this discrepancy between the ways of the old and the new creations. As one of the youngest officers assigned to the large maximum security jail, I often found myself witnessing human nature at its worst. Indeed, there were occasions when I had to dive for cover from hurled excrement, or when I had to defend myself (or others) against attack and possible harm. I have been spit at, yelled at, verbally abused, bruised, and punched. I recall thinking to myself while talking to some alleged murderers who were especially hostile that this person probably would not hesitate to kill me right now if given the chance. But during those years, I also met several others among the accused who were in anguish and who seemed quite penitent about their deeds.

As a Christian, I struggled with the use of force, the perpetual hostility, and the intense anger that often flared in that loud and smelly jail. I also began slowly to question the practice of capital punishment. Although this job probably contributed to a cynical attitude on my part toward people and the way things are in the world, I could not bring myself to embrace the enmity of some of my coworkers who expressed their desire to work as an executioner at the state prison in Starke, Florida, where "Old Sparky," the nickname of the electric chair, was located. While I could not articulate it at the time, perhaps I subconsciously anticipated an observation by Glen H. Stassen that I would read years later: "Christians who remember their Lord was unjustly and cruelly given the death penalty have a hard time being enthusiastic about imposing the death penalty on others." Many Christian ethicists—myself included—are
for a number of theological reasons opposed to capital punishment (reasons that I hopefully address will in a future column). Here I wish to focus on the question of how we respond to the reality that capital punishment is continuing to be imposed on innocent persons today, just as it was imposed on the Innocent One on the cross two millennia ago.

According to the Death Penalty Information Center, the number of executions in the United States has waned in recent years, and citizen support for capital punishment also is diminishing. (See their informative website at http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org). One major reason for this trend is increasing concern about the possibility that innocent persons are being sentenced to death. Since 1973, 123 people (at the time I write this) in twenty-five states have been exonerated and released from death row because of evidence of their innocence. As such cases have received media coverage, more Americans have come to question the institution of capital punishment. In contrast to Caiaphas's method for ethical reasoning, a longstanding saying in American criminal justice is that it is "better that ten guilty men go free than that one innocent man be punished."

The execution of innocent persons is the focus of Sister Helen Prejean's latest book, The Death of Innocents: An Eyewitness Account of Wrongful Executions (Random House, 2005). Nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize numerous times, Sr. Prejean is known for her bestselling book, Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States (Random House, 1993), upon which Tim Robbins's successful motion picture, Dead Man Walking, with Susan Sarandon playing the part of Sister Helen, was based in 1996. As in the first book, Prejean provides a moving account of her experiences accompanying two men to their deaths at the hand of the state. However, unlike Dead Man Walking, in which the two men were guilty of their crimes, The Death of Innocents provides disquieting details related to the conviction and execution of two possibly innocent men.

To be sure, this is one of the main reasons why in recent years several states, such as Illinois, have placed a moratorium on the death penalty. These states are putting executions on hold until solid assurance can be given that no mistakes and no injustices are being made. In addition to these concerns about the possibility of executing innocent persons, there are also statistics that call into question the fairness of the practice of capital punishment—such as racial bias, incompetent legal representation, bias against the poor, and geographic disparities. The jury is also out on whether capital punishment truly serves as a deterrent against violent crime. One wonders if the criminal justice system, a human institution, ever can get to the point where it will not make such mistakes or be fraught with such injustices.

After all, as Prejean noted in her initial book, "Anything that human beings do can go wrong." We and our institutions are finite and often err. I readily admit that I saw and made mistakes when I wore a uniform. Of course, nearly every inmate I met attempted to assure me of his innocence. Most were proven guilty at trial, yet some were found innocent. Mistakes are also made during trials, leading to the conviction of innocent persons. Even more disturbing, as Prejean points out, is that some mistakes may not be quite so accidental or unintentional on the part of law enforcement or prosecutors. As Reinhold Niebuhr was so adept at reminding us, we and our institutions are both finite and prone to sin.

Niebuhr's observation should encourage humility on our part as we pass judgment on the accused. Of course, a capital case is not the occasion for private vengeance by the victims or their loved ones. It is the state's duty to punish justly on behalf of society. However, just as individuals need to "do justice...and to walk humbly" (Micah 6:8), so too ought we to expect societal institutions, such as the criminal justice system, to carry out justice humbly and cautiously. In his An Interpretation of Christian Ethics, Niebuhr wrote, "Society must punish criminals, or at least quarantine them, even if the executors of judgment are self-righteous sinners who do not realize to what degree they are involved in the sins they seek to suppress." I think the "executors of judgment" indeed ought to realize the possibility that "they are involved in the sins they seek to suppress."

Such a realization should give us pause when it comes to capital crimes, especially since we live in a society where violence is often glorified in
film, in video games, and in everyday conflict situations—in a “culture of death” of which Pope John Paul II warned. Niebuhr himself appears to imply that imprisonment (“quarantine them”) would be the more appropriate response to crime. Indeed, later in the same book he observed that capital punishment is “probably ineffective as a deterrent of murder.” However, it should be noted that Niebuhr refused to invoke the principle of the sanctity of life as a reason for abolishing capital punishment. This, he thought, “would result in an ironical preference of the life of the guilty to that of the innocent.” Here is where Niebuhr and Prejean part ways.

Although, like Niebuhr, Prejean raises concerns about the mistakes and sinfulness of society and its institutions, she nevertheless advocates the abolition of the death penalty based on the principle of the sanctity of life and based on her attempts to answer the question of how to embody God’s love both for perpetrator and victim, as well as the families of both. She regards each person, regardless of their guilt or innocence, as imago Dei, the image of God, and as thereby possessing sanctity of life. This is a theological claim not rooted in whether a person deserves or earns God’s favor or our respect. It is a dignity that has been given graciously to each human being by the Creator. This is why the late Pope John Paul II wrote in his 1995 encyclical Evangelium Vitae (The Gospel of Life), “[W]hoever attacks human life, in some way attacks God himself.” Echoing Genesis 9:6, the pope views the murder of an innocent human being as a violation of his or her sanctity of life as the image of God. Like Prejean, he also believes, “Not even a murderer loses his personal dignity.”

Although Prejean in her most recent book rightly opposes capital punishment based on the possibility that innocent persons have been executed or remain on death row awaiting execution, her overall stance against the death penalty actually is based on much more than this. This is why she is opposed also to the execution of guilty persons. Of course, this does not mean that Prejean rejects punishment itself as implemented by the state. Indeed, she supports life imprisonment without parole for the worst violent offenders.

Obviously this does not make up for the loss of the innocent victim’s life, but does even the execution of the guilty perpetrator accomplish this? If not, and if the practice of capital punishment continues to remain fraught with possible human mistakes, such as the execution of innocent persons wrongly convicted, then perhaps instead of having more “dead men walking” we should have the “death penalty walking.”

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THE GERMAN WORD “SCHAUSPIEL” USUALLY means a theater play, but in political debate it can refer to the act of engaging in theatrics and making a spectacle of oneself, instead of engaging in serious debate. The Danish cartoon controversy has all the elements of a Schauspiel in the latter sense and reveals something important about the debate over truth in our globalized world.

In September 2005, the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten published several cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad. A group of Muslim imams in Denmark complained to the Danish government, which ignored them on the reasonable basis that governments do not tell newspapers what and what not to publish. Several imams lobbied Middle Eastern governments, including Egypt, which lobbied the Danish government to prosecute the newspaper. It again refused on grounds of freedom of speech. In a response owing more to geopolitics and their own domestic legitimacy crisis, the Egyptian government disseminated the cartoons throughout the Middle East which resulted in numerous riots and consumer boycotts of Danish products. The rioters, along with peaceful protesters, claimed they were upset with typically Western, neocolonialist insensitivities toward their religion.

Western response largely was twofold: numerous journalists dug in their heels and declared their commitment to free expression; and various news organizations and government officials avowed cultural “sensitivity” in opposition to republishing the cartoons. The second type of response confirmed the assertion by Robert Wright of the New America Foundation, writing recently in the New York Times, that what appears in the “mainstream media” is censored by a sort of self-restraint. Americans “let each group decide what it finds most offensive, so long as the implied taboo isn’t too onerous. We ask only that

the offended group in turn respect the verdicts of other groups about what they find most offensive.” The role of “mainstream media” is to publish what is granted “legitimacy by nations and peoples,” not, strictly speaking to publish “truth.” While liberal democrats might defend the cartoons’ publication as upholding some version of “truth,” those opposed to publication can call for “civility,” a quasi-virtue recognizing that society needs to be greased by falsehoods.

Even so, one misunderstands this Schauspiel if one views it as a conflict between freedom of speech (“restrained” by civility) and religious piety, between Western Enlightenment and so-called medieval Islam. Such a dichotomy ignores the character of both post-Enlightenment liberalism and contemporary Islam in the globalized world. Clarification requires examining each side more closely.

While many liberal democrats wanted the cartoons published in the name of freedom of expression, numerous Muslims complained that the mantle of freedom of expression merely veiled anti-Muslim prejudice. They pointed to laws in the West prohibiting certain kinds of “hate speech.” For example, while these protests were occurring, Austria sentenced polemicist David Irving to three years in prison for denying the existence of the Holocaust. The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix newspaper recently was fined for running an advertisement comprised of two males holding hands superimposed with the universal symbol of a red circle and a diagonal bar. Muslims argue that since Western democracies have their own forms of sacrilege against Jews, women, and homosexuals, the refusal to recognize Muslim piety proves Western prejudice against them.

One might say that these forms of liberal democratic piety are tenets of the democratic faith in equality that Western democracies hold. As
Alexis de Tocqueville warned in his magisterial *Democracy in America*, in a nation of widespread social equality the force of public opinion creates a “tyranny of the majority” that tolerates no difference. Liberal democrats are willing to sacrifice freedoms and enhance state power to secure equality by protecting certain kinds of opinions they deem most vulnerable to hostility from majority public opinion. Tocqueville considered perfect equality unattainable, and regarded enhancing state power in its name a recipe for despotism. Even so, when Muslims see hypocrisy and complain about the liberal democrats’ selective defense of freedom, what they are seeing is this tension between freedom and equality and the manner in which that tension is borne.

The manner in which Western journalists and academics defend free speech is even more problematic. Though wearing the mantle of John Stuart Mill’s defense of liberty, many forgot that Mill regarded freedom of speech as a means to an end. He argued that speech needs freedom to enable truth to emerge and to enable geniuses (like himself) to defend their distinctiveness against cultural, intellectual, and moral levelling (Mill was influenced by Tocqueville on this). However, ever since World War I, the liberal democrats have become increasingly skeptical of grand narratives that postulate “the truth” as emerging from historical progress. Liberal democrats are more skeptical than Mill that truth can win out over demagoguery and falsity. Liberal democrats are perhaps more skeptical that there exists such a thing as “truth,” especially one that grounds a master narrative for a society or civilization.

Such skepticism weakened the arguments made in favor of publishing the cartoons. They favored free expression, but few if anyone explained the purpose of free expression. The most common reason was “to get the truth out there.” But what kind of truth? For what purpose? Without any clear purpose, the cartoon’s publication becomes an end in itself. The circularity of the argument for publication reflects a crisis in articulating public meaning for post-Enlightenment liberal democracies. It is difficult to defend free speech if one is unclear on the purpose of speech. As a result, the argument’s effectual truth is simply to “get the truth out there”—to create a *Schauspiel*. As a result, freedom’s defender is no longer John Stuart Mill, with his means-ends defense, but Machiavelli, the master counsellor of “effectual truth.”

Some might find this claim for Machiavelli as the spokesman for liberal democrats excessive and argue that it ignores the fact that the cartoons were meant to ridicule and not necessarily to engage in cross-cultural dialogue. But ridicule, as practiced by the great comedians including Aristophanes, Jonathan Swift, and even *The Simpsons*, ridicules the high from the perspective of the low, or the noble from the perspective of the vulgar, but it never loses sight of what is genuinely high. Even Voltaire’s crude ridicule was meant to further the goals of the philosophical Enlightenment. This is one reason comedy often is regarded as closer to philosophy than is tragedy. Comedy is not simply self-expression and getting the truth “out there.” We may not have a right not to be ridiculed, as Ronald Dworkin claims, but ridicule needs a purpose. With images of Muhammad, that purpose would have to be that Muslims have a false idea of the nature of divine being or, like Voltaire, that we should be skeptical toward claims to any knowledge of divine being. Given these were cartoons with limited ability to communicate nuanced thought, it is difficult to tell whether to demand skepticism is in fact to demand atheism.

What the *Schauspiel* reveals about contemporary Muslims is more difficult to gauge. It is well known that many of the riots were organized with the help of Arab governments whose long-standing practice is to whip up anti-Western hatred in order to deflect their own crises of legitimacy. In the case of Egypt, its government is concerned by recent electoral gains by the Muslim Brotherhood, so it wanted to be seen as defending the interests of Islam.

Also complicating the picture is the influence that Wahhabism, Islam’s hyper-Puritanical sect and Saudi Arabia’s other chief export, has over Muslims. While Islamic history has seen periods when Muhammad has been pictorially represented, one of Wahhabism’s main tenets is the absolute prohibition against pictorial representations of the divine and of the Prophet. In Arab countries, cartoons are used primarily to mock,
and on that basis any Muslim would object to a cartoon of Muhammad.

Part of what makes the cartoon controversy a Schauspiel is that it involves images rather than words. Pictures might encourage debate, but they just as easily can bypass reason and stir up the passions, especially in a media world driven more by the appearances of things than by what they represent. Even so, for Muslims, the meaning of the cartoons is quite clear. The pictorial representation of the divine directly challenges the foundations of the Muslim community’s self-interpretation and its relation to the divine. Because images do not speak for themselves, this challenge is easier to recognize if we consider the importance of written representations and their relationship with the Muslim community’s self-interpretation.

For Muslims, the Qur’an is the unmediated word of God, unlike the Jewish and Christian Scriptures which are transmitted and mediated by humans. While there are debates among Muslims over the degree to which the Qur’an can be interpreted by humans, there is general agreement that the Qur’an is written, by God, in perfect Arabic dialect. Viewing it in this manner hinders the examination of the Qur’an using historical methodologies, as has been done to Jewish and Christian scriptures since at least the nineteenth-century.

Today, the most controversial historical study of the Qur’an is being conducted by Christoph Luxenberg, a pseudonym for a scholar who argues that parts of the Qur’an are based on writings by Syriac Christians. His work has drawn the attention of Newsweek and was considered at a major conference held last year at the University of Notre Dame. Among his findings is that the term “Qur’an” derives from the Syriac qeryana, a technical term in Eastern Christianity meaning lectionary. He also finds that the seventy-two virgins (houris) some suicide bombers hope for are actually a mistranslation of the word for raisins, or more likely the dates one finds in a desert oasis. The reasons for Luxenberg to maintain his anonymity are obvious. His work would undermine the divine status of the Qur’an. Because the Qur’an also provides a history of the community, its res gestae, along with a historiography of the meaning of that history, his work also would undermine the Muslim community’s self-interpretation as a community existing in time. The Luxenberg thesis shows more clearly what is at stake, from the Muslim side, in the Danish cartoon Schauspiel. Since the Qur’an cannot be interpreted as a text by Muslim scholars, Islamic self-understanding is particularly vulnerable to the fluid images of the modern media, as demonstrated by the media-savvy Osama bin Laden.

But a Schauspiel it remains, not only because of the circular “arguments” of both sides, but also because this was not so much a debate as it was performance art consisting in the disclosure of images. Liberal democracies in their post-Enlightenment condition find that they lack a common narrative. Among the numerous symbols, words, and slogans that become meaningless, visual images take priority because their fragmented “meaning” gets more quickly digested when flashed before us. This is why books titled Blink outsell War and Peace. This is why the television show “Baywatch,” with its ample images, is popular across the globe. The primacy of images is one reason Christoph Luxenberg so far has been able to hide behind his pseudonym while conducting his obscure but revolutionary work.

In the end, though, the cartoon Schauspiel reflects a chasm between the dogmatic positions of liberal democrats and Islamists. Among Muslims there are Islamists who desire others to submit to their totalitarian worldview, and among liberal democrats there are journalists, academics, and other elites who assert freedom of speech but have forgotten its purpose in finding truth. The counselors of civility seem to have given up entirely on truth and complacently live out their little white lies that keep society greased. The fragmented, globalized public space in which they transmit their images, each performing in isolation on one’s own soapbox, only aggravates the divisions.

One wishes the cartoon Schauspiel were a joke, but, like real comedy, it points to serious issues. Maybe comedy is closer to tragedy than we think.

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Among Christopher Hitchens's searing criticisms of the late Mother Teresa was his contention that she helped perpetuate the grinding poverty she ostensibly wished to alleviate. Hitchens argued that by forsaking political action and focusing instead on simple palliative care for the poorest of the poor, Mother Teresa engaged in the worst form of religious quietism. Christianity, as practiced by the outspoken sister from Calcutta, at least, was a pernicious opiate. Now, although the particular criticisms of this curmudgeonly critic seem implausible in view of the manifest sanctity of his target, they nevertheless raise an important question for the followers of Christ: in what esteem should they hold political action in comparison to acts of Christian charity? The question is not new and has numerous corollaries: What is the distinctive competence of political versus churchly authority? What role should public law play in moral formation beyond religious catechesis? Should Christians enter the political forum or confine themselves to the realm of culture?

Some light recently has been shed on these questions from a rather unlikely source: a papal encyclical on, of all things, love. *Deus Caritas Est* debuted earlier this year and marked an ambitious undertaking, an attempt by Benedict XVI to elucidate the mystery of the nature of God. Taking his bearings from John the Evangelist's astonishing declaration, "God is love" (1 John 4:16), the pope argues that God expresses both *agape* and *eros*. His is a fully comprehensive love, metaphorically revealed in the images of the suffering servant and the ardent bridegroom alike. He both makes a radical gift of himself to man in the sacrifice of Christ and eagerly seeks ecstatic union with his beloved Church. Made in the image of this God who is love, man fully exhibits the divine image, according to Benedict, only when he likewise makes a gift of himself to another and receives the other in turn. As Jesus expresses in the Great Commandment, the movement of love for the Christian must be a vertical and horizontal "exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving" (6). Loved first by the transcendent God, the disciple loves God in return and out of this relationship is equipped to love his neighbor.

The truth of the faith that God is love thus has direct social implications, which are definitive for the Church's self-understanding. "The entire activity of the Church," Benedict insists, "is an expression of a love that seeks the integral good of man" (19), body, and soul. She attends to his spiritual hunger for Word and Sacrament and his manifold material needs. Hence the Church, as a corporate body and as individuals, must practice neighbor-love through both spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Only when she is faithful to each of these tasks is she expressing her "deepest nature" as revealed in the Church's "three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (*kerygma-martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*), and exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*)" (25).

But where, a Christopher Hitchens might question, is justice in this picture? Do acts of charity render it irrelevant? Is the Church not concerned about political and economic structures? As if to anticipate this criticism, Benedict quickly appeals to the tradition of Catholic social thought—the central task of which is to reflect on and proclaim the requirements of a just social order in light of the Gospel. In this vein, the pope distinguishes between what is properly the task of politics, namely, the actual legal ordering of the community according to justice, and that of the Church, namely, evangelization, worship, the ministry of charity, and the advance of justice through the instruction of the faithful and the provision of spiritual resources. "A just society," he
observes, “must be the achievement of politics, not of the Church. Yet the promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good is something which concerns the Church deeply” (28).

While the Church qua Church, in Benedict’s estimation, does not wield political power directly, her lay members do. Indeed, he considers it a direct duty of the lay faithful to work for justice in the political sphere. Yet, the pope contends that even in a just society, charity—the personal expression of Christian love—would nevertheless be necessary. “There will always be suffering which cries out for consolation and help. There will always be loneliness. There will always be situations of material need where help in the form of concrete love of neighbor is indispensable” (28). The most enlightened political authority in the most well-ordered state cannot substitute for “the very thing which the suffering person—every person—needs: namely, loving personal concern” (28b).

This quality of intimate care offered against the horizon of transcendence can never be rendered by an organ of the state or communicated by even a perfectly just law. What a Mother Teresa can offer differs in kind from the noblest work of a social reformer or progressive legislator. And the difference does not detract from the value of the latter. Great Christian thinkers with a high view of politics recognized this instinctively. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, held the purpose of law in terrific esteem. He took it to be an indispensable aid for achieving human flourishing, and he accorded it a lofty function: to habituate men in virtue—the sine qua non of a happy life. But even Aquinas recognized that law is limited. By its nature, it attends to external action. It cannot penetrate the heart, cannot reveal the person. Though the product of intelligence, it is not an animate standard and cannot of itself treat the particularities of a life.

But this is precisely what is needful in a situation of distress. The sufferer cries out to be addressed by name, touched, held, called back to what is true. If the sufferer’s dignity has been violated or, worse, if he has inflicted an indignity, he needs to hear a word of forgiveness and hope that can come only from a transcendent source. As Benedict’s predecessor, John Paul II, reminded his listeners, “Man is called to a fullness of life which far exceeds the dimensions of his earthly existence, because it consists in sharing the very life of God. The loftiness of this supernatural vocation reveals the greatness and the inestimable value of human life even in its temporal phase.” Though our life on earth is only a penultimate reality, John Paul insisted, “it remains a sacred reality entrusted to us, to be preserved with a sense of responsibility and brought to perfection in love and in the gift of ourselves to God and to our brothers and sisters” (Evangelium Vitae, 2).

The truth of the indispensability of both justice and charity in light of our supernatural destiny was brought home to me three years ago while doing prison ministry at a juvenile detention facility in Los Angeles. In the girls I encountered, I found much that bespoke a social order in need of reform: poverty, intergenerational incarceration, drug addiction, an impersonal and densely bureaucratic justice system, and so on. This context required political action. But the deeper human needs there would not have found political remedy. These were the needs emerging from loneliness, abandonment, abuse, and violence—suffered and delivered. Only the Gospel could touch them. I never will forget an encounter with a particular young woman of fourteen or fifteen. A quick-witted, tough, street-wise gang member, she sat stone-faced and distant for most of our sessions until one afternoon when she asked me and Doug Yoder, the leader of our outreach program, how God reacted when a little girl is raped. Out of his deep humanity and mature friendship with God, Doug simply said, “It breaks his heart.” And tears welled up in her eyes. She had asked a question that could be answered only in the language of love. ♦

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BEGINNING LAST OCTOBER AND CONTINUING until late December, I began receiving for the second year in a row flyers in the mail urging me to "Voice My Choice." They came not from NARAL, or NOW, or any of the suspects the slogan might suggest, but rather from RG&E—Rochester Gas & Electric, my energy utility—which was dutifully notifying me of my new right to take my business elsewhere. "Voice Your Choice" is the tagline for New York State's attempt to introduce competition into the energy market.

When I received the first batch of flyers, a year earlier, I initially paid them little attention. Since they were neither bills nor refund checks, they appeared to be the sort of thing one safely could ignore. Eventually I learned from a neighbor that this was actually an opportunity for me to save money, and I made a mental note to investigate. Still, I procrastinated, and before I knew it the December 31 deadline had snuck up on me.

Thus, on New Year's Eve, while others were waiting for the ball to drop, I sat, virtuously, alone before the computer, trying to figure out how to Voice My Choice. My energy bill, I learned, consists of two separate fees—one for the actual distribution of the electricity through the cables to my house, the other for the initial supply of energy at its source. The distribution fee is fixed, and RG&E assured me that they would continue to be my energy distributor. But New York State was now giving customers the opportunity—imagine my excitement—to select from among a number of competing energy suppliers, creating a potential savings on that portion of the bill if I chose wisely.

This much was not too difficult to grasp, but the choice itself would require a comparison of the various independent suppliers. And so I descended into a world of arcana such as kilowatt-hours, for which even an advanced degree in political philosophy had left me woefully unprepared. RG&E kindly provided a worksheet to assist me in my comparison. It was, unfortunately, unintelligible, at least to me. I bounced from one supplier's website to another's, searching vainly for potentially useful scraps of information. Finally, I thought I had discovered a supplier that would save me money—call them ACME Energy. I filled out their online application form and received the glad tidings: "We are sorry, but ACME Energy is no longer accepting new applications this year."

I was overcome by a wave of indignation. Nosed out by my fellow Voice-Your-Choicers! Or deceived by New York's fraudulent promise that the enrollment period was open until the end of the year! But by now the fever was upon me. After so much effort, I simply had to Voice My Choice. I returned to a few of the other suppliers and found another candidate. Another hasty application. Another rejection. And so it went. Desperately, I raced through the remaining suppliers. At this point, I probably would have bought my energy from a Boy Scout rubbing two sticks together, if only I could have the privilege of Voicing My Choice. But the result was always the same: No more new applications being processed this year.

Finally, I accepted inevitable defeat. I was doomed to the default option: RG&E would continue to be my supplier as well as my distributor. As the new year rolled around, I stumbled to bed, battered and worn.

THIS PAST FALL I SIMPLIFIED THE PROCESS considerably. Having once endured the agony of comparing energy suppliers, I was now a confirmed RG&E man. My only remaining choice was between a variable monthly rate for my energy supply or a fixed rate that would protect me against unexpected swings in the energy markets. This choice I regarded as easy. (The Cresset no doubt will receive numerous letters from irate economists lambasting my economic ignorance.) RG&E, I figured, is unlikely to offer me a fixed rate
at which they expect to lose money. They could, of course, guess wrong. But—since they devote considerable time to thinking about energy prices, whereas I, as you may have gathered, do not—they are probably less likely to guess wrong than I am. So it's the variable rate for me. Over the long haul, at least, I ought to do better than by pitting my energy price predictions against theirs. Or, to shine the bright light of day upon my choice: I intend to be a free rider, enjoying the benefits of whatever competition those other Voice-Your-Choicers are able to induce. Let them drive down RG&E's prices for me. I just don't want to think about it.

All of which does raise a question: Is it really desirable to encourage innocent citizens to devote their time to studying energy prices?

A silly question, I know. But I found myself thinking of my energy supply nightmare in reflecting upon an important recent trend in several policy areas, namely, the attempt to control costs through the introduction of competitive markets. The clearest parallel to my “Voice Your Choice” story is surely the new Medicare prescription drug benefit introduced this year. President Bush and the Republican Congress, bowing to mounting public pressure, designed a drug benefit that permits insurance companies to offer different, competing plans, among which seniors can choose. Obviously, this incorporation of competition into the plan is intended to hold down prices. Since the plan's introduction, the media has treated us to countless tales of seniors’ frantic efforts to sort through the array of new choices opened up to them. We should certainly weigh reports of the program’s travails against the predictable media glee at signs that a Bush initiative might fail; however, there are clearly a lot of seniors out there who are no more enthusiastic about comparing drug benefit plans than I am about comparing energy suppliers. And, given the unrelenting tedium of health insurance—my own pet theory for why we have not yet addressed our health care crisis is that it simply is too boring to think about for very long—who can blame them?

Competition plays a key role in other recent initiatives. The President has advocated the expanded use of Health Savings Accounts. HSAs permit individuals to purchase low-cost, high-deductible health insurance policies, covering mainly preventive care and high-cost items, while saving money in special tax-free accounts in order to cover their medical expenses. Here, again, the goal is to control costs through the introduction of competition and choice. The same idea, of course, was at the heart of the President's proposal to reform Social Security by permitting individuals to put a small percentage of their benefits into personal retirement accounts that would invest in stocks and bonds and thus earn a higher rate of return. The hope, again: that markets, competition, and choice will provide a higher bang for our retirement bucks. Policy initiatives such as these—and we could list others, such as environmental proposals for systems of tradable emissions credits—suggest that what New York has done with my energy supply mirrors a broad trend in how we think about the role of markets in government policy.

I ought to admit that I support this trend. A fuller appreciation of the virtues of markets will, if nothing else, help us achieve our policy goals more cheaply and effectively. Nevertheless, competition can control costs only if people actually spend time exploring their options and comparing prices. Even though others may not share my own deep distaste for Voicing My Choice, we can reasonably ask to what extent public policy should encourage us to spend our time this way. In fact, the question is more important with respect to others than to me. I, after all, spend my working days reading Aristotle and Hobbes—spending a bit of time thinking about my energy bill won't do me any harm. But what about people who already spend their days calculating costs and effects, trying to make their businesses more efficient, comparing prices, trying to save on overhead, and making all the financial decisions that go into running a business successfully? Should policy require that they spend more of their leisure time on the same things?

EARLY TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO, ALEXIS DE Tocqueville argued that people in a democratic age were likely to be dominated by a desire for material possessions. Neither extremely poor nor extremely rich, these roughly equal citizens would have enough wealth to develop a taste for material goods and the realistic expectation of acquiring them, but not so much to be free from the fear of falling back into poverty. Life would become a ceaseless chase after modest
new creature comforts. "The love of well-being" in a democracy, he wrote,

proves to be a tenacious, exclusive, universal, but contained passion. It is not a question of building vast palaces, of conquering or fooling nature, of exhausting the universe in order to better satisfy the passions of one man; it is a question of adding some land to one's fields, of planting an orchard, of enlarging a house, of always making life easier and more convenient, of averting trouble and satisfying the slightest needs without effort and almost without cost. These objects are small, but the soul attaches itself to them: it thinks about them every day and from very close up; they end up obscuring the rest of the world from it, and they sometimes come to be placed between it and God.

In this respect, as in so many others, Tocqueville was remarkably prescient. As I was receiving those RG&E flyers last December, I was also reading the annual newspaper reports about unfortunate Christmas shoppers trampled to death by hordes of parents frantic for the newest video game console. David Brooks's Bobos in Paradise superbly describes a contemporary America that perfectly matches Tocqueville's description of citizens whose souls are too often attached to the slightest needs and conveniences.

Tocqueville's response, however, was not to denounce these democratic citizens as hopelessly bourgeois materialists. For one thing, he recognized that the material progress made in a democratic society enables vast numbers of people to lead far better lives than ever before. Furthermore, he believed that other aspects of American society, religion in particular, had in fact prevented Americans from becoming thoroughly materialistic. Tocqueville's response, rather, was to suggest that public policy needed to take account of this democratic tendency and to counteract it, by seeking to encourage countervailing norms whenever possible, directing people's attention to noble or long-term goals and reminding them that there is more to life than the pursuit of material comfort. "The whole art of the legislator consists of correctly discerning in advance these natural inclinations of human societies in order to know where it is necessary to aid the effort of the citizens and where it is necessary instead to slow it down." Policy should balance and correct the tendencies toward which citizens are otherwise prone.

Which brings me back to my original question. From both necessity and inclination, most of us already devote much of our lives to calculations of cost and benefit. Should public policy encourage us to spend our leisure in the same way? Do we want people spending more time comparing energy suppliers, insurance policies, and mutual funds, when they could be reading the newspaper, putting around in the garden, watching a ball game, or playing with their kids?

At this point, I suppose I ought to conclude, "No, we don't." Having confessed my own sympathy for the market approach, however, I can't do that very persuasively. So I will opt for a less coherent but more Tocquevillian conclusion instead. Policies that take advantage of the strengths of free markets probably can lower my energy bill, help restrain health insurance costs, and increase our retirement savings. We should not reject those advantages simply out of fear of materialism or a narrowly utilitarian approach to life. We should, however, seek to balance those effects by seeking opportunities, in public as well as private life, to remind each other that man does not live by bread alone. We do not lack for such opportunities, in policy disputes from bioethics to marriage to education. "It is therefore necessary"—Tocqueville again—"that the legislators of democracies and all decent and enlightened men that live in them try continuously to lift up the souls in democracies and keep them raised toward Heaven."

And indeed, as I cite those words from Tocqueville, I notice that their context—Democracy in America, part two, chapter 15, "How Religious Beliefs Sometimes Turn the Soul of Americans Toward Spiritual Pleasures"—suggests an unexpectedly elegant combination of policies for resolving my dilemma: Voice Your Choice, health savings accounts, partially privatized social security... and Sunday closing laws. Perhaps salvation lies in keeping the Sabbath after all. Imagine that.

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On October 28, 1965, the Roman Catholic bishops gathered at the Second Vatican Council promulgated the *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate)*. Paragraph four effectively reversed the “teaching of contempt” for Jews and Judaism that had characterized Christian proclamation for nearly two millennia. In the past four decades, *Nostra Aetate* has spurred many Catholic and Protestant clergy and scholars to reflect critically on the proper presentation of Jews and Judaism in Christian preaching. Marilyn J. Salmon’s new book represents a significant contribution to the churches’ continuing efforts to eliminate homiletical hostility toward Judaism and its adherents.

As her title suggests, Salmon intends her book for preachers who think they need no help in eradicating anti-Jewish sentiment from their sermons. “Even the most conscientious preachers unknowingly rely on stereotypes of Judaism” (ix). Her primary purpose, then, is to raise awareness of the negative images of Jews and Judaism that commonly crop up in preaching, to teach preachers to recognize them, and to provide strategies for avoiding them. Secondly, Salmon seeks to teach her reader how to proclaim the Christian gospel without depending on an inferior “other.” As a very effective means toward these ends, Salmon, herself an Episcopal priest and assistant professor of New Testament theology at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, provides numerous examples from sermons (many of them her own) that both unwittingly incorporate and intentionally overcome negative portrayals of Jews.

The Gospels are the focus of *Preaching without Contempt* both because most sermons are based on these biblical books and because the most pervasive type of unintended anti-Judaism is that which contrasts Jesus with his Jewish contemporaries and their customs. After setting the Gospels squarely within their first-century Jewish context (chapter 1), Salmon treats four potential pitfalls, namely: supersessionism, the conviction that Christians have replaced Jews as God’s chosen people (chapter 2), the Pharisees and the Law (chapter 3), the Gospel of John (chapter 4), and the Passion narrative (chapter 5). In her opening chapter, Salmon demonstrates that the Gospels belong within the context of the diversity of early Judaism. As such, their criticisms of Jewish groups must be understood as part of an internal Jewish debate over the identity and future of Israel rather than as the interreligious polemic of Christians against Jews. Realizing that the controversies recounted in the Gospels are intra-Jewish rather than anti-Jewish can preserve the preacher from inadvertent prejudices.

This is an important book that makes significant contributions to ongoing Christian efforts to proclaim the good news in ways that eliminate the bad news for Jews. Every Christian preacher can benefit from Salmon’s contextualization and careful consideration of the Gospels within first-century Judaism. Many of Salmon’s examples demonstrate the kind of creative, insightful, and bold exegesis and proclamation that the Christian conquest of the traditional “teaching of contempt” demands.

Yet, because the intended readership of *Preaching without Contempt* consists of preachers unaware of their need for such a book, Salmon could have demonstrated more clearly the urgency of her work by providing an overview of how Gospel texts have been used to promote anti-Judaism throughout history. Far too few Christian preachers are aware, for example, that the traditional interpretations of the Passion narratives gave rise to the anti-Jewish charges of deicide, blood libel, and host desecration; that they inspired Christian soldiers to slaughter thousands of Jews in...
the Rhineland during the First Crusade (1096); that they encouraged the bishops at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) to decree that Jews should not appear in public during Holy Week; and that they enabled Adolf Hitler to declare, “The task which Christ began but did not finish I will complete” (speech in Munich, December 1926).

As an historian of Christianity who is deeply committed to Jewish-Christian relations, I sympathize with Salmon’s goal of presenting the Christian message in a way that promotes positive inter-religious dialogue. My major concern with Salmon’s book, however, is that it seems at times to advocate proclaiming a gospel that loses its Christian distinctiveness. Amy-Jill Levine, a Jewish scholar of the New Testament to whom Salmon refers several times, rightly points out that “the church should not sacrifice its own theology on the altar of interfaith dialogue” (Amy-Jill Levine, “A Particular Problem: Jewish Perspectives on Christian Bible Study,” in *Theology and Sacred Scripture*, 2002, 17). Indeed, interfaith dialogue, by definition, presupposes two distinct religious faiths.

Although Jews and Christians share some scriptural books (i.e., the Tanakh and the Old Testament), the respective arrangements of these books in the two canons tell stories that are different in important ways. Thus, whereas Salmon argues for replacing the traditional “Old Testament”/“New Testament” nomenclature with “Older Testament” and “Newer Testament,” I would retain the term “Old Testament” to reference that peculiarly Christian grouping of sacred texts and the story it aims to tell. Furthermore, in my estimation, Salmon’s suggested “Older Testament”/“Newer Testament” nomenclature exacerbates rather than eliminates implied supersessionism. Even if we grant that the term “old” implies “new” (which, of course, is not necessarily so), *a fortiori* the comparative adjective “older” requires something “newer.” Again, Levine provides a helpful corrective when she affirms that “the problem arises not because of the term ‘old’ but because of the treatment the material receives in lectionaries, homilies, and then liturgical practice” (“A Particular Problem,” 17), a point that reinforces Salmon’s recommendation for more sermons on the Old Testament.

Another example of Salmon’s sacrificing Christian particularity is her view that the entire Bible should be read and preached from a theocentric rather than a Christocentric perspective. Over against the traditional Christian understanding that both Old and New Testaments reveal Jesus, Salmon maintains that all of Scripture tells the story of the God of Israel in covenantal relationship with God’s people. In her view, the primary subject of even the New Testament is not Jesus Christ but rather the God of Israel. Quite apart from the question of Christian theological distinctiveness, my impression is that many Jews would find such an understanding offensive and in violation of their sense of the particularity of the Tanakh and Judaism. As a result, Salmon’s sincere attempt to diminish anti-Judaism could be perceived as compounding it.

A third and final example is Salmon’s suggestion that *hoi Ioudaioi* in the Gospel of John be rendered not as “the Jews” (which may sound anti-Jewish to modern church-goers) but rather in a “more nuanced” way that conveys the intra-religious competition of late-first-century Judaism such as “the crowd,” “the people,” or “all of our people” (120). Such translations would be both less accurate and less nuanced insofar as they completely conflate Jesus’ followers or the Johannine community with other Jews, giving the reader or hearer little sense of existing intra-religious distinctions. I would recommend that the preacher read *hoi Ioudaioi* literally as “the Jews” and then carefully explain what group the Gospel writer might intend in this particular pericope (e.g., the people of Judea; the synagogue leadership; chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees; or even friends or followers of Jesus). This approach would enable the preacher to remain faithful to the text while also affording a twofold pedagogical opportunity: to educate parishioners both about the anti-Judaism in the Johannine text, which they may or may not hear, and about the anti-Judaism in the church’s long history of exegesis, belief, and practice, about which they might not have heard.

In spite of these limitations, Preaching without Contempt is a thoroughly useful book that I recommend to Christian preachers, scholars, and teachers and to all Christians who are interested in building a better future with our Jewish brothers and sisters. And there is no time more appropriate for careful reflection on these issues than during Holy Week and the Easter Season. ¶
GOOD FRIDAY. . . . The most important day in the history of man. . . . Let a man say what he believes about the six hours from nine until three and we shall know, as surely as we can in the time of Good Fridays, the eternal fate of his soul. . . . Strange things happened on the little hill nineteen hundred years ago, but none more strange than the fact that the hands of God pressed the story of man into six hours. . . . Nineteen centuries of birth and death, of pomp and circumstance, of crashing empires and falling sparrows, have not given men a new way to see the Cross and its meaning for those who pass by. . . . The Roman governor still walks the streets of the world, touched but not persuaded, glimpsing heaven and choosing hell, the twentieth-century man—proud, careful, cynical, afraid in his bravery of the greatest courage in life, the courage of faith. . . . All the others are here too—the mob blind to everything but blood—the blind leaders of the blind who fear that the power of heaven will take away their power on earth—the unseeing who make a holiday of hate out of the suffering of God. . . . For six hours—for nineteen hundred years—it goes on, the traffic along the road beside the Cross, where men and women pass and linger and look, or hurry by; and every man’s life is changed by the look he gives the stricken figure upon it. . . . This is all he can know, or needs to know, here and hereafter. . . . Whatever else may grow dim, or be broken and lost, the darkness of the Cross lights up his way homeless and alone without it, a shining light across the dark. . . . The mystery of mysteries. . . . A limp, torn body hangs upon a Cross, but in it, above it, beyond it, is the Light that never was on land or sea. . . .

All great events of history have been misunderstood. . . . The Cross is no exception. . . . Why has this pouring of the world’s sorrow on one Head held men these many years? . . . Is it because suffering is a language that all men can understand? . . . Is it the terrible fascination of the triumph of evil? . . . Is it a momentary glimpse into the hidden heroism of the soul of man which, embodied in its best and fairest, can reach heights of unselfishness unconquered by those whose only destiny is the dust? . . . Men have said these things and have lost the fullness of the Cross in its splinters. . . . There is no need to explain the Cross. . . . God has explained it. . . . Over and over again so that no one might misunderstand, but perhaps most clearly and finally in the twenty-five words which we know as John 3:16. . . . The Cross is eternally silent unless it speaks, now and for all time, of the reality of sin, the sureness of judgment, and the conquering love which forgives sin and removes judgment by the atoning death of Him Who became the everlasting chalice for all the tenderness of God and all the broken hopes of men. . . . This men must mean when they say “I believe in Jesus Christ,” or they may as well say “I believe in Stephen” or “in Joan of Arc” . . .

Six hours and nineteen hundred years. . . . We hear again the loud voices saying that His day is done. . . . So men heard them during those six hours, and in every generation since. . . . But reiteration has never made a thing true. . . . A cross still towers above the thrones that men build for their idols, and a crown of thorns is still greater than all the crowns of gold the world has known and will know. . . . 33 AD to 1939 AD . . . The heart of history—the heart of God—and here and there the believing heart of man. . . . This is all of Good Friday. . . .
The Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts

The Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts, established in 1991, seeks to strengthen the quality and shape the character of church-related institutions of higher learning for the twenty-first century.

First, it offers postdoctoral teaching fellowships for young scholars who wish to renew their sense of vocation within a Christian community of learning in order to prepare themselves for positions of educational leadership within church-related institutions.

Second, it maintains a collaborative National Network of Church-Related Colleges and Universities that sponsors a variety of activities and publications designed to explore the Christian character of the academic vocation and to strengthen the religious nature of church-related institutions. The National Network represents a diversity of denominational traditions, institutional types, and geographical locations.

**Lilly Fellows Program Network Institutions**

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The Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts is based in Christ College, the interdisciplinary honors college of Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Indiana.

For more information, please consult the Lilly Fellows Program website at [www.lillyfellows.org](http://www.lillyfellows.org)
on the cover—

The Wind's in the North, a painting by Frank V. Dudley in the Brauer Museum of Art's permanent collection, is a work that manages remarkably to capture in a static image the look of a breeze softly blowing across the landscape, perhaps the slightly brisk breeze one feels while standing by the shore at the Indiana Dunes in early spring. The subdued palette of blues, tans, greens, and lavenders reminds one of the pastel tones associated with the Easter season, as colors slowly emerge after their winter slumber.

Born in Wisconsin and a long-time Chicago resident, Frank V. Dudley discovered during his adult travels the magical landscape of the Indiana Dunes, a place that inspired him to visit and paint for the rest of his career and a landscape that he worked to have preserved in state and national parks. His dunes paintings capture the quiet grandeur of their setting. Lake Michigan, stretching into the distance, looks and feels like a vast ocean, while the various grasses and trees stand tall in the sunlight.

A retrospective exhibition of Dudley's work will be on display at the Brauer Museum from 15 August to 30 November, 2006. This major show of many of Dudley's finest creations (which will include The Wind's in the North) will be accompanied by a catalogue published by the University of Illinois Press and intended to be the definitive publication on the artist. Essays by esteemed scholars James Dabbert, William Gerdts, Wendy Greenhouse, J. Ronald Engel, and Joan Engel will illuminate the life and legacy of this legendary figure in American art history.

on reviewers—

Franklin Harkins
is a Lilly Fellow and Lecturer in Theology at Valparaiso University, where he teaches courses in the history of Christianity and Jewish-Christian relations.

on poets—

Christian Knoeller
has new work forthcoming in English Journal (NCTE), Fox Cry Review, and the South Dakota Review. His collection Completing the Circle received the Millennium Prize from Buttonwood Press in 2000. He serves as Associate Professor of English at Purdue University.

Diane G. Scholl
teaches English at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa.

Angela O'Donnell
teaches literature and creative writing at Fordham University in New York City. Her poems have appeared in a number of journals including America, First Things, Runes: A Review of Poetry, and Windhover.

D. S. Martin
is a Canadian poet. His poems have appeared in Canadian Literature, Christianity & Literature, and The Christian Century.
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