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The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum

Beverly Asbury
Christian Responses to the Holocaust

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Presuming Pain
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Introduction

"Hey mom, why did the Jews kill Jesus?" Once again, a parent is put on the spot. Conditioned by experience to answer quickly when probed on matters such as why the sky is blue or how little sister got here, mom may want to hotfoot it out of this one, too. But Christian parents have cause to stop and answer carefully. It may be the first time the child has ever thought about Jews. And if left unattended, it may be the most powerful association an adult carries about his or her Jewish neighbors, colleagues, and public figures.

We may even unconsciously promote this kind of thinking in our children. The headline article of a recent newsletter from the American Interfaith Institute, Explorations, was written by Will Willimon, who reviewed a new and highly touted children's Bible, The International Children's Bible, New Century Edition. The book is flawed by its pointed recriminations against the Jewish leaders of Jesus' time. Pontius Pilate is exonerated of his responsibility in the crucifixion of Jesus, and there is barely a hint that Jesus was himself a Jew. With these subtle but inaccurate messages, Christian prejudice against Judaism is passed down from one generation to the next. The irony is that this takes place in the very materials we use to teach our children about God and God's love for the world. Fortunately, children's Bibles don't have to be this way; Willimon cites the TAIZE Picture Bible and The Children's Bible (Golden Press) as laudable efforts.

This digression into children's religious literature is my attempt to give momentary focus to an issue that is complex and in many ways agonizing: Jewish-Christian relations in our post-Holocaust world. How does one even begin? About a year ago, I got a call from Jack Keller, who had just returned from a pre-opening tour of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. I had attended a similar event at the museum, so we
compared notes. I vividly remember standing with a group of fellow editors of religious publications around a scale model of each floor of the museum, hearing the story of how it was put together, being connected—to the extent that I am able—with the reality of what had happened. There was no dramatic flourish or psychological manipulation; just the simple facts, wedded with a vision of justice rooted in our nation’s ideals and institutions. It was extraordinarily powerful. Jack’s description of his experience held the seeds of an article for QR. He has given us a sort of theologically-guided tour of the museum that would be the perfect prelude to a visit of one’s own.

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum is filled with the stories of the living and the dead. We continue this theme with an essay by Bev Asbury, who shares his own story as a Christian who has long struggled to confront the evil of that time. It is a lifelong task, one that gives the ultimate test to any spirituality, as he shows. But while he works with the raw material of story, both historical and fictional, he makes a crucial point about it. Finally, stories have to be explained. So the Christian theologian is invited to consider the Holocaust, not to solve a puzzle but to describe the contours of the mystery.

There are still more treasures in this issue. Jeff Fager has written a nicely focused essay on the story of Jael and Sisera in the Book of Judges. Seen through the lens of chaos theory, that ancient yet up-to-the-minute theory of physics, this biblical story bristles with the unlikely, the unforeseen, and the unbelievable. When we vouch for God’s providence in the world, we do so by going through rather than avoiding such stories.

These three articles are only a portion of the excellent pieces in this issue of the journal. I commend all of them to you and hope they will accompany you in thought through the Advent season and beyond. The theme of pain and struggle is strong in this issue. But during this season we once again celebrate the incarnation of God in Christ. This means that, in the words of the Statement of Faith of the United Church of Canada, “In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone.” May the Spirit knit us with our griefs and joys together in shared communion!

Sharon Hels
Until recently there were few terms to describe and few ways to respond to the sexual abuse of adults by people in positions of authority and trust, such as managers, counselors, and clergy. For years, not only did people not have words to describe sexual abuse by authority figures but people often kept silent and conspired to silence anyone who would speak out.

When people were not silent, they often responded to cases of sexual abuse by dismissing the seriousness of the situation and accepting the acts as an unfortunate aspect of the modern culture. Sexual abuse was treated as just another form of sexual expression. The affected persons were considered to have invited the abuse by the way they dressed or acted. They were like the biblical figures of Jezebel or Potiphar’s wife, who used their sexuality to gain power or, once jilted, reacted in vengeful, deceitful, and exaggerated ways. If the situation was taken seriously, the perpetrator was moved to another job, practice, or church. If the situation was considered troublesome, the accused may have been asked to take a leave of absence to spend some time at a retreat center or alcohol rehabilitation center, even if there had been no indication of alcohol addiction. Complainants may have been offered counseling help.

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John Vogelsang, a consultant to churches and nonprofit organizations, is an associate of the Michael Harrington Center, Queens College, CUNY, and the author of many articles on organizational structure and Christian social action.
In reaction to the increasing number of complainant-initiated lawsuits, churches have implemented policies and procedures to deal with current cases and to prevent further incidents. Judicatory officials have issued codes of conduct. Many have been quick to discipline or remove offenders, but they have also tended to stigmatize complainants and exclude them from positions of power. Women have been overlooked for promotions and raises and have been driven out of their positions and out of their congregations when they have filed formal complaints.

Much is done to establish rules and limits. But little is done to reconstruct a healthier relationship between pastors and congregations and a healthier and more just congregational and judicatory system.

Current Approaches

After reviewing many policies and procedures and meeting with various judicatory leaders, I have identified some common models that church officials are using to understand and respond to incidents of sexual abuse. The models are offered as distinct for the purposes of this presentation. In practice people tend to operate with combinations of models, sometimes in contradictory ways.

Model One  "Sexual Sin"

Sexual Abuse: It is a form of sexual expression. It is wrong because it may involve adultery, sex with a minor, sex outside of marriage bonds, or other proscribed sexual activity.

Cause: The minister has sinned or has had a lapse of judgment due to overwork, stress, burnout, or alcohol addiction.

Response: Assess the culpability of the accused. Seek repentance and reconciliation. Remove the accused ministers for a short while and send them to a rehabilitation or a counseling center. Reassign the accused after they complete the course of treatment.

Model Two  "The Act of a Disturbed Individual"

Sexual Abuse: It is the harmful sexual acts of disturbed individuals.
Cause: The accused are sociopaths or sex addicts who lack character and conscience, are unreformable, and must be removed from their positions.

Response: Protect and provide counseling for the complainants. Use a psychological evaluation of the accused as a way to investigate the case. Remove the accused ministers from their positions and send them to a special program for sex addicts or sex offenders. Be reluctant to allow those accused to hold any position of authority.

Model Three: "Psychological Disorder"

Sexual Abuse: It is a violation of an individual’s emotional and/or physical boundaries with destructive effects on both the complainant and the accused.

Cause: Both the complainant and the accused are unclear about their own psychological boundaries. They may suffer from low self-esteem. They may be unclear about how to get their needs met in a direct and healthy way. They may come from alcoholic or dysfunctional families, and they may have suffered some form of abuse as children. Complainants are vulnerable to abuse; the accused are at risk to commit abuse.

Response: When complaints are made, send the accused minister for a psychological evaluation. Have a confrontational meeting where the complainant and support persons can confront the accused and offer him or her the opportunity to acknowledge the behavior and hear the damage it has caused. Offer counseling for both the complainant and the accused. Accused ministers must admit to their behavior and commit themselves to a therapeutic plan in order to assist in the healing process for the individuals as well as the congregation. The accused is removed from his or her position only if there are indications he or she will do further harm. Provide a way for the congregation to hear the outcome of the case and the accused’s confession and to express their feelings and concerns. Have a healing service for the congregation.

Model Four: "Betrayal of a Professional Relationship"
Sexual Abuse: It is a betrayal and abuse of the professional relationship between the minister, the congregant, and the congregation, in which ministers are expected to act in the best interests of their congregants, to live an exemplary life, to work according to high standards, to honor the trust placed in them, and to use their authority for beneficence, not maleficence.

Cause: The professional is ill-prepared, lacks supervision, and is given to abusing the power and authority of his or her position. The congregation and larger church lack clear policies and an accountability and support system for professional ministers.

Response: Re-educate the accused minister and provide supervision for him or her. If the case warrants, remove the accused minister from his or her position and insist upon a psychological evaluation after the case has been decided in order to develop a plan for healing. Offer counseling for both the accused and the complainant. Develop codes of ethics, policies, professional support systems, and processes for accountability. Conduct educational programs for the congregation and for the wider church about the role of the minister and the nature of the ministerial relationship.

Model Five

"Culturally Condoned Oppression"

Sexual Abuse: A manifestation of the culturally condoned use of power and sexuality perpetrated by men on women and children.

Cause: Men have been socialized to have power over women and to use sex as a way to control women and/or to seek intimacy. Women have been socialized to collude in this culturally condoned way of acting. Most of our social systems, including congregations, are constructed in ways to perpetuate this oppression.

Response: Remove the accused and suffer with the complainants. Encourage both the complainants and the accused to seek counseling. Provide education in male/female relationships which counteract the culturally condoned oppression. Examine and attempt to change aspects of
the congregation and church system that perpetuate male domination and male abuse of power.

Models One ("Sexual Sin") and Two ("Act of Disturbed Individual") can reinforce fears and anxieties about sex and sexual expression. Model One focuses, as Marie Fortune says, "on the who, what, where, when and why of sexual activity...[and does not] consider the substance of the sexual interaction, for example, the quality of the relationship, including the presence or absence of consent and the distribution of power." Model One can give license for attacks on practicing gays and lesbians; a gay or lesbian minister's committed, intimate relationship can be treated as a sexual sin and thereby be subject to judgment as sexual abuse in the ministerial relationship.

When people using Model Two speak of the accused they often use strong images that deliberately differentiate him or her from the rest of us. The accused is a sex addict, a sociopath, or a predator who lacks character and conscience and will continue to prey on other victims. Instead of experiencing how they may share within themselves the potential for the same behavior or may have done similar acts on a less harmful scale, people immediately label the accused as a lone individual whose actions are unlike their own and have little to do with the same social forces that affect everyone.

Model Three ("Psychological Disorder") attempts to assess and develop an appropriate therapeutic route for both the complainant and the accused. A small number of accused ministers may be sociopaths or sex offenders, but, according to this approach, most are psychologically predisposed to the abuse in ways that will respond to therapy. Both the accused and the complainant need to acknowledge fully the harmfulness of the event, and to work on those psychological factors which contribute to its occurrence. There may be an attempt to surface the congregation's feelings and concerns. However, the focus is still on the individuals involved at the expense of considering what factors in the church system and larger social forces might have affected what has happened.

Model Four ("Betrayal of a Professional Relationship") focuses on the social role of the minister. Sexual abuse in the ministerial relationship is not about sex but about betraying the integrity and expectations of the professional role. Instead of identifying the sin or focusing on the psychological state of the accused or the complain-
ant, this approach investigates how the professional relationship be­
tween the minister and congregant has been violated.

Model Four recognizes that the power differential between the
professional and congregant precludes meaningful consent. Meaning­
ful consent requires among other things equality of resources, lack
of direct or indirect coercion, and the freedom to say no. The nature
of the professional relationship, where clients allow themselves to be
vulnerable to professionals they expect will act in their best interests,
is an unequal relationship that lends itself easily to direct or indirect
coercion.

Though there may be some disturbed individuals, Model Four is
more likely to ask how the system allowed them to do what they did.
It concentrates on education, training, and supervision as the best
ways to prevent further incidents. Professionals must be clear about
their role and have a code of ethics for operating. There must be
clear consequences when that code of ethics is broken. And both the
professional and the congregation need to understand the nature of
the ministerial relationship so that they can hold each other mutually
accountable.

Many judicatories are incorporating aspects of Model Four into
their policies and procedures while continuing to operate out of Mod­
els One and Two in their attitudes. Behind this is often an elite and
hierarchical image of the professional. Those who have the authority
to intervene in cases tend to consider sexual exploitation as an abuse
of the power and authority of the professional role only in discrete in­
cidents of sexual exploitation. They thereby reinforce the cultural
stereotype that the male has more power over women and children
and do not look at how sexual exploitation is a manifestation of
power abuse in the larger system: we will continue to exclude
women from certain positions, but we will make sure that our men
do not use their power to harm women and children. In reaction,
some people have rejected the concept of the professional in an ef­
tort to replace it with constructs based upon collaboration, mutual­
ity, and empowerment: “We are not professional and client but
equals in ministry.” Ironically, even this rejection of the elitist pro­
fessional role may leave undisturbed the actual power, authority, and
role of the minister’s social position.

Model Five (“Culturally Condoned Oppression”) attempts to con­
front the larger systemic issues within acts of sexual abuse. Women
have been considered property to be disposed of as men see fit, and sexual violence and exploitation have been used to control and to marginalize women and children. Thomas Aquinas taught that adultery was a worse sin for a woman, because she violated property rights in making it possible for a bastard to become her husband’s heir.

According to Allan Griswold Johnson, **a conservative estimate is that, under current conditions 20 to 30 percent of girls now twelve years old will suffer a violent sexual attack during the remainder of their lives.** The most likely assailants will be “husbands, exhusbands, friends, dates, boyfriends, acquaintances, lovers or ex­lovers, authority figures.”

Sometimes in combination with Model Four, those who operate with Model Five want to reveal the systemic power abuse that is manifested in the particular case. They want to stand with the complainants not only to seek justice in the particular case but to find ways to begin to rectify the systemic injustices that have contributed to sexual abuse. A male therapist or minister who commits sexual abuse exploits his professional position of power and his culturally conferred power to invade the emotional and physical space of women and children. In doing so, he reconfirms the culturally condoned power system and continues to use exploitation to control those who are excluded from power. Pamela Cooper-White says,

*The pastoral relationship can and should be a sacred trust, a place where a parishioner can come with the deepest wounds and vulnerabilities—where she can even act out sexually. By modeling appropriate boundaries and healthy responses, the pastor can begin to empower her to heal those wounds. The harm done when this is exploited is no less than a violation of sacred space, which further ruptures and destroys the woman’s boundaries, devastating her mental health and her sense of self.*

In practice, this model may contribute to resistance and division as a congregation deals with the trauma of sexual abuse, and it may overshadow some other systemic issues that have contributed to abuse in the past and may foster further incidents. It is not uncommon to find abuse of various kinds throughout the history of a congregation which is experiencing a current incident.
How do we do otherwise than reduce systemic concerns to personal recovery and offer systemic solutions in ways that contribute to resistance and overlook other systemic issues? We can attempt to reconstruct what it is to be a healthy congregation and what is the professional minister’s role.

Reconstructing the Approaches

A construct of a healthy congregation and the professional minister’s role could start with a construct of justice. Karen Lebacqz points out that our attempts to define justice start with the notion that we should “give to each what is due.” We tend to start from the basis of entitlements—to guarantee that people get what they earn and keep what they have—before we look after the disadvantaged and oppressed. A new construct of justice needs to begin with the realities of injustice confronting us today. Once we tell and hear the stories of the oppressed and those who cry out for justice, we have the elements for a different construct of justice that is not based upon rights, entitlement, or due. Such a construct of justice includes the biblical concept of being in right relationship with each other. A right relationship is one of mutual respect, empowerment, responsibility, trust, and choice. The primary injustice is exploitation and denial of mutuality.

A construct of a healthy congregation also needs a construct of sexual expression and sexuality. James Nelson speaks of the shifts that are occurring in our theological conceptualization of sexuality and sexual expression that could inform the life of a congregation. There is a shift from understanding sexual sin as a matter of wrong sexual acts to understanding sexual sin as alienation from our intended sexuality. Instead of a list of prohibited acts, sexual sin is alienation from who we as sexual beings are intended by God to be. Sexual exploitation and sexual violence are the products of this alienation.

There is a shift from understanding salvation as anti-sexual to knowing that there is “sexual salvation.” Justification and sanctification do not involve the denial of our sexuality; instead, increased sexual wholeness is part of our redemption intended by God. “Sexual sanctification can mean growth in bodily self-acceptance, in the ca-
capacity for sensuousness, in the capacity for play, in the diffusion of
the erotic throughout the body rather than in its genitalization, and in
the recovery of lost dimensions of our sexuality."

There is a shift from act-centered sexual ethics to a relational sexual
ethics. Instead of assuming that the rightness and wrongness of a
particular sexual expression can be determined by the objective
moral nature of the act itself, sexual acts are seen in a relational con-
text. The question is not whether the act itself is wrong but whether
growth and integration are promoted and the act is self-liberating,
other-enhancing, honest, faithful, socially responsible, life-serving,
and joyous.

There is a shift from understanding the church as asexual to under-
standing it as a sexual community. Instead of avoiding discussing
and recognizing the sexuality of the community, the church is being
called into open discussions of sexuality and sexual expression. And
finally, there is a shift from understanding sexuality as a private is-
sue to understanding it as a personal and public issue. Instead of sex
and sexuality being private and thereby secret, we recognize its influ-
ence on every aspect of our lives, and we are willing to explore to-
gether how that influence can be creative rather than destructive.

Three focuses for a healthy congregation emerge from both Le-
bacqz’s and Nelson’s work: dignity, mutuality, and generativity. A
congregation that fosters dignity attempts to raise to consciousness
the presence of others as distinct people of intrinsic worth who can
each contribute to the nurturing and building up of society. One’s intrin-
sic worth must also include one’s sexual being. Therefore, in
their relationships, in their rules, and in their bureaucratic struc-
tures, members of a healthy congregation will attempt to change that
which denies dignity, that which alienates people from being the sex-
ual beings they are, and that which violates people’s sexuality.

A congregation which fosters mutuality shares responsibility for
each person’s development and participation in the community. They
share decisionmaking as much as it is possible, particularly over
those decisions which directly affect them. They hold each other ac-
countable to fulfill what they have mutually decided to do.

A congregation which fosters generativity encourages people to
experience their lives as participating in a larger context of meaning.
What each person does is judged by the impact on other people and
the community. An act, a relationship, a manner of expressing one’s

CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE
gifts, a way of working contributes to the common good if it fosters dignity, generates benefit for others now and into the future, and fosters the further development of the community.

These focuses lead to three processes that can contribute to a congregation's good health. A congregation which fosters dignity strives to revitalize the understanding, appreciation, and connection between its members. The congregation can attempt to rebuild the broken connections and the broken support for those who are abused and who abuse among themselves and with those who, for the moment, have escaped such experiences. The congregation can provide opportunities for those who are abused to gather to tell their stories and to recognize the resources they have. Instead of reacting in dread and horror, people can endeavor to listen. A church that has experienced sexual abuse in its congregation can, as part of its efforts to rebuild its congregational community, provide a forum for others in the neighborhood to honestly discuss and deal with their own experiences of abuse.

A congregation that fosters mutuality strives to redistribute decision-making power and access to its supports and opportunities. People suffering from sexual abuse have been persuaded to give up their resources and have been excluded from mutual participation and decision-making. Power is used to silence or minimize what has happened to those who are abused. Churches can shift from protecting the vulnerable to working with those who are vulnerable to use their resources to gain power in their lives and communities. Instead of the church hierarchy deciding solely what will happen to the accused and what will be done for the complainant when a case of sexual exploitation occurs, the congregation can examine how it has given power to some and excluded others and decide how it can work toward a mutually responsible community.

A congregation which fosters generativity strives to reconstruct relationships and processes that tear down rather than build up. Instead of accepting the continued promulgation of abuse, churches strive to reconstruct that which denies dignity and access so that all have an opportunity to participate. They can go beyond asking what can they do for the individuals in a case of sexual abuse to ask what can they do that will help sustain an environment in which fewer incidents of sexual and other forms of abuse will occur. Instead of focusing on the exploitative misdeeds of an individual, a church can ask how it
can be a community that encourages healthy, honest, and empowering relationships in its congregation and with its surrounding community.

This paradigm gives us a new model for the act of sexual abuse. First it is a violation of dignity: a violation of intended sexuality and a violation of the intrinsic worth of another person. Sexualized behavior and sexual contact within the ministerial relationship has little to do with an expression of connection flowing from the experience of the intrinsic worth of another. Instead, it is an expression of the power the professional has over the congregant. Sexual abuse becomes a violation of mutuality: a violation of the expectation that the relationship is one of sacred trust wherein the minister will act in another’s best interests and a violation of mutual responsibility in favor of a unilateral relationship which is shaped and controlled by the accused. The relationship is secretive, carried out within parameters set by the accused, and continued through manipulation and minimization of the congregation’s decision-making power. It is also a violation of generativity: a violation of the ministerial role to support healthy and just relationships which exemplify alternatives to culturally condoned oppression. It is a violation of community in that it tears down rather than builds up right relationships.

In a healthy congregation, therefore, one would most likely find:

A Clear Sense of Mission and a Planning Process to Enact That Mission (How can we continue to revisit why we exist, whom we serve, how we serve them, where we are, where we want to go, and how we can get there?);

Commitment to Being a Learning Community (How can we learn from each event, crisis, challenge to further our development as a congregation? How can we hear and deal with the questions coming toward us from the future?);

Networks of Listening, Connection, Appreciation, and Resistance (How do we encourage honest feedback? How do we build networks of support? How do we build networks of resistance that will help us be aware of the questions we need to hear? How do we foster a church as sexual community able to discuss sex and sexuality?);

Mutual Responsibility and Accountability (How do we articulate, discuss, and negotiate ethics and ground rules for conduct?)
How do we redistribute unilateral decisionmaking and power and be clear about who has power and authority for what? How do we have clear job descriptions and a way to clarify our expectations and roles? How do we carry—hold in our consciousness, pray and care for, support—each other and the congregation?);

Clear Sense of Boundaries and Appropriate Involvement (How do we clarify what is appropriate and inappropriate touch and behavior? How do we appreciate the sexual beings we are and discourage sexual alienation and sexual violation? How do we support people in declaring what is comfortable and uncomfortable for them and in clearly expressing and negotiating personal needs?);

Generativity (How can we foster energy, commitment, and growth? How can each relationship be an opportunity to build up each other and the community? How do we stay in touch with the realities of the larger community?);

Dynamic Worship (How can we recognize and celebrate the presence of God in our struggles and accomplishments and the dignity and gift of all our members?).

Healthy congregations would more than likely seek ministers who were willing to function in a manner that would foster the traits outlined above.

Sexual abuse or other forms of abuse would most probably occur if many of the healthy traits were missing, if there was not a professional minister who could foster such traits, or if both the congregation and minister have indirectly formed a pact not to struggle to be a healthy community. Intervention and prevention would treat the incident as an opportunity for individual healing and for developing a healthier congregational system. An intervention would involve determining how the system and ministerial role have broken down. The minister would be removed if the case warrants and if there is the possibility of future harm. If the case is found to be valid, the minister would be required to seek appropriate counseling and reeducation and to be supervised in whatever work he or she does. The complainants would be assisted in obtaining healing and restitution for harm done. There would be disclosure to the congregation of the wrongful acts, while respecting confidential information. The judica-
tory would work with the congregation to develop a healthy and just system, which in turn may mean that the judicatory has to change aspects of its own structure or procedures. The judicatory would offer educational experiences on sexual expression and sexuality, the ministerial relationship, male/female interactions which serve to build up each other and the community, and how to be a healthy congregation which encourages right relationships.

Notes


3. A major influence on this approach is Patrick Carnes, *Contrary to Love: Helping the Sexual Addict* (Minneapolis: CompCare Publishers, 1989), and *Out of the Shadows* (Minneapolis: CompCare Publishers, 1983).


12. See also Fortune, *Sexual Violence*.


14. Ibid., 121.
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Chaos and the Deborah Tradition

Chaos theory has received wide publicity in recent years, and many physicists are turning to it to explain natural phenomena which were once quite enigmatic. Even those beyond the natural sciences are using concepts from this relatively new branch of knowledge to explore their respective areas. Some economists explain unusual fluctuations in markets or unexpected recessions by relying on notions found in chaos theory, and social scientists are now self-consciously relying upon theories derived from physics. Theologians and scientists have also begun to explore the intersection of metaphysics and science. Philip Hefner, a professor of systematic theology and editor of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*, has pointed out that, like it or not, scientific language and theory do have an impact on our metaphysical concepts because we live in the universe described by science. Thus, Hefner attempts to inform our understanding of the nature of God's work in the world by using modern concepts of physics rather than the long outdated Aristotelian physics of classical theology. Likewise, Sally McFague draws upon modern cosmology in order to reflect upon the nature of creation and our place in it. Philip Davies comes to this issue from the perspective of a scientist in his book *God and the New Physics*, in
which he explains the impact of the latest theories upon traditional beliefs about God.  
While the latest advances in science and their relationship to religion allow us to see the cosmos in new ways, we should be wary of labeling ancient civilization as “pre-scientific.” Loye and Eisler suggest that the roots for social chaos theory may be found in the *I Ching* (The Chinese Book of Changes) and the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus. And with a careful look at scripture, we might discover that those who preserved the memories of ancient Israel understood in their own way realities which modern physicists are now describing in scientific language.

Jon Levison, in his book *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, points out a long-standing tradition expressed in the Hebrew Bible that the primeval chaos was a kind of being which might be chained but which nevertheless still exists and poses a threat to the cosmos. Although the Israelites demythologized their creation account, and no dragon or monsters battle Yahweh for control of the world, an underlying resistance to Yahweh’s rule continues. One also sees this resistance in the Book of Judges where the people persistently rebel against Yahweh in spite of God’s attempts to bring them under control. This is echoed in the Book of Amos in a litany of God’s attempts to subdue the Israelites’ wanderings (4:6-13). Every method Yahweh used to bring them back failed; the people could not be subjugated.

An extraordinary text describing God’s power (or lack thereof) lies within the divine speeches in the Book of Job. God challenges Job to sit upon the divine throne and subdue evil; if Job can achieve that monumental task, Yahweh tells him, “Then even I will give you credit” (40:10-14). God seems to be saying, “The world is a very big place, and many bad things happen in it; if you can get it all under control, that is more than I can do!” What does this mean for the orthodox doctrine of divine omnipotence and the related belief in a well-regulated cosmos?

**Is Anybody in Control?**

Hefner discusses this issue by contrasting Plato’s myth of the origin of the physical universe with the Babylonian creation myth, the
**Enuma Elish.** In Plato’s version the demiurge imposes the form of the eternal “Ideas” upon empty (and chaotic) space. Plato understands chaos as something to be overcome by order, which does not change or degrade in any way. Traditional Christianity founded its orthodoxy upon this Hellenistic view of the world and the divine control over it. A very different view is presented by the *Enuma Elish*, which sets chaos (the violence of Marduk) against violence (Tiamat). Expressed in later dialectical terms, this opposition suggests that “good and evil, chaos and order, God and the world, human personhood, all emerge *through* a struggle.” The Israelites adopted, and adapted, this myth to express their world view. While the violence of the Babylonian myth has been expunged, competition with chaos remains.

Hefner sees this tension between order and chaos expressed in modern science by the second law of thermodynamics. In our everyday experience we confront the law in five ways: the dissipation of energy, change from one state of being to another, the linear movement of time, chaotic disorderliness, and the constant presentation of new possibilities. The last three experiences of the second law correlate with the ancient Near Eastern cosmology. Struggle and change are not enemies of the universe, but they become the very process by which the world comes into being. Hefner goes so far as to claim that God emerges from this ground of absolute possibility—which is absolutely free—and creates by bringing into actuality that which was only potential. God uses the unexpected and the unpredictable as tools of creation.

**Chaos Theory**

So far, this discussion has referred to chaos as a general concept, not the contemporary scientific theory of quantum physics. Before turning to the story of Deborah in Judges 4, a few aspects of chaos theory technically defined ought to be highlighted since I claim that such theory relates to the biblical narrative. I will highlight the following three theses because they have a direct bearing upon the story of Deborah.
Unpredictability. First, systems are globally stable but locally unpredictable.\(^\text{10}\) Theorists have developed a "chaos game," in which a computer generates dots according to a few simple rules. Once the rules have been established, the dots may appear in random order, but after enough dots have been generated, a particular shape always emerges. A pot of boiling water provides another example. When we add heat to a pot of water, we know that the water will come to a boil. We cannot predict where the first bubble of steam will rise to the surface—or the second or the third—but we know that the water will eventually boil furiously. Within the realm of human behavior, how often have we heard, "I knew someone would say that, but I never expected it from her!"?

Microcosm = Macrocosm. The second thesis is the microcosm resembles the macrocosm.\(^\text{11}\) Fractal geometry shows that large structures have substructures which are similar to the large structures. Small patterns fit together in ways which form large patterns similar to the small patterns. Computer-generated designs can seem infinitely varied, but under close examination, we discover that the designs repeat themselves—perhaps at the microscopic level—within the larger patterns. Many religions have posited the belief that the earth is constructed on the image of heaven. Human temples were built on a heavenly model; human society is structured like divine society, etc. Modern chaos theory asserts that the physical world itself possesses such self-similarity.

Changeability. Finally, events have a sensitive dependence on initial causes.\(^\text{12}\) A meteorologist, Edward Lorenz, was conducting experiments to improve weather forecasting when he discovered that, when two computer models began to vary even slightly, they quickly diverged until they were quite different. This led to his "butterfly theory." A butterfly in Mississippi will create a slight current of air whose effects magnify over time and space, causing a storm in Paris. While this may be a dramatic way of illustrating the theory, scientists now understand that a tiny change in conditions sets off a chain reaction affecting many other elements within a system and greatly altering the results of an experiment. Who has not reflected on how the most trivial events in life turn out to be life-changing?
The Story of Deborah

Does the biblical text reflect such a universe? Did our ancestors, who maintained and passed on the human encounter with metaphysical reality, observe universal laws of nature (material and human) which modern scientists are just now rediscovering? The prose narrative of Deborah, Barak, Jael, and Sisera, found in Judges 4, provides exemplary evidence that this is the case.

**Literary Structure.** Like most passages from the Old Testament, Judges 4 is the product of a process of literary development and editing. The story itself is found in verses 4-22, but it is framed by a later editor, whose work is found in verses 1-3 and 23. The frame exhibits typical Hebrew narrative style with a series of “waw consecutives” driving the flow of the events. The writer of verses 4-22 avoids this use of verbs and instead uses participles and noun clauses to elicit a sense of flow. Robert Polzin sees a critical difference between these two sections. While the main story is told by a narrator who relates the tale’s surprising details, which parallel the instability of the times, the editor whose work shaped the story has taken the omniscient point of view in order to supply the element of stability made possible by knowing God’s plan and compassion.

The main story, narrated in verses 4-22, may have been derived from two strands of tradition. According to such a theory, one story describes the defeat of Jabin near Kedesh in upper Galilee with the wife of Heber as the heroine, and the other telling of the defeat of Sisera in Jezreel with Jael as the heroine. However, D. F. Murray argues from a literary perspective that verses 4-22 must be considered a unit and all the characters belong together for the plot to make the necessary turns to reach its conclusion. Murray is also correct in stating that the storyteller had an “essentially literary rather than historical or quasi-historical interest.”

**Historical Context.** On the other hand, the reader is confronted with a description of human activity set in an identifiable historical context. While we can suspend any judgment regarding the historicity of the events recounted in this chapter, we ought to consider the text as a genuine attempt to convey a sense of reality about the world.
Since this story presents metaphysical reality through the guise of historical reality, we must understand the historical setting if we are to grasp fully the metaphysical message. Or, perhaps more accurately, we must recognize what the readers would have understood the setting to have been. The setting for the story of Deborah appears to have been a time when the Israelite tribes were unifying, growing stronger, and encroaching on traditional Canaanite or Philistine territory, leading the Canaanites and Philistines to establish a military alliance to meet this new threat from the hills.

The Book of Judges contains two stories which involve tribes of the Galilee-Jezreel region, the stories of Gideon and Deborah. In both cases, the battles were instigated by an Ephraimite, a detail which indicates some commonality of interest. What was this common interest? The name of Deborah’s enemy may give us a clue. Sisera is probably a Luvian name (from Asia Minor), implying a possible connection with the Philistines, or Philistina itself. In either case, Deborah and Barak may have been fighting the Philistines or a Philistine-Canaanite coalition. But why would the Philistines and the Canaanites form a coalition? Norman Gottwald suggests the proper translation of Judges 5:6-7 (a section of the Song of Deborah) describes the increasing power of the Israelite tribes to interrupt commercial traffic and prosper from the booty they plundered from the Canaanite caravans. A. D. H. Mayes argues that the defeat of Sisera in the Jezreel valley is the one Israelite victory in the plains region that could have motivated a Philistine counterattack at Aphek (described in 1 Samuel 4). Since the battle of Aphek took place fifteen miles north of Gath, the northernmost Philistine city, and over a century after the Philistines had entered Canaan, the battle must have been motivated by a perceived threat from a unified Israelite force.

Geographical Context. A key issue in discovering some of the many surprises in this text is its geography. The characters in the story move a great deal, and we must know where they are going and explore the motivation for their movement. While the main action clearly occurs in southern Galilee and the Jezreel valley, two place-names create some confusion. First, Sisera dwells (which in this context undoubtedly means rules) in Harosheth-hagoiim.
Yohanan Aharoni translates the name as "the forests of Galilee" and assumes that Sisera is the nominal ruler over the entire region. This would imply that the Israelites had not gained control over Galilee, and the story of Deborah either comes from a very early period or it is a description of revolution. However, another theory states that Harosheth-hagoiim is a particular city which lay west of Galilee, nearer to the Mediterranean coast. Perhaps it was near the modern village of el-Harithiyeh at the northwest end of the Jezreel valley, or it was the ancient city of Muharashti (mentioned in the Amarna Letters) on the plain of Sharon. If Sisera is to be associated with the Philistines (as suggested above), the latter theory appears more plausible. In addition, the Israelites gained control of Galilee very early, making the former suggestion less likely. Finally, the Canaanites and Philistines ruled over city-states; therefore, Harosheth-hagoiim was probably a city of the coastal plain region, west of Israelite-held Galilee.

We experience even greater difficulty in our attempts to locate Kedesh (associated with Barak). Since "Kedesh" is based on the word for "sacred," it was a popular name for towns and cities—a fact which has led to several theories concerning the location of the Kedesh in Judges 4, including the suggestion that the story describes as many as three different Kedeshes. Our narrative first mentions "Kedesh in Naphtali" (v. 6), but John Gray contends that two cities bear that name in Naphtali: one in the northern Jordan River valley, seven miles north-northwest of Hazor, and the second east of the Jezreel valley on the slopes overlooking the Sea of Galilee. In addition, 1 Chron. 6:72 mentions a Kedesh in the territory of Issachar, and Gray believes that this Kedesh (now called Tell Abu-Qadis, which is two miles southeast of Megiddo) would make a better location for the Heber encampment. The variety of possible identifications and combinations is quite large. But what impression does a reader get from this story? We must note that once "Kedesh in Naphtali" is introduced as the home of Barak, no other geographical qualifiers are associated with the name "Kedesh" wherever it appears in the chapter. No problem exists in assuming the Israelite troops were mustered in Barak’s hometown (vv. 9-10). Further, the Kedesh mentioned at the end of verse 11 indicates the location of the Oak of Zaanannim, making Kedesh the entity known by the reader; therefore, it must be identified with the Kedesh.
already mentioned in the narrative. Given what is presented to us in chapter 4, it seems best to assume that one Kedesh is meant throughout the story and that Kedesh lay in southeastern Galilee. We shall see how this adds to the surprising features of the narrative.

Chaos and Unpredictability in Judges 4. With these presuppositions about the history and geography of the narrative, we may begin to examine the many ways the story of Deborah surprises the reader. The first unexpected detail arises in verse 5, where Deborah is said to be judging Israel at the “palm of Deborah” in the hill country of Ephraim. From the traditions about their ancestors, the people were already familiar with an “oak of Deborah” in the same region; this was the burial site of Deborah, the nurse of Rebekah (Gen. 35:8). One often finds such connections among widely separated texts in the Bible, but the transformation of the tree into a palm is startling. Why does our storyteller refer to a palm tree in the central hill country, where the climate and terrain are incompatible with palms? Boling suggests that this may be a reflection of the “divinitory oasis par excellence”—Kadesh Barnea—where Israel spent most of its time in the wilderness, receiving instructions of Yahweh. If Boling is correct, we have a surprising juxtaposition of desert oasis and green hills. In any case, a palm tree located in Ephraim is an example of “chaos” in nature.

When Deborah summons Barak to lead the battle against the Canaanites, she tells him that Yahweh will give Sisera into his hands (v. 7). This is the normal state of affairs; the general of the army receives credit for the victory and quite often kills or executes the enemy’s leader personally. The reader is led to expect a typical story of Yahweh leading a mighty man of valor to the capture of the opposition. In this case, however, two atypical twists occur. First, Barak, the mighty warrior, will not proceed to the battlefield without the presence of a woman (v. 8; the Septuagint adds Barak’s desire to be certain of the most propitious moment to engage in battle.) While there are many examples in the Bible of reluctance to heed God’s call to action, this is the only case in which a man seeks advice on military matters from a woman. This hesitation leads to the second twist of plot here: Deborah declares that Sisera will be given into the hand of a woman, contrary to expectations. Amazingly, Deborah repeats the promise that Yahweh will deliver Sisera into Barak’s
hand in verse 14, heightening the uncertainty of the outcome in the mind of the reader.\textsuperscript{31} Our expectations have been turned upside-down, or have they? In this story we cannot predict.

Once we are told that a woman will conquer Sisera, we immediately turn our attention to the chief female character of the story—Deborah. Indeed, Deborah’s immediate joining of Barak (v. 10b) and her call to engage Sisera in battle (v. 14a) may give hints that she expected to be the woman into whose hand Yahweh would sell Sisera.\textsuperscript{32} Thus, reader and character alike look toward Deborah’s triumph. But at the last possible moment, the storyteller introduces another woman. The presence of a Kenite encampment is introduced in verse 11, but only Heber is mentioned, delaying the appearance of Jael and raising false expectations about Heber.\textsuperscript{33} Murray does state that “‘there is a sense in which both Deborah and Jael are the [women] of verse 9: Deborah, by subjugating Barak, effectively achieves victory over Sisera’s forces; Jael, by achieving the victory over Sisera, effectively subjugates Barak.’”\textsuperscript{34} Nonetheless, events take unpredictable (chaotic?) turns, leading us to question any overall control in history.

The narrator tells us that when Barak’s army routed Sisera’s army, his soldiers fled toward their home base, Harosheth-hagoiim (v. 16). Assuming the geography described above, the Canaanite-Philistine coalition retreated to the west, away from the territory controlled by the Israelites—a very natural reaction. But Sisera chose to flee to the encampment of Heber the Kenite (v. 17), which, the reader has learned, is near Kedesh (v. 11). As stated previously, the Kedesh of verse 11 most probably is to be identified with the Kedesh named as Barak’s home town; therefore, Sisera fled toward the heart of enemy territory! While one can imagine that choosing to separate oneself from the main army might be a shrewd tactic for escape, one might reasonably wonder why Sisera took this particular direction. Other stories of Israel’s victories include vignettes of generals or kings escaping the battlefield only to be captured later; this one surprises us with the apparent audacity of Sisera running away from the security of his own home and into the uncertainty of an Israelite stronghold.

The narrative does go on to provide a rationale for Sisera’s unexpected decision: Heber the Kenite has a peace treaty with the Canaanites. However, the presence of a Kenite camp near Kedesh
and the existence of a peace treaty between them and the Canaanites must have perplexed the reader. Norman Gottwald speculates that Heber may have been a traveling metallurgist who worked for whomever hired him, but the tradition consistently placed the Kenites in southern Canaan, near and in the Negeb. In addition, the Kenites were considered allies of Israel and, therefore, unlikely to give aid and comfort to one of Israel's enemies. The Israelite readers must have asked themselves why Heber had moved his camp so far from the normal range of Kenite occupation and why he had made a treaty with the Canaanites.

The pivotal scene in the story, and the one fraught with the greatest unpredictability, involves the relationship between host and guest, i.e., between Jael and Sisera. The ancient Near East had many strict rules about extending and receiving hospitality, and this narrative becomes a virtual "comedy of errors," a description of utter social chaos. Once Sisera was allowed into the encampment, he assumed (as would the readers) that he had received sanctuary. This is particularly true after he received the normal refreshment offered to visitors to a Bedouin camp. While Jael's gift of milk is proper behavior for a host, it may actually become part of the ruse to do Sisera in. Boling states it succinctly, "Certain goat milk products have a soporific effect. . . .She duped him and doped him." Along with the offer of milk, Jael's covering of Sisera (mentioned twice) may imply maternal concern; but this concern is for her own household, and it leads to Sisera's death. The place of sanctuary had become a death trap.

Victor Matthews points out, however, that several rules of ancient Near Eastern protocol of hospitality were broken. These rules were so basic to getting along in society and they were so familiar that the very fact of Sisera's breaking them would have shocked the readers. The male head of a household was to extend hospitality; therefore, when Sisera approached the tent of Jael instead of Heber, he dishonored Heber's authority. Jael also usurps Heber's right to offer hospitality—going so far as to tell Sisera to "have no fear"—but this might be the beginning of a self-defensive ruse to gain his trust in order to kill him. Compounding Sisera's misconduct as a guest, the "rug" with which Jael covered Sisera might have been the curtain which separated the public from the private section of the tent, indicating an improper intrusion into Jael's sleeping area.
Indeed, the entire scene presents hints of a thinly veiled sexual aggression which was totally unexpected from a guest.

Once an invitation of hospitality has been extended, a guest is not to ask for anything; the host must be allowed the honor of freely offering to meet the guest's needs. Sisera's request for a drink of water was an affront to Jael's hospitality since it implies that she failed to provide for his needs. The readers expected Jael to bring milk since the host is to offer the best that is available in the household, but Sisera's demand was not part of the normal social order. Sisera continued to be demanding when he commanded Jael to stand at the door of the tent and turn away any searchers. "General" Sisera's final words are imperatives, but such behavior was improper for a guest and might be interpreted as belligerent, placing Sisera into the status of hostile intruder. Ironically, the presumably subservient woman expresses the final "No!".

By the end of the story, it had taken so many unexpected turns the readers might very well have been left dumbfounded. All evidence which normally provided clues to the flow of future events proved useless for predicting who might do what. In addition, the old tradition (vv. 4-22) was not written in the typical historical narrative style, which might have given a sense the comfort of distance—i.e., these are events that occurred in the past, and we are well aware of their outcome. On the contrary, the writer used noun and verb clauses which placed the reader in the middle of events as they were happening. The storyteller and the audience were on this roller coaster for the first time, and every turn and dip were a surprise. Such unpredictability could lead us to question the presence of any control over, or even order within, history. After all, order implies the ability to discern constant cause-effect relationships which allow us to know how events follow one another.

Divine Providence and the Chaos Game

The story of Deborah accurately reflects our experience of life in the world: human actions and historical events are often unpredictable and appear chaotic. The strict order, which people so desperately seek, fails to meet our expectations, and that might lead us to a crisis of faith. If events seem to occur randomly, we might question the
existence of purpose in history. Does God have any control over history? Does divine providence have any meaning at all? Yet, in spite of the chaotic nature of individual events, general patterns emerge when we observe large numbers of actions over long periods of time. Just as in the “chaos game,” in which computer-generated dots appear randomly on a screen but over time many dots produce a recognizable shape (see above), the individual events in the story of Deborah occurred unpredictably but fit into the Deuteronomist’s scheme of history. To use another analogy studied by chaos theorists, we know exactly where a river flows, but we cannot predict what direction any particular molecule will take.

Perhaps the physicists who examine chaos in nature have rediscovered a truth about reality which the ancients knew long ago. Chaos is a fact of life; things happen to us—unpredictable, unexpected, sometimes tragic things. The way of thinking based on Newtonian science seeks a cause for every event, strict laws of the universe by which we might know what will happen and (more importantly) how to manipulate events to our advantage. But the new physics tells us the cosmos is not so tidy—as does the story of Deborah and many other texts from the Bible. God does not control each event, particularly those events we call human decisions, yet the Bible affirms that order does exist. Indeed, as the story of Deborah indicates, divine order may emerge from the chaos of human unpredictability. The objectionable phrase acts of God, which is found in insurance policies, is inaccurate; hurricanes, earthquakes, and tornadoes just happen. The Judeo-Christian affirmation claims that God continually works to bring life-giving harmony out of the chaotic cacophony. Perhaps that is what Paul meant when he wrote to the Romans, “We know that in everything God works for good.”

Notes


7. Ibid., 477-78.

8. Ibid., 471-73.

9. Ibid., 479-80.


11. Ibid., 115-18.

12. Ibid., 15-23.

13. This same editorial style and structure can be found in the “frames” of other stories in the Book of Judges, e.g., 3:12-14; 6:1-2; 8:33-35; 10:6-10; and 13:1.


22. Ibid., 221.


25. Gray, 269. See also Aharoni, 224.


27. See, for example, Boling, 96-97; and Miller and Hayes, 98-100.


29. Concerning this identification, see Gray, 219.


31. Murray, 177.

32. Ibid., 177.

33. Ibid., 181-82.

34. Murray, 177-78.

35. Gottwald, 321.

36. Ibid., 577-78.


40. Matthews.

41. The following discussion of broken hospitality rules is based upon Matthews's thorough examination in his article to be published in *Biblical Theology Bulletin*.

42. Murray 183.

43. See Numbers 6 for a description of what the people could have expected of a Nazirite.
Jack A. Keller, Jr.

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and Forms of Moral Discourse

Every visitor to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum will be haunted by something different. For me it was three photos. One captures a huge crowd responding to the pageantry at the Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg in 1938. In the foreground is a beautiful teenaged girl with a look of intensity on her face and in her posture that says she has given her soul to the Nazi propaganda. The second photo has frozen forever a mentally handicapped young girl, about the age my own daughter is now, being held up for examination and judged to be a "life unworthy of living." The third photo is a portrait of a lovely young woman from the Polish town of Ejszyszki, where 4,000 souls were wiped out by Nazi mobile death squads in 1941. She bears a startling resemblance to my sister-in-law. When my eyes locked onto those three photos, the message of this memorial museum suddenly became personal. And judging from the varying amount of time that other visitors lingered in front of particular exhibits, I assume that they too found points of emotional connection in this museum of misery.

Thousands of artifacts of all sorts convey the enormity of the Holocaust. Some artifacts are large, such as Boxcar 11688-G, used to transport Jews from Warsaw to Treblinka. Some are smaller,

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personal items such as toothbrushes, scissors, and shoes. Some are things that belonged to people as victims: yellow stars for Jews, purple triangles for Jehovah’s Witnesses, and striped prison jackets. Photomurals and video monitors throughout the museum document the march of madness in those terrible years. The glass walls of two bridges between the museum’s towers are etched with the names of individuals and entire towns that succumbed to the Nazi onslaught. The enormity of the devastation is realistically portrayed—and yet remains beyond full comprehension. But a portion of the grim reality comes home with emotional force when museum visitors somehow discern in one of these images and artifacts a personal connection with a real person from the past.

The permanent exhibit, which is the heart of the museum, tells the story of the Holocaust in chronological fashion. It is organized so that the visitor begins at the fourth floor and proceeds down through the third and second floors. The chronicle of “The Nazi Assault” during 1933-39 is housed on the fourth floor. “The Final Solution,” implemented during 1940-45, is depicted in gruesome detail on the third floor. The third and final major portion of the exhibit, entitled “The Last Chapter” and housed on the second floor, recounts the efforts of rescuers and resistance fighters during the Holocaust, the liberation of the death camps, the trials of war criminals, and the resettlement of Jews. But at any point in this historical rehearsal, one may encounter some artifact, some item that arrests one’s gaze, that compels one’s attention and thereby enters more deeply into awareness. The museum can be, and surely will be for many visitors, a powerful awakening experience, both cognitive and emotional.

According to museum director Jeshajahu Weinberg, the main task of the museum is simply to present the facts of the Holocaust. “To educate its visitors, the museum does not have to indoctrinate moral conclusions. They are inherent in the historical story which the museum relates.” That is surely true. The museum presents the history of the persecution and murder of six million Jews and some five million others (Gypsies, Poles, Jehovah’s Witnesses, homosexuals, the mentally and physically handicapped, and Soviet prisoners of war). Just to present the facts of that brutal history is a compelling argument for certain moral conclusions. They are so
obvious and so deeply felt that to state them explicitly seems
unnecessary.

Yet I find it helpful to reflect on how the moral importance of the
Holocaust is conveyed by this museum. What kinds of moral
discourse does it demonstrate and encourage? Or better, what kind
of morally relevant discourse does it demonstrate and encourage? I
propose to consider the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in terms
of four types or forms of morally relevant discourse: prophetic,
annotative, ethical, and policy. Each type or form has its
characteristic style and strengths. Each speaks with its distinctively
authoritative voice. None of the four types is sufficient by itself; to
focus exclusively on one type would be to leave some other morally
significant issues and concerns unattended. The moral dimension of
life is too rich to be reduced to any one form of discourse. So it is
no surprise that describing the moral and ethical significance of an
event that rent the fabric of Western civilized societies should
require more than one type of discourse, more than one type of
argument. As I describe selected features of the Holocaust Memorial
Museum, I will note how each functions as a particular form or type
of moral discourse.

Prophetic Discourse

Prophetic discourse often takes the form of indictment, trying to
show how far short of the ideal society has fallen. The writings of
Amos, Hosea, and Jeremiah are familiar biblical examples.
Prophetic indictments are radical. Specific acts are important only
insofar as they signify deeper dangers or problems. The real concern
is to identify and challenge the roots of what is morally wrong.
Prophetic indictment typically uses passionate language, vivid
images, and metaphors to stir emotions. It evokes a sense of crisis,
of urgency.

Such discourse has both strengths and weaknesses. Prophetic
indictment can arouse awareness of the presence of evil. By
appealing to moral indignation it has enormous capacity to motivate
those who find its depiction compelling. Prophetic indictment warns
us that something has gone terribly wrong but does not usually
specify in detail what should be done and by whom in order to set things right again.

The fourth and third floors of the Holocaust Memorial Museum offer a powerful illustration of prophetic discourse. The exhibits are not beautiful, just the opposite. But they are painfully eloquent in their testimony that something has gone wrong, that a great evil has been set loose upon the world.

Official persecution of Jews began in 1933 with a 24-hour boycott of Jewish businesses and shops across Germany. A week later, the government announced the first of a series of laws passed between 1933 and 1939 that were designed to isolate, exclude, segregate, and impoverish Jews. The museum reminds visitors of the wild night of book burning in May of 1933. The books of Jewish authors, including Einstein and Freud, were burned. But so were the books of Helen Keller, a writer whom most of the world perceived as a heroic figure but whom the Nazis regarded as an inferior specimen.

The Nazi propaganda machine was awesome in its efficiency. Joseph Goebbels (who held a Ph.D. in literature and philosophy from Heidelberg) became the master propagandist. Under his direction, the one-party state exercised complete control over the flow of information through newspapers, tabloids, radio, mass public rallies, posters, and films. At the heart of the message conveyed through various media was an obsession with racial purity.

The museum exhibit makes clear the root evil in the Holocaust: racism. The Nazi fascination with a so-called “Aryan master race” seems ridiculous when looking at the display of calipers used to measure skull width, nose length and width, forehead height, and so on. But it took a nasty turn with the passage of the Nuremberg race laws in 1935. German Jews were stripped of their citizenship and marriage between Jews and “racial Germans” was forbidden. After Nuremberg, the pace of persecution picked up. Jews were barred from many public facilities. All Jewish businesses were seized and “Aryanized.” Jewish professionals were forbidden to practice. The most striking artifact from Kristallnacht—the pogroms that erupted November 9, 1938, when thousands of Jewish stores, schools, and synagogues were burned, scores of Jews were beaten and killed, and 30,000 Jews were arrested—is a wooden Torah ark from a German synagogue, stabbed and scratched and scarred.
The Nazi regime made full use of sophisticated technology to identify and track its victims. The museum exhibit includes a Hollerith punch-card counting machine—a crude precursor of today’s computers. Hollerith machines, manufactured by a German subsidiary of IBM, were used by the SS to manage the movement of prisoners in and out of concentration camps. A visitor to the museum cannot look at the Hollerith machine without leaping to contemporary dilemmas. How can one ensure that a powerful yet morally neutral technology is not harnessed for malevolent purposes?

Between 1933 and 1941 the Nazi regime tried to get rid of Jews by forced emigration. By 1938 roughly 150,000 Jews had fled Germany. But by 1938 they were running out of places to go. The museum exhibit includes photos and extensive newspaper reports of the Evian Conference on Lake Geneva, at which representatives from thirty-two countries gathered to discuss the international refugee crisis. The results were puny. Most countries, including the United States, were not willing to receive large numbers of Jews. A lingering economic depression, high unemployment, and anti-Semitism combined to close the door to all but a trickle.

The museum also includes artifacts of the ill-fated ocean-liner St. Louis, which left Germany for Cuba carrying 930 Jews—only to be denied entrance to Cuba and the United States. Forced to return to Europe, the passengers finally were admitted to Belgium, the Netherlands, France, and England. But within months the Nazis occupied Western Europe; only the 288 passengers admitted to England were safe.

This portion of the Holocaust Museum is especially troubling. Prior to 1940, much could have been done to prevent the Holocaust (or at least reduce its magnitude) simply by offering hospitality to would-be immigrants. And it is discomforting to think about the current political climate in which U.S. immigration policy is formulated. There is a reluctance, still, to opening our doors to the ones who most need asylum from threats of one sort or another.

World War II began officially with the German invasion of Poland. Poles were considered subhuman by the Nazis, valuable only as slave labor. A brutal murder campaign was launched against Polish priests, teachers, university professors, writers, artists, and anyone suspected of being a member of the resistance. This was
something new and terrible: terror was intensified after the surrender of an enemy.

Museum Project Director Michael Berenbaum describes the murder of the handicapped as a prefiguration of the Holocaust. Pseudo-scientific rationalizations and financial considerations went hand in hand in denying the handicapped any right to life. Gas chambers were first used at the handicapped killing centers, as were crematoria to dispose of the bodies. Here again, a visitor to the museum cannot help but think about one’s personal situation. Who among us doesn’t have some handicap or know and care about handicapped persons in our circle of family or friends or workplace or church?

Before the “final solution” was in place, Nazi policy in Poland was to confine Jews to ghettos. Ghetto existence was grim: poverty, hunger, disease, bitter cold, severe overcrowding, and forced labor. Yet a stubborn vestige of cultural life survived: concerts, theater programs, poetry readings, synagogue services, schools for children and adults somehow continued. The museum includes numerous photos of ghetto scenes along with large objects such as a builder’s cart used to carry corpses, a gate from a Jewish cemetery, a casting of a section of the wall around the Warsaw ghetto.

The most unexpected artifact came from Theresienstadt, which was both a ghetto and a concentration camp. A tiny, brightly painted wooden butterfly on wheels was made by an unknown prisoner in defiance of the Nazi camp policy and smuggled to a small child, one of 15,000 children incarcerated in separate barracks from their parents. The children in this concentration camp often used the image of a butterfly in their drawings and poetry. Butterflies in summer became for them symbols of freedom. Only 1,000 children survived Theresienstadt.

The museum record of the actual slaughter of Jews and others deemed undesirable by the Nazis is brutally graphic. Photos of mass executions and mass graves record the ghastly work of the Einsatzgruppen, the mobile killing squads. At the Wannsee Conference in 1942, the leaders of several government agencies formally articulated the Nazi “Final Solution to the Jewish Problem.” Genocide became official state policy, and murder on this scale required the participation of every branch of government bureaucracy and every level of German society.
Parish churches and the Interior Ministry supplied the birth records that defined and isolated the Jews. The Post Office delivered the notifications of definition, expropriation, denaturalization, and deportation. The Finance Ministry confiscated Jewish wealth and property. German industrial and commercial firms fired Jewish workers, officers, and board members. . . . The universities refused to admit Jewish students . . . and dismissed Jewish faculty. Government transportation bureaus handled the billing arrangements with the railroads for the trains that carried Jews to their death. . . . German corporations profited handsomely from the industry of death. Pharmaceutical firms tested drugs on camp inmates without any regard for toxic side effects. Companies bid for contracts to build ovens and supply the gas used for extermination.  

Such widespread complicity with radical evil makes it all the more disturbing to see the photomurals and video monitors of inhumane medical experiments, slave labor, emaciated bodies holding to life by a thread, and stacks of corpses thrown away or burned. Some of the artifacts are more durable than human flesh: a canister for Zyklon B poison gas, barracks used at Auschwitz, a casting of the door to the gas chamber at Majdanek (with the manufacturer’s name proudly emblazoned on the peephole). Suffice it to say that there is more cold efficiency of killing and more anguish of suffering represented in this part of the museum than most of us can absorb.

But what do we do after hearing and seeing and feeling this prophetic indictment? Elie Wiesel knew what he had to do on the occasion of the dedication of the museum in April. Speaking directly to the President of the United States, Wiesel denounced the so-called “ethnic cleansing” underway in the former Yugoslavia: “I cannot not tell you something. . . . we must do something to stop the bloodshed in that country.”8 That was surely prophetic discourse. Wiesel did not try to spell out precisely what strategies should be followed, only that something be done, that victims not be abandoned to their tormentors.
Some other contemporary prophet might rage against the massive international arms bazaar, which feeds the fires of destruction for the sake of profit. That kind of corporate greed smacks of the German firms that competed to sell ovens.

Prophetic indictment surely has a place within Christian communities (at local, regional, and national levels). If indictment is all one hears, week after week, then it loses its sting. But from time to time the threat to human worth and dignity is so urgent that Christian leaders are obliged to speak out, calling attention to the disparity between what is and the biblical ideal of what ought to be. Let us turn now to another kind of moral discourse suggested by the museum.

Narrative Discourse

Narrative discourse deals with what we should do by rehearsing the stories and images that tell us who we are. In the process of hearing the stories and reclaiming images of our community’s history, our moral identity, our character is shaped. Actions then flow from that identity or character.

This kind or form of morally relevant discourse has considerable strength. Recent theological literature has highlighted the importance of narrative as the primary form of scripture itself and as an important means, perhaps the fundamental means, by which theological meanings can be apprehended and integrated into our lives. Narratives function to sustain a common memory in communities. And stories can carry nuances of meanings and emotional weight that no purely rational argument can bear.9

The weaknesses of this kind of discourse, when isolated from other types of discourse, are apparent. A narrative has power only for those who share a conviction of its authority. What basis, if any, does narrative ethics provide for dialogue and cooperation with those who disagree about which story or stories are authoritative? How do we discern which stories are appropriate to our situation? Which stories ought to shape moral ethos and character (and hence, ultimately actions and policies)?

The Nazis had a powerful story, of course, a full-blown ideology. And everything I have described so far about the museum is
dedicated to demonstrating the demonic consequences of that story. The consequences of the Nazi ideology were so horrendous that world opinion now regards that story as a paradigm of radical evil.

However, the museum also records the witness of smaller communities shaped and empowered by other narratives. While the numbers of people involved were pitifully small, there were throughout Europe some brave souls who dared to defy the systematic oppression of the Nazi regime at the risk of their own lives to rescue Jews. The second floor of the permanent exhibit tells the stories of such persons who exhibited amazing bravery and a tenacious hold on human decency.\(^\text{10}\)

The story of the rescue of Jews in Denmark is symbolized by one of the largest artifacts in the museum: a small fishing boat used to ferry Jews to safety in Sweden. Of all the European countries occupied by the Nazis, only Denmark rescued more than 90 percent of its Jews. Jews in Denmark were accepted and respected as full citizens. When plans for the deportation of Jews reached Danish political leaders, a massive, well-coordinated, underground movement was launched to get Jews out of the country before they could be deported. Over a two-week period in October of 1943, 7,220 Jews were carried on fishing boats to Sweden; only 464 Jews were unable to escape (and only 51 of those eventually perished).

What motivated the Danes to protect the Jews? Some were self-consciously motivated by their Christian identity. But perhaps most were impelled to act simply because they viewed Jews as fellow citizens and neighbors. Jews and Gentiles were perceived as part of a common narrative of a democratic Denmark.

The museum celebrates also the rescue efforts of an extraordinary individual. Swedish aristocrat Raoul Wallenberg was chosen to lead the War Refugee Board rescue operation in Nazi-occupied Budapest in 1944. Authorized to use any methods he deemed appropriate, Wallenberg printed and distributed to Jews thousands of Swedish certificates of protection. He set up hospitals, nurseries, and soup kitchens for Jews. With an imperious air, he confronted German and Hungarian officers, demanding the release of Jews in their custody. He saved tens of thousands of Jews from Auschwitz, only to disappear forever himself as a prisoner of the Soviet army that liberated Budapest.
The testimony of rescue that most captivated me is about the village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon in southern France. During 1940-1944, 5,000 refugees—3,000 of whom were Jewish—were hidden from the Nazis by the residents of this ordinary village. The moral courage displayed by these villagers was clearly funded by their Christian faith. Their identity was decisively shaped by their identification with the biblical story and their Huguenot heritage of religious persecution and civil disobedience.

Their reading of the biblical story, articulated by their pastor, André Trocmé, emphasized several themes. First, all human beings are of immense, unconditional worth to God. Created in the image of God and redeemed by the sacrifice of Jesus, every human being is important to God, quite apart from personal desert. Hence, while the parishioners of Le Chambon resisted strenuously the Nazi effort to deport Jews, they nevertheless refused to hate their German oppressors. Their intent was to save the victims and save the victimizers from doing more evil.

Second, the Christians of Le Chambon were steeped in the Old Testament story of the Jews as the chosen people. Nothing in their reading of the New Testament changed that special status of the Jews. To help Jews was to serve God.

Philip P. Hallie, in his splendid book *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*, calls attention to a third theme drawn from the Bible that profoundly influenced the Christians of Le Chambon. They took very seriously the obligation to provide cities of refuge (see Num. 35:9-15; Deut. 19:1-13; Josh. 20:1-9). The pastors and people of this village were convinced they had a duty not only to avoid inflicting harm directly but to protect refugees, to prevent harm being done to others. To allow bloodshed against refugees in their midst would be to be guilty of that bloodshed.

These stories of rescue illustrate powerfully the importance of narrative discourse. To a considerable degree, actions do spring from identity and character, which in turn is shaped by the narratives that enable us to make sense of the world. This lesson about the moral importance of narrative discourse has obvious implications for Christian congregations today. The way we read the Bible (and convey that reading in our preaching, worship, and teaching) has a profound influence on our attitudes toward Jews. Churches today inculcate attitudes toward Jews just as surely as
churches did fifty years ago. But we do have resources available now that can help us recognize our theological and moral blind spots. The story we convey in our preaching, in our liturgies, in our teaching will either reinforce or dispel prejudice against Jews. Likewise, the story we claim as the Christian story and convey in our churches will either incline or disincline those who hear it to extend hospitality to other persons and peoples in need.

**Ethical Discourse**

Ethical discourse proper gathers in several tasks, all typically approached with philosophically or theologically self-conscious modes of argumentation. It may encompass the clarification of rights and duties of individuals or the requirements of social justice. It may entail the identification of overarching principles and values. Ethical discourse may also be concerned with meta-ethical grounding of method or substance.

Just before visitors exit from the museum onto 15th Avenue (now renamed Raoul Wallenberg Place), they pass two wall engravings. One records the words of George Washington from August 17, 1790: "The Government of the United States . . . gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance." The other engraving quotes the Declaration of Independence: "All men are created equal . . . they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." The Holocaust Museum presents a gut-wrenching object lesson in the negation of these ideals. But the planners of the museum clearly intended to underscore the importance of protecting these basic values. As Michael Berenbaum explains, the events of the Holocaust are "a violation of every essential American value." The museum "calls upon the best of American values, seeking to reinforce the inalienable rights of all people, equal rights under law, restraint on the power of government, and respect for that which our Creator has given and which the human community should not take away." The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum reminds each of us how fragile democracy is, and how vigilant we must all remain in defending the core American values—indeed, the
core human values—of individual dignity, social justice, and civil rights. 14

These basic values rest upon the bedrock documents of our democratic heritage. Theological support for these overarching principles or values is not a part of the museum, of course, but could easily be articulated.

In the American context it is relatively easy to win support for such values and principles—in the abstract. The rub comes when we face concrete political choices, which leads us to the fourth type of morally relevant discourse.

Policy Discourse

The aim of policy discourse is to determine and achieve what is desirable within the constraints of what is possible. In this arena we are grappling with the political assignment of moral claims and responsibilities. What resources are available or can be accumulated? What legitimate interests compete for those resources? What institutional arrangements are necessary? Obviously, without this kind of discourse, prophetic indictments and ethical principles remain at the level of rhetorical statements—stinging rebukes or high-minded platitudes, perhaps, but with little impact on the rules for public action. Narrative discourse can guide particular communities but offers less direction in the public arena. On the other hand, without prophetic, ethical, and narrative discourse, policy discourse degenerates into premature satisfaction with what is easily possible, a servant of prevailing values and procedures and vested interests.

One patently obvious message of the museum is that the policies of the Third Reich were clearly wrong and that many of the policies of the Allies with regard to Jews and other enemies of the Nazi state were woefully inadequate. The more interesting questions raised by the museum at a policy level have to do with specific contemporary applications of the principles or values imbedded in the prophetic, narrative, and ethical discourse illustrated by the museum. For instance, Michael Berenbaum contends that the Holocaust “must sharpen our insights into the importance of human rights and human dignity everywhere.” 15 Encounter with the Holocaust should
engender, Berenbaum continues, "a belief in equality and equal justice under law; a commitment to pluralism and toleration . . . and a struggle for human rights as a core national value and a foundation for foreign policy.''

What are the urgent problems for which we need to hammer out policies that incorporate the values and principles affirmed by the museum? Three problem areas come to mind immediately: (1) U.S. policy regarding Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina; (2) U.S. immigration policy regarding refugees from the Caribbean and from Central America; (3) Israeli policy regarding Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. I have neither the space nor the expertise to offer policy recommendations about any of these complex problems. And other problems could surely be cited. My point is simply to suggest that the Holocaust Museum implicitly encourages policy discourse about such crucial matters.

In sum, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum offers an important witness to all U.S. citizens and especially to Christians. It is at the very least a stunning, sobering memorial to the Jewish genocide. More than that, the museum is a powerful illustration of different types of morally relevant discourse about the Holocaust. Further, the museum can be a source of encouragement for moral discourse of all four types about other social problems. That discourse is appropriate to several arenas, but surely one of those arenas is the Christian church.

Notes

1. The museum, which opened in April, 1993, is the fruit of efforts begun in 1978 when Jimmy Carter appointed a President's Commission on the Holocaust. In 1980 a unanimous act of Congress established the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council with the mandate to plan and build a national institution for Holocaust remembrance and education. The museum stands on 1.9 acres of land, given by the federal government, between 14th and 15th Streets, adjacent to the Bureau of Printing and Engraving, just off the National Mall in Washington, D.C. The building and permanent exhibit were funded entirely by private donations.

2. The permanent exhibit occupies 36,000 square feet of the total 265,000 square feet in the five-story building: A six-sided, seventy-feet high "Hall of Remembrance" is available for quiet reflection and formal ceremonies. One of two special exhibition galleries now features the "Children's Wall of Remembrance," 3,300 ceramic tiles painted by American school children in memory of the 1.5 million children killed in the Holocaust. Another exhibit entitled "Remember the Children" tells the story of a composite child, Daniel, through the Holocaust years as visitors walk through replicas of his original house, his home in a Jewish ghetto, and his space at a concentration camp. The museum also includes classrooms, a computerized learning center, and
two large auditoriums. The museum building also houses the Holocaust Research Institute, which contains a library and large archival collection.

For a description of the architecture of the museum, see the photo essay by Michael Kerman and Robert C. Lautman in the April 1993 *Smithsonian* magazine.


5. "Most museums deal in the beautiful. We are dealing with the anti-beautiful, the anti-precious," Project Director Michael Berenbaum, quoted by Judith Weinraub, "Passing on the Memory of the Holocaust," *Washington Post* (Feb. 2, 1990).


10. For more information about such efforts see *The Courage to Care: Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust*, ed. by Carol Rittner and Sandra Myers (New York: New York University Press, 1986).


15. Ibid., 222, emphasis added.

16. Ibid., 223, emphasis added.
Eve's Tattoo: Reflections on Christian Responses to the Holocaust

In my adult life, I have come to know Elie Wiesel. We are about the same age. When I was fourteen, a typical teenager growing up in Georgia, the Second World War was far away. When Wiesel was fourteen, he was a prisoner in Auschwitz. He had seen his God, his mother and sister, his soul and hope murdered by the Nazis. Elie Wiesel was immersed in a death experience beyond normal human comprehension, and his life as a survivor has been indelibly marked by it. Through him, other survivors, and years of studying the Holocaust, I too have been marked, but in an inescapably different way.

Elie Wiesel, a Jew; Beverly Asbury, a Southern Protestant Christian. Born of a Methodist father and a Baptist mother, I have spent most of my adult life as something of a Presbyterian. Yet the Holocaust has marked my life since I first saw the newsreels in the Samuel Elbert movie theater in the summer of 1945, following the liberation of the German concentration camps by Allied soldiers in April and May of that year. The images never left me, and I increasingly came to see that the events that Wiesel experienced also challenged my God, life, soul, and hope.

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Both Elie Wiesel and I have entered "young old age" now. We are bonded by the Holocaust and by a common commitment that those who perished in it be remembered. And yet, remembrance cannot stand alone; it involves a quest to understand what made the Holocaust possible and a resolve to use the Holocaust as a benchmark by which to judge and oppose continuing acts of genocide in our world. My commitment to remember is a commitment as a Christian and a commitment to bring other Christians to see the connection between our faith tradition and the Holocaust. I cannot escape it; it is a "calling."

Why Christian Interest in the Holocaust?

In the summer of 1992, my wife, my oldest daughter, and I spent the night in a lovely rural bed-and-breakfast in the wine country of California. As we registered in our hosts' living room, I noticed a fishbowl for business cards. A card was drawn weekly, and the prize was a free night's stay. My only card read "Tennessee Holocaust Commission," and as I put it in, I wondered about the appropriateness of using it that way. After we returned from dinner, our hosts at the B & B invited us to have wine or coffee and dessert in their breakfast room. As we sat, my host said, "Are you a Jew?" I wondered, Why do you ask me that? He had purposefully pulled (not drawn) my card from the fishbowl out of curiosity. If I were not a Jew, why would I be interested in the Holocaust? "Why should a Christian...?"

Well, here I was on vacation, at the end of a long day. I paused, hesitated. I felt a flash of impatience. I had noticed copies of Guideposts in our room and elsewhere in the house. My hosts had not-so-subtly left hints lying around about their own understanding of Christianity.

My wife and I caught one another's eyes. She knew that I was deciding whether and how to respond. Any reply would be complex. I would begin, "The Holocaust took place in the very heart of Christian culture in Europe..." But does a questioner really want an answer? Maybe the inquiry was merely rhetorical. Perhaps my host already had a pat, simple, set explanation. An answer could provoke an unwanted argument. Still, I knew that silence carried more risks.
than a reply and that there is never a vacation from my commitment.
“No, I am not a Jew. I am a Christian. In fact, an ordained minister
of the gospel. My reply will depend on how much you want to
know. . .”

The response of my California B & B host revealed as much
about him as mine does about me. Although he had never heard of
David Rausch and his book, A Legacy of Hatred, his own views re-
lected those of Rausch, a professor at Ashland Theological Semi-
nary in Ohio.

Rausch, a conservative evangelical Christian, sees the Holocaust
as a failure of persons who may have called or considered them-
sews to be “Christian” but who were “not really Christians.” The
claim, of course, is that “real Christians” or “true followers of Je-
sus” could never commit acts of atrocity. Presumably, “real Chris-
tians” would have been so freed from their sinful human nature as
to have become spiritually perfect. To hold this view is to espouse a
kind of gnostic position; Jesus can be known apart from history;
Christians are by nature spirtual; “Christian life” can be divorced
from the actual history of Christianity.

The disowning of Christian history as “Christian” is not shared
by all evangelical Christians. Clarence H. Wagner, Jr., the Interna-
tional Director of Bridges for Peace (a Jerusalem-based group of con-
servative American Christians seeking to reconcile Jews and
Christians) wrote in a 1992 newsletter:

Let’s look at the record. . . .

The early Church Fathers in an effort to seek legal recognition
for Christianity from the Romans (a status already conferred on
Judaism as an “ancient religion”), started Replacement Theol-
ogy: the teaching that Christianity superceded Judaism, that the
Church was the true Israel, that the promises of the Old Testament
were for the Church, and the curses were for the Jews.

In 306 A.D., Constantine embraced Christianity, becoming the
first Christian Roman Emperor. This signaled the end of the
persecution of Christians, and the beginning of the persecution of
Jews by the now Christian Holy Roman Empire. In 313 A.D., the
Edict of Milan outlawed synagogues and another Edict in 315
withdrew the ancient privileges of the Jews and among other
regulations, made proselytism by Jews punishable by death by
burning. After 312 A.D., the writings of the Church Fathers changed
from being apologetic to being very aggressive, directing their venom especially at the Jews.

Seven centuries later, zealous Crusaders offered the Jews the alternative of Christian baptism or death. In 1215 A.D., the Roman Catholic Church's fourth Lateran Council required the Jews to wear a distinguishing mark. Then, from 1481-1820, the Inquisition in Spain and Portugal killed, tortured or punished over 350,000 Jews who were not expelled from the Iberian Peninsula.

Even the Reformation did not change the character of Christian-Jewish relations. At first, the Protestants under Luther showed great understanding for the suffering of the Jews. But, soon, Martin Luther penned two books, one called, On the Jews and their Lies (1543) which contained some of the most abhorrent and vile language ever written against the Jewish people. Meanwhile, in the still Catholic regions of Europe, the Catholic Church was putting their Jews into walled Ghettos to isolate them from society.

Even in the 17th and 18th centuries, the era of Enlightenment, the term, "Wandering Jew" found its definition in the fact that Jewish people were forced from country to country, the scapegoat for the world's ills including the Black Plague and the economic woes of many European nations.

Russia took its turn at persecuting the Jews beginning in 1881 with its Pogroms, in which so-called Christian populations attacked the Jews, looting villages and murdering the occupants, often with church authorities endorsing the attacks and looking on. From 1881-1921, 530 Jewish villages were subject to 1236 attacks leaving 60,000 Jews dead and several times that number wounded.

Then came the Holocaust—the culmination of nineteen hundred years of anti-Semitic teaching in Christian society. The Nazis learned from previous Church-sponsored activities about how to close synagogues, destroy Jewish property, make Jews wear distinguishing marks, isolate Jews into ghettos, and even kill them. Germany, one of the most enlightened, educated, industrialized Christian nations of Europe became one of the vilest offenders against humanity in history. They took the Church's example and created a highly efficient mechanism to complete the 'final Solution' to what they saw as the Jewish problem.

For the most part the Church and Christian nations remained silent or made only token gestures. Fortunately, some Christians, like Corrie ten Boom, went against the authorities to rescue Jews
at the risk of their own lives... but, as in times past, they were far too few.

Wagner's closing remark also was echoed in those of my California host. I often call it "The Christian Rescuer Response," but it could also be termed "The Saving Remnant Response." It differs from Rausch's view in that it seems to acknowledge that most European Christians were true Christians who acquiesced in the Holocaust through silence or active support of the Nazi ideology and its murderous programs. However, there was a "faithful remnant," a group of people some Jews have come to call "righteous Gentiles" or "the righteous among the nations," who acted to resist the Nazis and to aid and rescue Jews.

It is an important point. Not all were corrupt. Not all were captive to the anti-Judaic prejudice of Christian history. They symbolize, perhaps, that there can be a redemptive quality in Christian history, and they surely represent a deep hope in Christian hearts that we have examples to follow, heroes from whom to learn. Corrie ten Boom (The Hiding Place, Fleming H. Revell, 1971), Pastor André Trocmé (celebrated in Philip Halle's book, Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed, Harper, 1979, and in Pierre Sauvage's documentary film, "Weapons of the Spirit") and Eve Fleischner's French Catholic heroes and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Nechama Tec's Polish rescuers (When Light Pierced the Darkness—Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland, Oxford, 1986), among many others, all deserve to be recognized, studied, and celebrated.

However, they should not be used to excuse, deny, obfuscate, or dismiss the reality: the documented Christian rescuers of Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe represented less than 1 percent of Christian believers. Wagner recognizes this in part by saying, "They were far too few," but he fails to state the darker side: 99 percent of Christians were accomplices or bystanders. Christians who cannot or will not face the historical truth merely reinforce Jewish skepticism about Christianity and its morality after the Holocaust.

Despite our "knights of faith," who acted heroically, we must continue to explore whether contempt for Judaism and the Jewish people still prevails among Christian people. Christians might ponder what Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits meant in stating, "We ask of Christians one thing: keep your hands off our children." Or we might consider Rabbi Irving Greenburg's injunction to say nothing.
about God that we are unwilling to say in the presence of burning Jewish children. Reading what most Christian theologians have to say about God's presence in Christ makes it difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Christian responses to the Holocaust that we have considered so far are inadequate. There have to be other and more historically responsible responses from Christians on the connection of Christianity to the Holocaust.

Facing the Holocaust as Christians

Perhaps the need is for something akin to Søren Kierkegaard's *Attack upon Christendom, 1854-1855*. That is, an honest response to the Holocaust requires a full facing of Christian history and the need for revision in Christian belief and practice that connect to atrocity. However, such an "attack" must be rooted, as it was for Kierkegaard, in a deep Christian commitment. Its purpose would lie in seeking reform that allows believers again to celebrate the light and truth that they have found in Jesus, free of the teaching of contempt. In writing of the contemplative life, Thomas Merton, the great Trappist monk, said that the test of any true spirituality was the extent to which it embraced the realities of life in the world. By that test, Merton found most spiritualities to fail and to be revealed as attempts to escape the realities of creation. Merton gave his life to developing and living a spirituality that was adequate for such realities in human life as race and war and prejudice.

In that vein, we might consider that the test of any Christian theology today lies in the extent to which it embraces and responds to the realities of Auschwitz and Treblinka. How does facing the "sacrifice" of one million Jewish children under the age of twelve affect our thinking and language about the "sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross of all humankind"? How can we Christians speak of the "redemption" we claim that God brought about in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ after confronting the killing of Jesus' sisters and brothers by the Nazis? If such questions are "on our test," we surely face a difficult exam on some of our most cherished theological assertions. Most of Christian theology either ignores or denies the reality of the Holocaust and what it revealed about the heart of Christian morality. Christian theology faces an as yet unacknow-
ledged crisis at its core, and one ought at least to pause at the renewed cry in the United States for the restoration of Christian culture “which made us great.”

What we must seek is a Christianity that looks at the reality of the Holocaust and how Christian history relates to it. At the beginning of the third millennium, the Holocaust has to be taken as a critical event for Christian life, thought, and morality. That is my preliminary way of replying to the question, “Why should a Christian be interested in the Holocaust?”

There is more to be said. But first, we have to stop and acknowledge the limits of this response, too. By itself, it will not communicate to “ordinary Christians.” My response remains abstract, intellectual, rationalistic. It is not the stuff of a B & B conversation. Despite my critiques of the “wrongness” of most conventional Christian responses to the Holocaust, there is also a “rightness” in the citing of individual heroes or “knights of faith.” The “rightness” lies in the centering on people, on ordinary people, because underlying that centering may be a recognition that Christianity can only be redemptive when it is personal and incarnational rather than doctrinal and propositional.

Stories of Remembrance

At the end of Mark Helprin’s novel A Soldier of the Great War, the narrator of the tale, the older soldier, is dying. His young companion, to whom the soldier has been relating his experiences, offers to leave, but the two men decide together that he will stay. Then the young man states,

“Signore, this may seem funny, but I want to do something for all the people in the time of which you spoke. I want to very much, but I can't, can I?”

“But you can. It’s simple. You can do something just, and that is to remember them. Remember them. To think of them in their flesh, not as abstractions. To make no generalizations of war or peace that override their souls. To draw no lessons of history on their behalf. Their history is over. Remember them, just remember them—in their millions—for they were not history, they were only men, women, and children. Recall them, if you can, with affection,
and recall them, if you can, with love. That is all you need to do in regard to them, and all they ask." (pp. 784-5)

That kind of remembering is represented in the new United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in the display of photographs by Jaffa Eliach of her native village in Lithuania. Dr. Eliach, one of her town's very few survivors, has collected pictures of people in their ordinary lives; and as you stand in the presence of their images, the Holocaust ceases to be an abstraction. Here are faces, bodies, homes, lives—women, men, children who can be recalled with love and affection. We are offered another way of understanding. Here are people, not victims; people who were made into victims; people to be remembered as persons.

Much the same sense is conveyed in Emily Prager's recent novel, *Eve's Tattoo*. Prager tells a story of Eve, who on her birthday has her left arm tattooed with the number of an Auschwitz victim, a radical act. The number she has chosen is 500123, that of a woman she had seen in a photograph. She named the tattooed woman "Eva" because the woman was officially nameless. Once tattooed, the number replaced the name. The person disappeared. So, Eve has to search for the person, the individual who had been robbed of her identity. To remember a person as a person, specifically; to take on "Eva's" identity, was to rescue that person from oblivion.

Consider what Terrance DesPres taught us in *The Survivor: Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps*. The Nazi acts of stripping prisoners naked, shaving their heads, replacing their names with a tattooed number, and feeding them a thin slop that produced diarrhea—all of this was meant to convey a profound devaluation. It said, "You are a piece of shit." Eve took this tattoo, she said, as her response to the meaninglessness of contemporary life all around her. Her fiancé was stunned, affronted by her action:

*He looked like someone had hit him with a hammer. "What?" he got out finally. "The tattoo." She pointed at the woman's arm. "I want to remember her. I want to keep her alive. I'm wearing the tattoo like an MIA bracelet."

Charles César got up and began pacing the room. Eve couldn't tell what was going on with him.

"Why have you done this?" He asked this reasonably but there was a deadness in his eyes. She didn't trust it.
"Well, in a very few years," she began nervously, "the people who lived through the Third Reich will all be dead. And when the people who experienced an event are no longer walking the planet, it’s as if that event never existed at all. There’ll be books and museums and monuments, but things move so fast now, the only difference between fantasy and history is living people. I’m going to keep Eva alive. She’ll go on living, here with me." (p. 11)

In *Eve’s Tattoo*, the story proceeds through the device of her friends and acquaintances observing the tattoo and questioning its meaning. In reply to inquiries, Eve tells the story of an "Eva" whose number she wears in remembrance. There are Eva Klein, Eva Hofer, Eva Berg, Eva Marks, and Eva Beck. Each person has a story that relates what happened to people, some Jews, some Catholic, some "not normal." The stories are one person’s at a time, and each raises the question of what happened and how it could have happened.

Imagine having Eve with a tattoo to your dinner party and the unanticipated havoc it could play on your evening. Eva’s fiancé considers her crazy for having gotten the tattoo. As we’ve seen, it is an affront to him. Later on, we learn that his strong reaction arises from a hidden past. His parents had been "catchers," Jews who had assisted the Nazis in hunting other Jews who were in hiding. Charles César’s past and the guilt and shame that he felt about it had been dealt with by his conversion to Christianity.

His repression and denial were now painfully threatened by Eve’s tattoo, and he demanded that Eve have it removed. He speaks of the Catholicism in his heart and of the Judaism that remains in his soul. While Anglican Eve finds it necessary to explore how German Christians became Nazis, her Jewish-fiancé-become-Catholic resents any Christian act that reopens a personal past he has attempted to close by conversion. When Eve refuses to have the tattoo removed, he abandons the relationship.

Ahron Appelfeld, himself a Holocaust survivor, has dealt with the question of Jews converting to Christianity in several of his novels. Appelfeld almost never addresses the Holocaust directly. He writes of Jewish life both before and after the Holocaust. The Jews of whom he writes are mostly religiously unobservant; they are intellectually and culturally assimilated into European life. Before the War, before the Holocaust, several of the Jewish characters in his books
convert to Christianity as a part of their cultural assimilation. His novels make no negative judgments about them. Nevertheless, their conversions did not save them from being exterminated by the Nazis; the Nuremberg Laws defined such converted Christians as Jews, and as Jews they were marked for death.

In *For Every Sin*, Appelfeld writes of a young survivor of the camps named Theo who is now searching for an identity, for a meaning to living. What Theo had been as an assimilated European Jew the Nazis stripped away in one of their camps. With the war over, Theo is trying to find his way "home," but it is elusive. There is no progress in his journey. When he confides to other survivors what it is he seeks, they respond.

"Your desire to return home is entirely understandable to me. It's an illusion, a dreadful illusion. We have no home anymore. We no longer have anything. I'm not a religious woman, but to convert to Christianity now seems to me like suicide. It's hard for me to explain that to you. I, at any rate, wouldn't do it for any price in the world..."

"Why are you going to convert to Christianity? All the blood within me is boiling. I'm not religious, but the thought that you're going to convert to Christianity saws through my flesh. I don't know how to explain that to you. But you're intelligent, and you understand the difference between thought and sawing."

"I'm going to the place where Bach dwells. The place where Bach dwells is like a temple. I have no other place in the world. No, I'm making a pilgrimage to him."

"It's wickedness. Greater wickedness than that would be hard to describe. I'm not a religious man, but the thought that you're going back to your hometown to convert to Christianity makes me into a primordial Jew." (pp. 155-160-1)

What was possible before the war is not possible after the Holocaust. For a Jew to become a Christian is a sin against God and against God's People Israel. With the new and terrible knowledge of the depth of human brutality, unmitigated by over a thousand years of European Christianity, conversion offers no escape, only a further betrayal. Being a Jew is a condition from which one cannot escape.

That is precisely what Eve's tattoo drove home to her fiancé. Eve is a Christian who is seeking insight into what it means to be a Jew, or an "other," or a Gypsy—a person whose very condition of life
was for the Nazis a condition of extermination. She sees that to ask them now to shed or deny that “condition” would be, in the words of Emil Fackenheim, “to hand Hitler a posthumous victory,” something every Jew is commanded not to do.

Eve’s Tattoo and Its Lessons

The Holocaust represents a trauma to the Christian faith, a great rupture in the fabric of truth claims, beliefs, and doctrines. Jews see this more clearly than most Christians, and they consider the usual responses of Christians to the Holocaust, as illustrated by Rausch’s Legacy of Hatred, to constitute a kind of continuing blindness.

Eve’s Tattoo attempts to remove the blinders. Eve represents women, life, birth of sight—the ability to see and identify with the other. Having a tattoo, Eve is asked, “Are you a Jew?” She has to learn to answer, “No, a Christian, whose Lord was a Jew, a Man/Person for others. Because of what Jesus means to me, I must now take on the identity of the ‘others,’ to learn their histories, to preserve their memories.”

The tattoo inevitably leads to questions and comments. What is it—a PIN (Personal Identification Number)? Will you write a story about the tattoo and your experiences? Damn, I wish that I had thought of that. What does your family think?

The tattoo led Eve to the stories of women who had become Hitler’s victims, to other women who had supported Hitler, who aided and abetted mass murder. Eve explores personal stories that “remember them... for they were not history, they were only... women.” And she “recalls them... with affection and... with love.” She explores a different way of being a Christian in relation to the Holocaust. The exploration of persons changed Eve and, to an extent, her view of her own faith. She came to see how her faith tradition, like every other faith tradition, carries within it seeds of intolerance and contempt that flower and whose blooms can burst into intolerance. She came to see how the religious quest and thrust to achieve purity can lead to a “puritanism” that embraces “ethnic cleansing.”

Eve’s is a type of response that might well open the issues to Christians who have never before had any cause to consider the
Holocaust's relationship to their faith tradition. It depends on story, narrative, and personal empathy. In turn, it evokes a response instead of confronting believers with provocative challenges. Nevertheless, this type of response has its own limitations and problems.

What happened to individual Jews happened because they were Jewish, a part of the Jewish people. To take on the tattoo of one person or several carries with it a risk of limiting and distorting Christian concern. If it limits that concern to "martyrs and survivors," it will not lead to a great Christian interest in the history of the Jewish people and Judaism. The great danger of most Christian interest in the Holocaust lies in its distortion of Judaism by not coming to terms with it as a living, continuing, developing tradition. Preoccupation with the Holocaust can lead to an unwitting focus on the Jews as a murdered people, a dead people, a dead or vanished relation. It can also lead to thinking always of Jews as victims, as people deserving of Christian sympathy (thereby preserving the very image of ourselves as Christians that was exposed by the Holocaust to be faulty.) The danger comes, then, in continuing to see Christians as needed benefactors, defenders of morality, rather than as a flawed people of God who did nothing or far too little.

Perhaps we should press the question of what right Christians have to tattoo themselves and seek to identify with the Holocaust's victims. Why not, instead, seek to understand and identify with perpetrators and collaborators and thereby explore Christian complicity with evil? The historian Paul Fussell has been quoted as saying, "...if you can't imagine yourself an SS officer hustling the Jewish women and children to the gas chamber, you need to be more closely in touch with your buried self." By the same token, is it not a failure of imagination if we can't identify with Christians who were silent or cooperative rather than imagining ourselves to be a Trocmé or a Bonhoeffer?

In Eve's Tattoo, Eve collapses at a theater; and an old man, the theater manager, tends to her in his office. He is a survivor. He examines her tattoo and inquires of her reason for wearing it.

"You're not a Jew." He stated this.

"No. I'm a Christian, a WASP, the enemy. I'm an anti-Semite."...

"Don't worry, for God's sake." The old man cameover
and sat upright on the couch. "All Christians are anti-Semites."
She stared at him, surprised.
"They are? Do you really believe that?"
"That's my observation."
"Myself," he said, "I'm an anti-Hamite."
"An anti-Hamite?" Eve repeated.
"From Ham, the man who fathered the first tribe of Christians. An anti-Hamite. I hate Christians." He was being facetious and yet, not.
"Because of the Nazis. Because of Auschwitz?" Eve asked.
"I've been forty-five years out of the camps, my dear. I've had other experience with the Christians."
"But your experience with the Nazis?"
"I wouldn't be what I am without it."
His eyes gleamed when he said this. He looked mischievous. There was no malice, no rancor in his tone. Eve was confused.
"Why do you hate Christians?" she asked...
"What you believe. Stupid! Heaven, a stupid concept. A virgin gives birth. Goyim will swallow anything."
Eve took offense at this. "I hate that you don't believe in heaven and hell!" She was immediately ashamed that she'd said this to him.
"After the camps, I believe in hell," he said. "It's heaven I have trouble with." "I can't talk to you about this. It isn't right." A survivor. Why did she have to meet a survivor?
"You're so feminine. I wish to study you. Talk. Go on."
He urged her with his gestures.
"We believe in resurrection out of this life. You believe this life is all there is or ever will be."
"Yah, opposing views. Goyim are stupid," he said again.
"I love your arms, so long and slender. Wave for me, would you?"
Eve contemplated him. She waved one arm without the tattoo.
"Jews are whiny and selfish," she said, waving it.
He looked at her, shocked.
"Prejudice," she added, "begins in ideology. Then it filters down into stereotypes." (pp. 145-6)

This dialogue establishes just how difficult it is for any of us to escape our prejudices. Racial and religious stereotypes are deeply em-
bedded in the human psyche, and only on rare occasions do they find expression as overt as this exchange. Indeed, most expression of contempt may go undetected unless one has an educated eye.

Last fall, "The Talk of the Town" section of The New Yorker (Nov. 9, 1992) carried a report headed "Bully Pulpits." The author had attended St. Thomas Episcopal Church on 5th Avenue. There he found a printed sermon available for a quarter. It had been preached during the presidential election campaign by "the Reverend Dr. John Andrew, former chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury and sponsor of the world premier of Andrew Lloyd Webber's Requiem Mass." The sermon was entitled "A Question of Character" was inspired by "the so-called character issue in the election."

"What makes you think that politicians are to be believed?" he [Dr. Andrew] asked. "Do you recall an election campaign where the question of character has ever loomed so large in the consciousness of the electorate?" After running in fearless detail through the various character failing of which both Governor Clinton and President Bush have been rightly or wrongly accused, the rector concluded that for all three candidates, including Ross Perot, "there can be no peace, there can be no togetherness, there can be no integrity without the salvation and pulling-together and re-creation of the forgiving God through Jesus Christ Our Lord." (emphasis added)

The sermon reflects what one continues to hear from most Christian pulpits. Is it a matter of theological hyperbole, or does the preacher really mean that a Jew or a Muslim or a Humanist or a Unitarian can have no character? Does he really mean that there can be no peace, no togetherness, no integrity except through Jesus Christ? The old theater manager in Eve's Tattoo would surely believe that the chaplain means it. And he very well may. But is it possible that he simply has not thought about his language in the light of the Holocaust or about its implied contempt for people of other beliefs? The New Yorker concluded its item by saying that whatever Dr. Andrew meant by "character," it is "something quite different from what the voters have in mind. Whatever the voters admire as character in a politician, they do not confuse it with virtue. Virtue doesn't get things done. Virtue is what we look for in clergymen. . . ."

Well, tell that to Gary Hart and Robert Packwood. Even the report on a biased sermon carries its own bias. The New Yorker's
secular eye led it to a political reflection while ignoring the underpinning of the sermon itself. 'Bully Pulpit' indeed; the report dismisses 'character,' 'virtue,' and clergy as irrelevant and misses the continuing relevance of exclusivist Christian assumptions in the teaching of contempt for others. Had the writer reflected on Eve's Tattoo, she or he might have written a piece on the power of stereotypes or, at least, have been aware of her or his own.

The virtue of Eve's Tattoo lies in its giving Christians an occasion to reflect on the dark side of Christian history and to explore the path to change. However, the novel itself illustrates how difficult that path will be even for the well-intentioned.

At the end of the novel, Eve has an accident, and the accident becomes a literary device which is used to remove the tattoo. Her fiancé returns to her, and they converse about Hitler and the Christian women Eve has researched who collaborated with the Nazis. Her fiancé asks if she has figured out how Hitler got these women to dump Christ. Eve speculates:

"'Structure, I think. The structure of Nazism as he presented it was indistinguishable from the structure of Christianity. It promised an ascendancy through the glory of the Thousand Year Reich. The path to that ascendancy was purity, the purity of the race. He was the Christ figure. It was all so familiar to them, and their promised position in it so much more powerful than they could imagine—it was a bargain they couldn't refuse. I think it was awhile before they realized they'd dumped Christ. Hitler was darling while he was dating Germany. It was only after they married that he started slapping her around...''

"'They had already had it done to them,'" she replied. "'Through the laws and the Euthanasia Program. By the time he started on the Jews, their women's hearts were hardened. I think mass breeding is the flip side of mass murder. Yin and yang.'"

"'There is that theory that murder is outer-directed suicide,'" Charlie said.

"'That's what I think, too. What the Germans let Hitler do to their society in the name of glory and purity was a suicidal act. Then they turned and perpetrated the same crime on the Jews and anyone else they could find. You know why they arrested Jehovah's Witnesses?'" she asked.

"'Why?'"
“They refused to dump Christ...”

“Before Christ, there was no concept of mercy. Did you know that?” Charlie asked Eve.

“Yes,” she said with shame. (pp. 183-4)

Whatever Eve’s shame in this novel, it does not involve a confession of the limits to what she has learned as a Christian from her experience. Her ignorance of the Jewish experience and practice of mercy implicitly carries with it a notion of Christian superiority to Judaism. The “before Christ” and “after Christ” disjunctive remains at the conclusion of this novel just as it continues as a dominant theme in popular Christianity. The novel’s theological flaws are not overcome by the final revelations of the identity of the real person who had received number 500123 as her tattoo; and, as a result, it fails to offer evidence that Christians have even learned the questions and problems confronting Christianity after Auschwitz.

The Theological Dilemma of the Holocaust for Christians

Perhaps there is an inherent limitation in approaching the Holocaust through personal stories alone. Finally, we have to say what they mean, what questions they raise. In that case, there is no escape from the kind of rational, analytical approach with which I began. The work of theology cannot be replaced by narrative or story alone. It is “both/and,” rather than “either/or.” The two types of approaches complement one another and are necessary for our human attempts to grasp the meanings of this all-but-incomprehensible event.

In any case, it makes sense to return to the question: Why would a Christian be interested in the Holocaust? It is directly addressed by the Harvard philosopher, Robert Nozick, in The Examined Life. Among Nozick’s philosophical meditations is an essay on the Holocaust in which he explores its effect on Christian theology. Nozick holds that the Holocaust transformed the theological situation itself.

Christian theology has held that there were two momentous transformations in the situation of humanity, first the Fall and then the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, which redeemed humanity and provided it with a route out of its fallen state. Whatever changed situation or possibility and resurrection were supposed to
bring about has now ended; the Holocaust has shut the door that Christ opened. (I myself am not a Christian, but that is no bar to seeing—perhaps it helps me to see more clearly—what the deepest implications for Christianity are.) The Holocaust is a third momentous transformation. There still remain the ethical teachings and example of the life of Jesus before his end, but there no longer operates the saving message of Christ. In this sense, the Christian era has closed.

It might be thought that what Christ accomplished according to Christian theology, he accomplished forever, once and for all. He died for all our sins, past and future, small and large. But not for that one, I think. Recall the theological view that in giving people free will God intentionally limits his omniscience, so that he no longer foresees how people will choose. Perhaps, in sending his only son to redeem humanity, he had nothing like the Holocaust in mind as what humanity was going to need redemption from. But in any case, whatever suffering Jesus underwent, or God the father in watching it, this could not be sufficient to redeem humanity in the face of the Holocaust, I think Christian theology needs to maintain. Or rather, whatever the current situation of individuals one by one, the Holocaust has created a radically new situation and status for humanity as a whole, one the sacrifice of Jesus could not and was not meant to heal. The human species now is desanctified; if it were ended or obliterated now, its end would no longer constitute a special tragedy.

Is humanity permanently reduced to this desanctified status? Is there anything we can do by our behavior over time, so that once again it would be a special and further tragedy if our species were to end or be destroyed? Can we redeem ourselves? No "second coming" could alter our status, not at any rate if it was anything like a repeat performance. Only human action could redeem us, if anything can. But can anything? (pp. 239-40)

Of course, what Nozick claims lies beyond what one can even begin to suggest to a Bed-and-Breakfast host. It is equally beyond what we might reasonably hope to find in most novels or Sunday sermons. However, it cannot be beyond the realm of theological concern of serious-minded Christians in the churches. Nozick's thought is radical, it goes to the root of Christian theological problematics; it goes to the root of personal crises of faith. What can redeem us? After Auschwitz, what can redeem us?
Nozick questions whether any actions on the part of humanity, even over centuries, can undo the evil of our history. He explores whether we might change our nature by entering fully into human suffering and ceasing forever to inflict suffering onto others. Of course, he is not optimistic, but he points to a Christian way that is both old and, after the Holocaust, boldly new.

Perhaps it is only by suffering ourselves when any suffering is inflicted, or even when any is felt, that we can redeem the species. Before, perhaps, we could be more isolated; now that no longer suffices. Christian doctrine has held that Jesus took humanity's suffering upon himself, redeeming it, and while others were told to imitate Christ, they were not expected similarly to take suffering upon themselves with redemptive effect. If the Christian era has ended, it has been replaced by one in which we each now have to take humanity's suffering upon ourselves. What Jesus was supposed to have done for us, before the Holocaust, humanity must now do for itself. (p. 241)

Nozick suggests that suffering in this way offers Christians a way to mend their relations with Judaism and the Jewish people. It would acknowledge agreement that whatever was accomplished in human history by Jesus, it has not produced a redeemed world. If humanity can be redeemed at all, it will have to be by everyone taking on the suffering of others.

Christians could think this a new era that more truly continues and embodies the Christian message; Jews could see others now truly weep over a suffering so momentous and so monstrously inflicted that everyone now must be different henceforth. The Holocaust has thrust the issue of redemption before us anew, except now redemption must come from ourselves, humanity as a whole, with the outcome uncertain. (p. 241)

I know of no clearer or weightier statement than Nozick's. As Christians, we do not have to agree with it. Nozick acknowledges that his is but one interpretation, and he does not seek to exclude others. The Holocaust dwarfs every interpretation and all interpretations. No single explanation will suffice. But any interpretation must give "commensurate weight" to the Holocaust as a "massive cataclysm that distorts everything around it."

By that standard most Christian interpretations thus far fall short of what is required. Our responses will have to be ongoing enter-
prises. Our faith tradition cannot remain as it was. As Nozick says, the issue of redemption has been thrust before us.

We have hard theological work ahead of us in trying to state afresh from whence and from whom the redemption of humanity shall come.

**Reading List**


Taking the Bible Seriously
Honest Differences About Biblical Interpretation
J. Benton White Paper $12.99
White surveys the many Protestant approaches to the Bible and then focuses on the issues raised by modernists and fundamentalists in this century, giving special attention to the Protestants' struggle with the question of how the Bible should be understood.

In Search of Wisdom
Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie Edited by Leo G. Perdue, Bernard Brandon Scott, and William J. Wiseman Paper $24.99
This much-needed volume provides a comprehensive study of wisdom in the Hebrew Bible, in selected intertestamental and Rabbinic texts, and in the New Testament.

Jeremiah
An Archaeological Companion Philip J. King Hard $27.00
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Using God's Resources Wisely
Brueggemann explores readings from Isaiah and how they relate to the environment and urban crisis. He approaches the readings as an artistic-theological history of the city of Jerusalem with alarming parallels to today’s urban crises.

Raising Up a Faithful Priest
This thought-provoking study reviews priesthood from a theological perspective and explores the theological value and significance of priests in the Old and New Testaments.

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Teaching a thirty-member class of seminarians one recent spring, I felt a notable chemistry evolve. And I was reminded all over again of how little we pastors often know of our parishioners, and of how urgent is our knowing more.

Our mid-term assignment required a brief biography focusing on moral development—either of oneself or of an interviewee. The great majority of students wrote about themselves. Among the group were two or three survivors of incest and child abuse, equally as many alcoholics and heirs of alcoholic families, at least three homosexuals, more than that number who had been through the pain of divorce, and several early thirties people still anxious and unsure of their vocation—and of themselves. The list could go on.

Whether we are aware of the numbers or not, we can assume our parishes are like that, too. The total impact of these testimonies and yearnings forced me to recall those many times, even after several years of pastoral connection, that people told me new and important things about themselves. They offered the kind of disclosures to which my first and most honest response, vocalized or not, was simple: "I never knew. You have really suffered."

Pastoral leadership without this kind of knowledge easily misses the mark. On the other hand, assuming human vulnerability and hid-
den hurt enhances every dimension of ministry—liturgical action, pastoral sensibility, parish program, and prophetic strategy.

In public prayer we address God on behalf of the congregation. We try to gather up something of people’s anxieties and fears and guilts, their sense of being graced, and their noblest concerns for others. We even dare to speak a little beyond their ordinary sentiments and give words to deeper hope and generosity than they usually express. To do this well we need to know our people. We easily fail in the priestly role because we have been opaque to the buried pain.

I’ve taken often to reading the psalms of lament before composing prayers. They remind me of my conviction, even if my week was largely spent with up-beat, smiling faces, that everyone also suffers. People are afraid of dying, of losing their jobs, of what will happen to the kids or to grandma. They grieve missed opportunities, lost children, shrunken hopes. They have been where life is rough and diminished and tawdry, and they are still traumatized or shamed by it. They need again to know by the grace of divine empowerment that they are forgiven, that they can be healed, and that justice even yet waits in the wings. When I forget the hidden anguish behind the pleasant faces, my prayers leave out far too many people in the pews.

Presuming hidden pain in the congregation means also that one of our great parish tasks is tending the channels of concern and communication. The ordinary hesitations of competitive, or shy, or callous people to express and listen to others’ expressions of angst and ache challenge our pastoral ingenuity.

The congregation ministers to itself by caring. It was probably February or March, some years ago, when I met “Jane Medford” in the hallway of the church where we were both fellow members. We were not well acquainted. I had discovered by chance that Mike, her husband of nearly thirty years, was living in a community a few miles away, so my “How are you doing?” probably expressed more than matter-of-fact concern. “I’m lonely,” she said. And then she said much more. “Mike walked out on me in November. I haven’t spent an evening since then with anyone but my kids. The other day one of my friends I used to be close with asked how Mike was. She didn’t even know he had left. It would have been better if Mike had died! At least then everybody would know.” Jane and I talked then
and there about why her separation was all so hushed up and why people don’t keep up with each other.

Jane Medford prompts reflection on a clergy dilemma, of course, and it needs to be noted. Sworn to confidentiality, the minister must be very reticent about passing along information even if gathered at relatively public coffee hours. No one known as a gossip belongs in the pastoral role. Jane probably wanted both that the minister not share confidences and that people should know. Yet in her ambivalence of subtle shame, she herself did not even tell her own best friends.

In theological perspective, we must note the harm done by the church’s middle-class atmosphere. Forgetting that we are created in community and called to care, we stiffen our upper lips and adopt a “can do” idea of individualist adequacy that ultimately sends a message, “Bear your own burdens and don’t burden me.”

We reflect seriously, therefore, on the congregation’s ethos and disposition. We try to develop people’s interpersonal gifts by nudging our congregations toward knowing enough among themselves about each other to make them into better healing communities. On the simplest level, we attend to the better alternatives available in our conversational response to others—the one of empathy rather than one of mere banter. “The holidays exhaust me; I came back to work all worn out,” someone says. We can reply by beginning, “You feel wrung out, doing so much,” or we can dismiss the weariness and say in effect, “I hope you’re feeling better now,” or “I get worn out too, so what else is new?”

More broadly, we cultivate flexibility that admits into our formalities the interruptions of pain. Speaking recently of children’s place in worship, a psychiatrist told the story of an unusual minister who was presiding at the Sunday service during “joys and concerns.” A small boy blurted out, “My daddy died!” Instead of moving on with the liturgy, the minister walked down the aisle to stand where the child was and said, “That’s very, very sad.” Then he invited the whole congregation to be with the child in grief: “Let’s all be sad for a moment, together.”

Again, if participants but remember our universal experience of one kind of pain or another, small groups help immensely in the task of healing. Once I saw communication channels open wholesomely in a large Bible study group. Someone reacting to the text at hand
had commented self-righteously about people who were not optimis-
tic and energetic in their Christian faith. Another older woman,
"Mary," herself courageous and cheerful, quietly differed. She said
she thought people often hid worry and grief that, if known, would
explain their discouragement. The discussion faltered, but then some-
one in the group who knew Mary's own history said, "Mary, tell
them what you're thinking about." And Mary poured out the story
of the murder of her 18-year-old son a decade earlier and what a loss
that was for her. The study group became a more caring fellowship
that night.

One of the best clues about the importance of acknowledging pain
can come from the Alcoholics Anonymous groups housed in so
many of our church buildings. People coming to an AA meeting are
presumed to have a problem and to need the group's help. That
mindset creates helpful openness to each other and cohesion in what
many experience as a spiritual quality the church itself could well
emulate.

Beyond wholesome pastoral care, presumptions about pain play
out in larger ways as well. They foster sensitivities that serve pro-
phetic ends. Walter Brueggemann uses words like numbness and
emptiness to describe the stultification of established religious tradi-
tions. Such stagnant consciousness needs once more to sense the tran-
scendent God's concern for the anguish of the underclass. Scolding
is now what church people need most of all. They need poetic words
to awaken their own defensively suppressed emotion. Action follows
awareness. The major task of the prophet, says Brueggemann, is to
"bring to public expression those very fears and terrors that have
been denied so long and suppressed so deeply that we do not know
they are there" (The Prophetic Imagination [Fortress, 1978] p. 50).

The seminary class that recent spring was not the right time or ap-
propriate place for group testimonials and sensitivity training, al-
though I have even wondered if even that setting would not have
benefitted from such efforts. I summarized for the seminar the hurt
and the nobility of the struggles to overcome it, but I wanted to say
even more than I did, "Don't you know? Wouldn't it help you to
know—this and this and this—about each other?" "While we sit
here speaking in the third person about social ills and intellectual
problems, shouldn't we be enacting each other with more first per-
son exchange and confession?"
Original sin means at very least that everyone needs God. Our experience of that need may take the form of guilt or fear, of existential anxiety or a lost sense of purpose for our lives, of despair or an unforgiving resentment and spitefulness against the human community. Whatever the shape of the pain, deepening our understanding of it—in ourselves and others—will heighten both the urgency and the joy with which we announce the gift of God’s grace and the coming holy Commonwealth.
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"The Amnesty of Grace liberates the doctrine of justification from its individualistic, subjective, and middle-class captivity and provides fresh understanding of God's grace expressed in solidarity with the poor and excluded."
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Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon open their recent book, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*, with the following: "Sometime between 1960 and 1980, an old, inadequately conceived world ended, and a fresh new world began." The authors go on with the qualification that they do not mean to be overly dramatic. However, in beginning their book in this way, the authors put all readers on notice that they are about to engage in the rhetoric of crisis in order to highlight the news that a "tired old world has ended, and an exciting new one is awaiting recognition."^1

Toward the end of a century, much less of a millennium, to expect an emergence of the rhetoric of crisis may not be unusual. As long as it pushes us to reconsider our foundational assumptions such rhetoric can promote critical investigation. It is fair to say that *Resident Aliens* is stimulating toward that end: this book offers an opportunity to reconsider the relationship of Church and world and the meaning of Christian faith and ministry. Yet it is also seductive. It not only assumes a turmoil of a modernity that may be coming to its own end as a demarcated world age but also proclaims the clear advent of something new, an arrival of what the authors think is a fresh and dramatic return to the Church and ministry intended by Je-
sus. However, what they proclaim as the “new life in the Christian colony,” their informing metaphor for the Church, has little prospect for constructively bearing the faith forward to what some are now calling the postmodern age.\(^2\)

**Modernity, Postmodernity, and the Insecurity of Foundations**

Describing the foundations of any subject of inquiry, interpretation and judgment, however necessary, is paradoxical. The search for foundations is the attempt to establish stability and coherence, a firm and secure grounding for present experience as well as clear points of departure for further investigation. But there is debate among scholars whether such an interest in foundations is miscast from the beginning. Some philosophers contend that foundations may be impossible to find and grasp as well as being ultimately insecure in the shifts of historical experience. Others argue that however insecure and subject to historical reformulation, the search for foundations is necessary and part of the human intellectual enterprise itself. A growing minority still holds on to the classical thought and goal that there is in fact an absolute principle which grounds the many, that when found, offers us a necessary and secure place to stand for interpreting, criticizing, evaluating and guiding human experience and activity. I think that the search for foundations is part and parcel of the human intellectual and moral enterprise, but such foundations are elusive and shift with the movements of historical time and place.

In this essay I will not consider the many positive aspects of the world-view and paradigm of modernity.\(^3\) Instead, I take up the position that we are in a critical time of foundational paradigm shift and change under the thesis and euphemism of postmodernity—in short, the *rhetoric of crisis*. Accepting it now for the sake of argument, I shall try to gauge how the Church is obliged to respond to such a crisis in its theologies and ministries.\(^4\)

To begin, we will first want to know: What has been passed forward into late modernity and what has not; indeed, what cannot be passed forward any further? What are the prospects for security and foundation upon the horizon of postmodernity?
Modernity's Turn to History

Along with the rise of the modern scientific method and a new experience and understanding of human individuality, the modern age was marked profoundly by the rise of a new historicism. By the eighteenth century, new studies of history were demonstrating that what had seemed so consistent and impermeable to change in the classical ages—"the nature of reality"—was in fact subject to change and was changing. The new view of history, as R. G. Collingwood suggests, engaged an "analogy between the processes of the natural world as studied by the natural sciences and the vicissitudes of human affairs as studied by the historians." Along with the rise of modern historicism came a renewed optimism in our ability not only to understand the change that was happening but to control it. As science could master the physical universe, human beings could master history. Ernest Gellner suggests that the eighteenth-century Enlightenment created a new form of "world story" that was "upward sloping, and, on the whole, self sufficient. Its salvation was endogenous"—produced from within. Thus early modernity enjoined a vision and even celebration of change with a promise of salvation in the occurrence of the new rather than in any retrieval of past origins. The now ossified traditions of the past could crumble in the rush of the new stream of history. Modernity's historicist sense could now disclose, even celebrate, the relativity, conventionality, and plurality which were embedded in history, knowledge, politics, and ethics all along. All intellectual and moral constructs, all institutions and systems that will not or cannot adapt to this new and radical spirit of historicist modernity will be swept away.

Commenting on the radical spirit of the age, Karl Marx wrote:

_All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and men at last are forced to face...the real conditions of their lives and their relations with their fellow men._
Optimism Disclosing Pessimism

However, with intimations along the way, perhaps more with the tragedy of the First World War than with anything else, new questions began to emerge to challenge this optimistic spirit of change. A rhetoric of crisis began to take hold that signalled for some an age becoming moribund and coming to an end. What has now come to be called the postmodernist thesis is only the latest name for this rhetoric of crisis that came full bore into our century after the great war.

We can gauge the flavor of contemporary postmodernist rhetoric through a series of questions:

1. Can knowledge, truth and right, the political and moral life, and social and political institutions be grounded in ever melting solids—in fact, in the air?
2. Did not historicist modernity also disclose the dangers of relativism, conventionalism, and disparate pluralism? To whom would we appeal for solid foundation and for adjudicating conflict? How can we know the true and right? And is there any true and right left to know?
3. And further still, has the world in late modernity now fast become an inhospitable place—an insecure and anxiety-ridden place, a place wherein individuals and persons are losing their significance in the broad and often deadly sweep of the on-rushing stream of history and its new and impersonal, nonpersonal, and indeed, apersonal technologies and bureaucracies?
4. Has history itself become the final "apersonality" which can no longer be framed as a disclosing text or a coherent narrative—indeed, a meaningful drama or a journey with sense and direction?
5. Finally, has the enlightened project of modernity's signature as historicist turned into only a dark abyss of terrifying isolation and separation—much ado about nothing, the divine comedy turning into absolute tragedy?
The Contradictions and Tensions of Modernity

Such a clash of optimistic and pessimistic spirits expressed most poignantly in the last hundred years are, in fact, part of the self-understanding of our age itself. In a book that might be described as "two cheers for the modern world," Marshall Berman writes that persons of the modern world

are moved at once by a will to change—to transform both themselves and their world—and by a terror of disorientation and disintegration, of life falling apart. They all know the thrill and the dread of a world in which "all that is solid melts into air."

To be modern is to live a life of paradox and contradiction. It is to be overpowered by the immense bureaucratic organizations that have the power to control and often destroy all communities, values, lives; and yet to be undeterred in our determination to face these forces, to fight to change their world and make it our own. It is to be both revolutionary and conservative: alive to new possibilities for experience and adventure, frightened by the nihilistic depths to which so many modern adventures lead, longing to create and to hold on to something real even as everything melts... Kierkegaard said, the deepest modern seriousness must express itself through irony.

To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world—and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are. Modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology: in this sense, modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern
is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, “all that is solid melts into air.”

The Church in Late Modernity and Postmodernity

It is certainly too much to expect that the Church could have been immune from the irony and ambivalence of the new spirit of the modern age or its stages of birth, vitality, and death. For if history teaches us nothing else, it demonstrates that world views and cosmologies begin and end, are born and die. Thus, the new rhetoric of crisis asks ecclesiological and theological questions as well.

Has the Church, with universalist intentions, thrown in its lot with a grand narrative of history that now may not be a narrative at all? Within the new deconstructionist rhetoric we will want to know if we have been dependent on a set of foundational and classic texts which may only be read as modern and now, finally, as post-modern texts that continuously deconstruct—i.e., texts without solid and stable meaning. Have we as a Church framed our mission within a world-historical drama which may no longer have characters with moral and psychic centers? Have we understood ourselves as wayfarers on a “journey” through history which is going nowhere in particular?

The Church can and has responded to these questions, but it has often done so in some negative ways. These responses may offer comfort but do not meet the true challenge of the age. The first response that can be discerned in such times is one of melancholic nostalgia. Here we call for a return to worlds of long-ago—to more solid worlds of traditional values which truly have not yet melted into air. The fact that critical-historical study indicates that such worlds were never as secure as we now imagine gives way to the anxiety that has given birth to our melancholy.

The second response can be termed one of aestheticist release. Here we attempt to somehow rise above this maelstrom and seek release from the terrors of our material-historical meltdown. In a new spiritualization of our lives, we desire to follow what has melted into an aestheticist air—a posture curiously reminiscent of past efforts to spiritualize faith and life, a search for a place that is not a place, a time that is timeless, a locus above.
The third response can be termed *neo-sectarian withdrawal*, with *neo* emphasized and *withdrawal* in quotation marks to indicate, as I will argue below, the now bourgeois status of such sectarianism. Totally within the confines of our own middle-class life, at least in North America, we attempt to "withdraw" from this maelstrom and create smaller, more particular worlds and communities of faith and life that are narrow, more confined and precise, less complex and more coherent.

How are we to decide? Is it a decision? Even if only in our imagination, which of the above, if any of the above is the most faithful? Does fidelity mean that the Church must now become antimodern in either a mode of melancholic nostalgia, longing for worlds of long ago, or sectarian withdrawal and reduction, giving up on the world in which we find ourselves and opting instead for something smaller, safer—a better world for us, our Church, our theologies and ministries?

Or do we take a postmodern aestheticist stance and adopt a posture of release from our own time and place? In such a state of radical dislocation and timelessness, words and their context will only distract; the meaning of texts will be only in their instability of meaning; the narrations and dramas of history only confining to our aestheticist flight. Our only obligation will be to release ourselves from all surly ties to the earth and stop all of our journeying through its cultures. Our only obligation will be to have no obligation, no binding ties. In such a nonspatial and timeless state our theology will be only negative: God is all that we cannot say.

The Church as a visible institution itself will be finally too material, too finite, too sinful for our now refined aestheticist tastes. In such a stateless state nothing can be mediated; all must be pure experience. It is the personal experience of God we seek and more: we seek to lose our fast-eroding self, individual and collective, in God. Indeed, we seek a state where there is no more seeking, no more desire, no limits, no boundaries. In this rarified aestheticist state it is absorption we seek. There is no longer any difference between the artist and the work, creator and creature. We lose patience with our own finite and historicist creatureliness: we want to be the I AM.\(^\text{11}\)

In such a state, Feuerbach’s negative understanding of modern religion will return to haunt us as a devastating trace: The experience of God will have become the God of experience.\(^\text{12}\)
The Neo-Sectarian Option

The Hauerwas-Willimon agenda has received much attention among the denominations, with Hauerwas's work over the last fifteen years—especially his growing criticism of liberal enlightenment modernity—providing the anti-modernist intellectual foundation. I think that their neo-sectarian agenda is getting such play for two reasons: first, accepting for the moment the legitimacy of their own rhetoric of crisis, their diagnosis of the conditions of faith, theology, and the Church, especially in the United States and other first-world nations, is often on target; second, their solution seems a way out for the Church, a way to respond with particular integrity and security as stable foundations erode around us.¹³

I use the term neo-sectarian advisedly. Certainly it is not classical social and cultural withdrawal that Hauerwas and Willimon seek but more psychological, moral, and in theological terms, ecclesiological withdrawal. Ironically, because of this their proposal lacks the integrity of the classical sectarian traditions. Whether intended or not, they have communicated a way for middle-class Christians to have a new separation of their religious and secular lives. Following their proposal, we can bemoan the sins of our own age and ages past while going about our business as usual. As I have indicated, this may not be the vision that Hauerwas and Willimon see, but it will be the ultimate result. To speak of a narrowing of engagement with the world for at least North American Christians smacks of just one more bourgeois luxury not available to most of the rest of the world. To become resident aliens will be only to become more secure, more confident, and less anxious amid a world wherein our sisters and brothers have no such luxuries. The resident alien can thus enjoy the treasures of a “good conscience” without cost—confession without indictment. We may look out with compassion, even love, upon the sinful world, but our celebrations will be among ourselves—celebrations of the graces which we have been given and the world has rejected. In effect, the Hauerwas-Willimon proposal merely triumphantly baptizes our ecclesiological status quo.

Along with strong objections to what an image of resident alien and colony would bring practically to the North American Church, there are other theological objections. Starting with either theory or
praxis, even a brief critique of the proposal of Hauerwas and Willi-
mon comes to the same problematic ecclesiological conclusion. 14

Neo-Sectarianism: The Phenomenon of Particularity

In one way or another, all neo-sectarian orientations are rooted in
the general thesis that religious, theological, and moral identity—the
experience of faith itself—starts from particularity and must remain
so for integrity, fidelity and coherence. This thesis is advanced
under a number of now popular and common categories.

Narrative. Thesis: Biblical and communal narratives in general—
all narrative which defines meaning, truth, and character—start par-
ticularly, i.e., of a particular people in a particular time and place,
and must remain so for integrity.

Response: Mistakes are sometimes made in concentrating on the
particular forms of stories and dramas at the expense of their con-
tent. And while interpreting forms is a way to understanding con-
tent, it is the content we seek. Framed as stories told to and by the
peoples of Israel and Christ, biblical narratives are not stories told
only for and about these people, i.e., these colonies set apart. All
biblical narratives are finally stories told for and about the world.
Thus, the story of God's particular covenant with Israel must be cast
upon a larger and more universal story of God's covenant with the
world. Similarly, stories about Jesus told in and for New Testament
communities do not continue as stories whose coherence and obliga-
tion remain rooted as a history and heritage of only that particular
people. No matter how particular and focused the form of their tell-
ing, biblical narratives are not insulated from the existential chal-
lenges involved in their telling and retelling in and for larger worlds.
The world is the horizon of all biblical narrative.

Covenant. Thesis: Our baptismal covenant and thus our relation
and obligation with God finds its coherence and meaning—its core
integrity—only within the confines of the particular community
formed in that covenant.

Response: My response informs an approach to covenant theol-
ogy in general. All particular covenants are framed against the hori-
zon of God's single and universal covenant with creation. It is the
world, and all of its cultures and material histories, that is particu-
larly chosen to be the time and place of God’s dwelling with us. Being baptized into the covenant of the Church only has meaning in light of the originating covenant between God and the work of God’s hands—creation itself. Doctrines and theologies of creation, redemption, and sanctification cannot be separated. They are all framed as dramatic encounters between God and humankind upon the stage of the world. It is this single and universal covenant which invites and obliges us to a worldly and historical participation and dwelling with God and each other, indeed with God and every other.

Such a single and universal covenant with the material historical world is made manifest and revealed in particular ways and to particular peoples in their own histories and ongoing narratives. The biblical manifestations and revelation of such a universal covenant are made particular in the heritages of Jewish and Christian images, symbols, and stories. As our individual and communal biographies are not interchangeable, neither are such particular covenantal manifestations. However, the point of such particular stories and the communities they engender is to reveal and tell a more universal and ongoing tale of God’s interest, intentions, and involvements with the world, its history, and ages. In covenant theology, the plural dimensions of particularity are cast against a horizon of historical universality. It is the world with all of its plurality, relativity, and conventionality, its sin and incoherence, that has been chosen by God as the time and place of the divine dwelling. Trying to make God’s covenant or Christ’s Church smaller, purer, and more particular than it is is only to try to purchase grace cheaply and coherence at the price of parody.

Liturgy. Thesis: Christian liturgy has a grounding and informing quality for character identity. Thus, it is our liturgy that identifies and frames our particularity. Liturgy provides the faithful link of continuity—the abiding link of particularity—that has and will guide our Christian colony through the ages.

Response: I certainly have no quarrel with the experiences of narrative and liturgy as fundamental parts of the horizons of remembrance and anticipation which make and identify Christian character and the character of the Church. However, what is troubling in neosectarianism is the assumption that Christian narrative(s) and the use of Christian symbols and rites of worship can be so easily distilled from the cosmological worlds in which they were, are now, and will
be told and engaged. There is a legitimate sense of the particular and unique in Christian identity—all identity in fact—but it is neither singular nor absolute, and it cannot be rooted in some kind of ahistorical purity.

In its transit to modernity, the Church has not just passed through the ages of the world as a coherent and discrete colony: rather, such worlds have substantively (not just accidentally) informed the Church and Christianity itself and have become, for good and ill, part of our character identity. Character identity and integrity are never formed in separation and isolation but only in involvement and participation. Character is not formed in mirror-imaged relationships, but in the encounters of difference. If liturgy is to function as an informing dimension of Christian identity and character, then it must frame, symbolize, and, indeed, effect sacramentally a full participation in the cultures of the world in all their differences. The communion we seek is a communion of plurality and difference—a communion of celebration and affirmation of God's dwelling with us despite and because of our difference.

Liturgical celebrations are not internal exercises of particular and separate self-identification but rather are identifying statements about the meaning of life in the worlds in which we find ourselves—worlds that are also part of us and our biographical heritage. Liturgy ought not take us out of the world and its conditions at any given time and place, but ought to cast us into its heart.

Therefore, Christian worship is far more than an internal and particular act of self-identity or a narrow locus for theological coherence for the formation of a segmented Christian character. Liturgy does not even remove us temporarily from the worlds we inhabit, no matter how much we think or want this to be so. Celebrated now in the content of modernity, Christian worship is a modern act, one that either advances our search for meaning, truth, and right in our own age or one that does not. It is not just the particular Jesus whom we remember and celebrate in the Christian liturgy but the Jesus who has become the Christ, not just of the Church as a particular colony but of the world, indeed, of the cosmos itself.
Dangerous Times and Obliging Places

Hauerwas and Willimon remind us that ours is a dangerous period for faith. They tell us that the post-Constantinian Church has been on a long detour, seduced by the foolishness of thinking of ourselves as part of the worlds in which we preach and witness. For surely being part of this worldly corruption will also corrupt our faith, dilute it and make us imperfect and self-serving vessels. Hauerwas and Willimon call us to envision ourselves differently as a Church. The world is simply too seductive and dangerous for us to be anything more than a Christian colony—strangers resident in a strange land. Thus, their issue, and in my mind, their problem is ecclesiological.

However, questions remain for Hauerwas and Willimon: What times were safer? Which places has the Church ever feared to go—even when it was to the heart of empire? Undoubtedly, most of us will be seduced and our faith corrupted. Our Church will continue to sin abundantly and be as imperious as the empires we have courted and coveted. However, becoming a colony of resident aliens will not make our infidelities less prevalent or virulent, just practiced in a smaller venue and upon a smaller stage. We have always been caught in the human counterpoint between fidelity and infidelity, and no reduction of ecclesiological self-understanding will save us.

As in all ages past, the Church has, necessarily, entered yet another maelstrom. What is unique now is that the maelstroms of late modernity and postmodernity challenge the Church’s dependence on narrative history and identifying texts in general. In postmodernity, our root metaphors of narrative, drama, and journey themselves will be challenged. If both self and history are being deconstructed in increasing and nonpersonal technocracy, how then are interpersonal faith and Church to survive? In response, Hauerwas and Willimon claim that it has been history and divine-human character which have been radically misunderstood all along—history which cannot be engaged and understood as a macro-narrative at all, but only as the biographies of discrete colonies claimed by God.

The Hauerwas-Willimon approach, in fact, depends on the axiom that the postmodern world, one in which “all that is solid melts into air,” has more terrors and dangers than possibilities for the advancement of the life of faith and the pursuit of true virtue. And it is these
dangers that make their proposal so attractive to many. However, in our present situation of ever-melting solids, no simple decision to become a resident and alien colony will prevent the melting of old coherence and security. Either consciously or not, we will engage Christian faith in the worlds in which we find ourselves. This is not a recipe for passive acceptance, much less foolish co-optation but merely an indication that the dangers and obligations of the Church, its theologies and ministries, are not of our own choosing.\textsuperscript{15}

Nor do Hauerwas and Willimon have any melancholic nostalgia for worlds of long ago—the classical and traditionalist desire for more solid worlds which have not yet melted into air. Rather, amid our meltdown, they offer us what they see as a way out, and despite their protestations to the contrary, an ecclesiological withdrawal from this maelstrom with the prospect that we can create smaller and putatively more particular communities of faith and life that are coherent, stable, and grounded in true virtue. But the price of such withdrawal is too high. Stated simply, the Church does not look, or more importantly, feel right in the shape of the Hauerwas and Willimon images. Canadian theologian Douglas John Hall writes:

\begin{quote}
There is, I think, a sense in which those of us who must live alongside the American empire can be grateful for persons living within it who have become as “pessimistic” about “American patriotism” and “arrogance” as Hauerwas and Willimon. . . . As “children of Vietnam,” they are rightly sickened by the identification of the Christian mission with the preservation and enhancement of modernity. . . . They posit over against a “liberal” faith which always seeks to accommodate itself to the spirit of the age, a church which is faithful to the Scriptures and attempts to discern the “radical” import of its message for “the social order.” . . . But perhaps from the edge of empire one may be permitted to remind these American colleagues that human civilization is not to be equated with modern America, and the preservation of “the world” as the object of the gospel does not immediately translate into the preservation of modern technocratic society!. . . . We
\end{quote}
must ask them whether it is in any serious sense the church's business to keep the human project afloat.  

Ecclesial Faith and the Church’s Worldly Signature

The Church is a community of people named in Christ and signed by the cross. Our entrance into the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ is, at the same time, our entrance into the heart of the human condition, its cultures and its worlds. This baptism marks the Christian Church as being in and for the world. Therefore, we speak of and proclaim Christ, act under the name of Christ, not first for our own needs and salvation (though these are also included), not even first for the needs and survival of the community and institution of the Church (though these are also included), but first and foremost for the needs and salvation of the world. Thus, neither the Church nor any individual Christian can have any agenda of faith, theology, or ministry which is not also the agenda of the worlds in which we find ourselves. Hall continues:

These theologians want a church with its own “intrinsic worth” — one that refuses to let the world “set the agenda.” But is the agenda that the church is to set, in their view, one that is conscious of the world’s needs? If it is not, then have they not opted for a new kind of ecclesiastical-theological “imperialism”? If it is, then in our attempt to construct a responsible theology, we cannot be as independent of the “spirit of the age” as they suggest.

Despite, and indeed, because of the evil, threat, fracture, pain, incongruity, incoherence, and failure we find in the world and in ourselves, those marked with the sign of the cross must see the world as the time and place of the divine dwelling among us. God with us is the incarnational mark of all biblical faith and the horizon which frames any adequate doctrines of creation, redemption, and sanctification. Without the world and its material histories, there is no incarnation of the Spirit of God in Christ. Indeed, without the world, there is no Christ, no Church: our theologies become abstract, and our ministries self-serving and defensive. The God whom we claim
to serve becomes only an obfuscating projection of our own anxieties and the needs of our all too particular church. Biblical faith begins to die—becomes moribund with a sickness unto death.

No matter what we lose or lack in this engagement of the defining and incarnational mark of the Church, whose being is always and at all times in and for the world, no matter how we remain incomplete and unfulfilled by bearing the world’s burdens as our own, any posture of narrow particularity in ecclesiology will frame a self-serving infidelity. It takes a fundamental and ecclesial faith and courage to see and accept the world and its material-histories as the only time and place where the name of Jesus Christ, and those who bear it, can be borne forward—can, in fact, remain alive.

Notes


2. In saying that the ecclesiology of Resident Aliens does not adequately “bear the faith forward,” I am certainly not saying that the book or its authors are unfaithful. I am saying that the reason that I do not prefer (etymologically “to bear forward”) their ecclesiology is because I do not think it will in fact advance the mission of the Church. It is because we disagree about that mission that we have different ecclesiologies.

3. For a critical but constructive engagement of modernity in terms of the possibilities of intersubjective communicative action see Jürgen Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, trans. by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987). In his essay on “The Normative Content of Modernity,” Habermas argues: “The radical critique of reason exacts a high price for taking leave of modernity” (p. 336).


8. Certain Søren Kierkegaard would have to be mentioned as an early objector to this modernist spirit of optimism, as would William Blake before him. Commenting on what he


11. It is interesting to note James Joyce’s depiction of the artist as Godlike in his A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (New York: Viking Press, 1964), 215. In the famous discussion of Chapter 5, Stephen Dedalus says: “The dramatic form is reached when the vitality which has flowed and eddied round each person fills every person with such vital force that he or she assumes a proper and intangible esthetic life. The personality of the artist, at first a cry or a cadence or a mood and then a fluid and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalizes itself, so to speak. The esthetic image in the dramatic form is life purified in and reprojected from the human imagination. The mystery of esthetic like that of material creation is accomplished. The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails.” For the notion of the artist as “Godlike” in Stephen Dedalus and James Joyce, I am indebted to J. Mitchell Morse, “The Godlike Artist: Augustine Again” in Morse, The Sympathetic Alien: James Joyce and Catholicism (New York: New York University Press, 1959), 127-139.


13. Hauerwas’ response to this criticism is focused in his After Christendom? (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991): “I have learned that there is simply nothing I can do to prevent my position from being characterized as fideistic and/or sectarian...(and)...that these characterizations presuppose the epistemological and social positions I am challenging ...” (p. 16). He goes on to suggest that he is not asking the Church to withdraw from what necessarily surrounds it: “I am not asking the church to withdraw, but rather to give up the presumptions of Constantinian power, particularly when those take the form of liberal universalism.” (p. 18). By accepting, for the sake of this article, a good bit of Hauerwas’ rhetoric of crisis upon the horizon of late modernity and post-modernity, my own criticisms in this vein are attempts at refocusing the debate at its ecclesiological center in terms of a discussion of what constitutes a faithful response. At the same time, and in other contexts, it would not be difficult to engage critically Hauerwas’ radical dismissal of the enlightenment heritage of liberal universalism and point out to him the high price that must be and has been paid when, in Habermas’ words (see n. 3 above), the radical critique of reason takes leave of modernity. In the end, my brief against Hauerwas may be partly biographical—something I think he would understand. Since my own Roman Catholic denomination came late into the modern world, I am not prone to give up on liberal modernity quite so quickly.

14. The Hauerwas agenda can be traced, in part, from his earlier concentration on the ethics of character and virtue through an emphasis on narrative and story to his present neo-sectarian ecclesiology. See, for example, Stanley Hauerwas, Vision and Virtue: Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection (Notre Dame: Fides, 1974); Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics (San Antonio: The University of Trinity Press, 1975); Truthfulness and Tragedy (with Richard Bondi) (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977); A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983); Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World, and Living in Between (Durham: Labyrinth Press, 1988). Hauerwas’ latest works are: After Christendom? (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993). However, even a cursory examination of these latest works suggests the same level and type of rhetoric of crisis, antimodernist analysis, and ecclesiology disclosed in Resident Aliens (See n. 13 above).

15. In his Theology of Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), Paul Tillich raises significant points about the emergency and estranged character of authentic religion and theology.
and warns especially of situations where religion ceases "to be dangerous for any rational and practical human enterprise" (p. 7).


17. This parenthetical approach is H. Richard Niebuhr’s in his *The Responsible Self* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 125.

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(See instructions on reverse)
Many preachers find it difficult to use Pauline texts because they lack a narrative line and seem to invite a dry, doctrinal style of interpretation. Actually Paul’s letters are one-half of a conversation with early congregations, requiring the other half to be reconstructed in order for the communication to be properly understood and interpreted. One of the hazards of the lectionary system is that it rips passages out of their contexts and invites treatment of the texts as independent, abstract, dogmatic statements. I propose in this study to recontextualize each of the paragraphs to allow an imaginative portrayal of their original relevance in real life situations in the early church. This can provide raw material for more vivid sermonizing that gives attention to the story behind the text, including the other half of the conversation with the Corinthians to which Paul is responding. This could provide the basis for provocative comparisons with other stories and conversations in contemporary life.

The Social and Historical Situation of 1 Corinthians. A knowledge of the social and historical background can aid in the interpretive process. Corinth was one of the largest cities in the
Roman Empire, reestablished in 46-43 B.C. after destruction a century earlier. Situated on the isthmus that joins northern Greece with the Peloponnese peninsula, it developed rapidly with a mixed population of Roman freedmen, Greeks, and immigrants from other areas, including a substantial number of Jews. The economy was based on the transit of goods from the two harbors, Cenchreae to the east and Lechaion to the west, rendering unnecessary the dangerous sea passage to the south. Manufacturing, administration, and the Isthmian Games combined with an intensive road network to provide Corinth with a booming economy that reached its apex in the second century A.D. Corinth was also infamous for the sexual vices characteristic of a seaport. Corinth was the capital of the Province of Achaia, which was governed by an imperial proconsul. The official language of Corinth was Latin, though church affairs were apparently conducted in Greek.

Paul's mission in Corinth probably began in the spring of A.D. 50, a date derived from the Gallio Inscription, which establishes a tenure of July 1, 51, to July 1, 52, for the proconsul before whom Paul appeared (Acts 18:12-17). This correlates with the encounter with Prisca and Aquilla, immigrants from Rome in 49, with whom Paul developed a tentmaking business (Acts 18:1-3). Several house churches were established in Corinth and its two harbor towns, whose patrons sponsored various traveling evangelists and came to favor competitive outlooks. The bulk of the converts were slaves and humble handworkers, led by patrons such as Gaius, Titius Justus, Chloe, Phoebe, Stephanus, Erastus, Prisca and Aquila. In the period between Paul's departure in A.D. 51 and his first return visit in 55, serious conflicts arose, eliciting Paul's letters. A proto-gnostic faction emerged to promote radical freedom from the law and a rejection of bodily responsibilities. Apollos, who missionized in Corinth during this period, played a role in the development of the controversies, and there were several conservative groups that opposed the proto-gnostics and the followers of Apollos. After the conflicts were resolved by the dialogue in the letters, Paul spent the winter of 56-57 in Corinth and Cenchreae before starting off on his final trip to Jerusalem. Here he found sufficient support to draft and refine his most elaborate letter, the Letter to the Romans.2
The Corinthian Correspondence as a Collection of Letters. It is appropriate to speak of the "Corinthian Correspondence" rather than simply 1 and 2 Corinthians because there are direct references to two letters beyond the canonical epistles (1 Cor. 5:9; 2 Cor. 2:4). When one takes into account the changed attitude toward the Corinthian situation visible in 1 Cor 11:18-19 as compared with 1 Cor. 1:10-14 and the abrupt shifts in subject matter and tone, it is likely that as many as seven letters were combined to create the canonical 1 and 2 Corinthians. There is more scholarly support for the redaction of 2 Corinthians than for 1 Corinthians, although some commentators still maintain the integrity of both.

The Progression of the Corinthian Controversy. Here is a summary of the ongoing conflict between Paul and the Corinthian churches, including a brief title for each of the original letters. This hypothesis identifies the lectionary selections for January and February as originally belonging in Corinthian Letters B, C and E, reflecting different stages of the controversy.

Letter A, "Sexual Roles and the Eucharist" (1 Cor. 11:2-34)—Paul responds to hearsay information about the agitation of the proto-gnostics concerning challenges to traditional sexual roles and definitions, involving women using male hairstyles and disturbances in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Letter B, "Avoid Mismating with Idolatry" (2 Cor. 6:14—7:1 + 1 Cor. 6:12-20 + 1 Cor. 9:24—10:22 + 1 Cor. 15:11-58 + 1 Cor. 16:13-24)—Paul receives additional information about openness to pagan worship and the rejection of sexual morality and bodily resurrection. He begins to take the controversy more seriously by writing a strong warning about involvement in pagan activities.

Letter C, "The Answer Letter" (1 Cor. 1:1-6:11 + 1 Cor. 7:11—8:13 + 1 Cor. 9:19-23 + 1 Cor. 10:23—11:1 + 1 Cor. 12:1-31a + 1 Cor. 14:1c-40 + 1 Cor. 12:31b—13:13 + 1 Cor. 16:1-12)—Paul receives a precise report from Chloe's church along with a letter requesting advice concerning the intensified conflicts between conservative factions and proto-gnostics. Paul answers the letter, showing serious concern about factionalism in Corinth.

Letter D, "Apostolic Sufficiency" (2 Cor. 2:14—6:13 + 2 Cor. 7:2-4)—Paul hears of invading missionaries (the "super-apostles") who bring letters of recommendation to prove their "sufficiency" in
miracle-working and spiritual exegesis of scripture. In response to
t heir criticisms, Paul defends the idea of genuine apostolic treasure
in earthen vessels and urges reconciliation.

Letter E, "The Letter of Tears" (2 Cor. 10:1-11:11 + 1 Cor. 
9:1-18 + 2 Cor. 11:12-13:13)—After a visit to Corinth in which the
church rejected his leadership, Paul develops a slashing attack on the 
Corinthians for following the "superapostles," in violation of the 
thology of the cross. Using Socratic irony, Paul defends his
ministry and shows the exploitative quality of the invading 
opponents, threatening to come back to Corinth with powers of 
excommunication if order cannot be restored otherwise.

Letter F, "The Offering Letter" (2 Cor. 9:1-15)—Paul attempts
to make new arrangements for collecting the Jerusalem Offering,
which had been disrupted by the troubles in Corinth. By comparing 
their procrastination with the vigorous efforts of the Macedonian 
Christians, Paul urges the Corinthians to get ready for the delegation 
that will take the offering to Jerusalem.

Letter G, "The Letter of Reconciliation" (2 Cor. 1:1—2:13 + 2 
Cor. 7:5—8:24)—After meeting Titus, who bears good news about 
the reconciliation of the congregation, Paul writes a joyful letter 
dealing with the themes of affliction and comfort in Christ.

Suggestions for Contemporary Preaching. Each passage selected 
in the lectionary is part of a dramatic controversy that would be 
interesting and relevant if imaginatively retold. But in contrast to 
texts from the Gospels or the Old Testament, the story behind the 
text needs to be reconstructed by the interpreter. I propose that you 
use the materials in this study to recover the story implicit in each 
passage in 1 Corinthians and then relate that story to real life 
situations in the current church and society. Once the theme of a 
particular controversy between Paul and the Corinthians is 
established and the dialogue between Paul and his congregations is 
clarified, it will be easier to correlate the theme with current studies 
of a comparable issue. I also propose that you consider the 
opportunity of correlating a Pauline passage with a film, television 
program, or novel that may be known to some members of your 
congregation. The abstract, dogmatic tradition of interpreting Paul 
can be broken down by evoking a vivid story that resonates with the 
particular issue Paul was discussing with his congregation. A
January 16, 1994: 1 Corinthians 6:12-30

The opening phases of the Corinthian controversy deal with sexual roles and ethics. A radical group in the congregation, probably influenced by an early form of Gnosticism, challenged the traditional definition of male and female roles and claimed freedom from sexual restraints. They argued that such matters were morally irrelevant since the body was evil anyway in comparison with the spirit and the mind. They apparently rejected the Judeo-Christian doctrines of the creation and redemption of the body, believing that salvation was a matter of knowing the divine origin of one's true self, which was spiritual and mental.

In 1 Cor. 6:12-20 (in Letter B), Paul responds to their argument that prostitution was preferable to marriage because it demonstrated freedom from commitments in the realm of the body and showed that bodily relationships are morally irrelevant. As we can tell from Paul's quotations of mottos used by the proto-gnostics in Corinth (1 Cor. 6:12-13), they argued that the freedom they had gained in Christ meant that sexual restraints should be abandoned. "All things are lawful for me" had been taught by Paul as a consequence of justification by faith rather than works, but he never intended it to justify libertinism. The motto in 6:13 is quoted only in part, but we can reconstruct it from Paul's rebuttal. The proto-gnostics argued that "just as food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food; so sex is for the body and the body is for sex." In other words, the choice of sexual partners is merely a matter of appetite, as irrelevant spiritually as whether one's stomach favors carrots or spinach. They believed that God related only to the mind and spirit and had no concern for bodily relations. This provoked Paul to develop an innovative approach to bodily ethics, which avoided the legalistic and moralistic categories that would betray the legitimate sphere of Christian freedom.

Beyond Freedom. As the apostle of freedom, Paul does not want to abandon the sense of being released by grace from the necessity to
conform to the law. His own conversion had revolved around this issue, because in his compulsion to enforce conformity to the Jewish law, he had persecuted the early church. But freedom for Paul did not stand alone; it needed to be understood within the framework of a relationship to the Christ who lived and died for love. Thus in 6:12a, he acknowledges that “all things are lawful for me,” but not all things are beneficial.” The term (sumpherein) implies benefit to the community, a key consideration in the ethic of love that Christ embodied and taught. For Paul, freedom was not an end in itself, as it was for the proto-gnostics and is for many contemporary North Americans. It is a quality of relationship to a new Lord, who sets believers free from conformity to whatever law has dominated them and places them under a new constraint that can be exercised in perfect freedom, namely to love one another. This requires taking bodily responsibilities seriously.

In 6:13b Paul adds a second consideration to the concept of Christian freedom, not to “be dominated by anything.” It is possible to be released from conformity to the law, which separates us from God, and then to fall into an equally distorting bondage to bodily impulses or evil relationships. Paul understood freedom as an aspect of the new relationship with the grace of Christ; anything that replaces or distorts that relationship is the enemy of freedom. This is a profound insight, as relevant for the proto-gnostics in Corinth as it is for persons who are in today’s society. In the words of Gerald May, “The same processes that are responsible for addiction to alcohol and narcotics are also responsible for addiction to ideas, work, relationships, power, moods, fantasies, and an endless variety of other things. . . . Addiction. . . is the absolute enemy of human freedom, the antipathy of love. . . . Grace is the most powerful force in the universe. It can transcend repression, addiction, and every other internal or external power that seeks to oppress the freedom of the human heart” (pp. 3-4). Similar insights are expressed in the hymn “Make Me a Captive, Lord, and Then I Shall Be Free.” Films such as Blue Angel, Manhattan, or The Lost Weekend are working with similar issues.

Rebutting the Argument about Food and Sex. Paul has to agree in 6:13a with the first part of the motto promoted by the proto-gnostics, that food and stomachs are morally irrelevant. But
his reason is different from theirs: it is not because of their material nature but because in the final judgment such things will pass away. He denies, however, that the body as a whole is similarly indifferent. For Paul, the body is the means of personal identity and communication between persons and God. It refers to the whole person, including the mind, the hands, and the sexual organs. This is expressed with an astounding claim, given the tendency in the Greco-Roman world to be suspicious of bodily impulses and to restrict religion to the mind and conscience. “The body is . . . for the Lord, and the Lord for the body” (6:13b). Just as God raised Jesus’ body after death, so believers in their distinctive bodily form and their capacity for relationships will be raised in the last day, according to 6:14. Humans are therefore indissolubly linked to their bodies, both in this world and the next. Paul claims that the relationship with God is a relationship with our body, encompassing every aspect of our personhood, explicitly including sexual relations. Believers become “members of Christ” (6:15), extensions of his body. Therefore, anything that distorts bodily relationships, as, for example, prostitution, violates the relationship with Christ. This remarkable statement of physical mysticism, implying that physical relationships have a profoundly spiritual and personal significance, could be compared with the novels of D. H. Lawrence or John Updike. One could also correlate this passage with films such as Working Girls, American Gigolo or Indecent Proposal, the latter of which powerfully refutes the popular idea that sex is morally and psychologically irrelevant, a mere matter of sexual appetite.

Paul’s Innovative Case against Fornication. Rather than developing a legalistic or moralistic argument about fornication and prostitution, as the church has ordinarily done, Paul builds his case on the kind of wholistic relationship believers have with Christ. The rhetorical question in 15b concerning whether “members of Christ,” i.e., our bodily parts dedicated to the kind of love taught by Christ, should be joined with a prostitute. The answer is “Never!” because the exploitative, impersonal, and dishonest relationship of prostitution is the very opposite of the kind of love that binds believers to Christ. Sexual relations, according to verse 16, engage our whole bodies, meaning our heart, soul, mind, and spirit as well as our sexual organs. When couples become “one flesh,” this
relationship reshapes them into a new entity, altering the identity and the personhood of each. This occurs just as much for casual sexual relationships as for marriage, because in each case the quality of the relationship shapes the identity of the participants.

Paul stands at the opposite pole of moderns who dissociate sexual relationships from personhood by referring to “sex,” as if it were devoid of relationship and could be separated from the core of personhood. Paul advocates the psychosomatic unity of persons that refuses to segment sexual relation into a separate sphere. And the sanctity of such relations is stunningly expressed in 6:17, which uses the term for sexual intercourse (κοιλαδ, “unite, cohabit”) to refer to the spiritual relationship between believers and Christ: “But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.”

The direct prohibition in of fornication 6:18, i.e. sexual relationships outside of covenantal boundaries, is thus based on the wholistic quality of bodily relationships rather than on prudential considerations, moralistic principles, or laws. Paul is arguing from the center of his Christian mysticism, with its wholistic view of God’s relationship to believers through Christ. This should provide the background for the puzzling formulation of 18b, that “every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself.” Several dozen proposals have been made to explain Paul’s seeming overstatement, because there are clearly other sins that involve one’s body, and there are various ways to abuse oneself. One of the more plausible options is that Paul is quoting a Corinthian saying to the effect that all true sin is “outside the body,” i.e., does not involve the morally indifferent body but rather pertains to the mind. If so, Paul strongly disagrees and adds his rebuttal that the person involved in illicit sexual activity is sinning against the body itself—which has been shown to be the basis of our relationship with the Lord. Another option is that Paul intends to say that no relationship beyond sexual intercourse so totally engages the whole person, so that distortions in this area affect the body in all of its aspects. Whatever his precise intent, Paul is making a case that sexual relations influence our relationship with Christ, and vice versa. Fornication brings one into a bondage to a false relationship that replaces the Lordship of Christ. One can think of many films dealing with the addictive and alienating potential of sexual relations, including Lolita and Indecent Proposal.
The Revolutionary Idea of the Body as the Temple of God. The capstone of Paul’s argument concerning sexual self-control is to expand the idea that the church was the new form of God’s spiritual temple (see 1 Cor. 3:16). The introduction “do you not know” in 6:19 implies that this basic idea was shared by the congregation, but nowhere else do we find the precise notion that the “body” of believers comprises this temple of the spirit. The basis for this had been prepared by 6:17, but its implications are revolutionary. It means that all bodily relationships and activities are a direct expression of the Holy Spirit’s presence, an indication of belongingness to Christ. This includes the work we do with our bodies, the relationships in which we engage, and the way we treat our bodies themselves. Christ’s lordship extends not just to our minds and hearts, but to every aspect of our relationships. “For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body” (6:20). This is the farthest step away from the proto-gnostic contempt for the body, which lay at the heart of the Corinthian controversy. It hallows all of our bodily activities, from our hobbies to our vocations, from our family obligations to our daily chores, from our diets to our exercise. There are many contemporary resources that move in this direction, although many diet and exercise programs aim to add glory to oneself rather than to God. A significant parallel to Paul’s argument, perhaps, is Overeaters Anonymous, a 12-step program that provides a spiritual resource for persons having difficulty glorifying God in their eating. The idea of glorifying God with one’s body is portrayed beautifully in Chariots of Fire.6

January 24, 1994: 1 Corinthians 7:29-31

The background of this discussion about the ethical implications of the shortness of time is also concerned with the gnostic tendency in the congregation. But this was gnosticism in its alternate expression: asceticism. On the premise that the physical world is evil, proto-gnostics favored either libertinism—to show one’s contempt for bodily regulations—or asceticism—to renounce all involvement with the physical world. There are many examples in the ancient and
modern world of such asceticism, including fasting or renouncing certain foods, denying sexual relations or other bodily pleasures in order to demonstrate the mind’s control over one’s so-called “lower nature.” Ancient Pythagoreans or modern Yogas represent this tradition of suppressing the passions and bringing bodily appetites under strict control. Some of the proto-gnostics in Corinth apparently misunderstood Paul’s personal renunciation of marriage as a sign that all such entanglements with the physical world should be avoided. They believed that the bodily realm was damned and that only the spirit and mind could be saved. Paul quotes their motto in 1 Cor. 7:1, “It is better for a man not to touch a woman,” which implied that all sexual relations are to be renounced. For persons already married, they advocated a kind of platonic arrangement, in which sexual union was to be avoided, as we can infer from 1 Cor. 7:5. They urged persons who were engaged not to carry through with marriage (see 1 Cor. 7:26, 36-38), because it represented an attraction to one’s lower nature that was thought to be the source of damnation.

This movement posed a difficult interpretive task to Paul, because he had been an advocate of a disciplined lifestyle and had himself renounced marriage. He did not wish to encourage moral and physical laxity, yet he could not agree with the proto-gnostic devaluation of the physical body as inherently evil. He held to the doctrine of the goodness of creation shared by most Jews and early Christians, while the proto-gnostics were developing a doctrine (which was later identified as a heretical) of the creation of an inherently corrupt world through evil demiurges or a false god. This helped to explain the radical fallenness of the world, its current corruption and evil. The difference between Paul and the proto-gnostics was that they believed the problem lay in the physical nature of the world, while he believed it was due to human sin, which was being overcome by Christ. He believed that a “New Creation” was being born as the church spread over the Roman Empire and that as a result wholistic relationships with the physical world were gradually being made possible. Paul’s view of self-discipline was based on obedience to the Lordship of Christ, loyalty to the principle of loving relationships within the new community of faith, freedom from the distorting burdens of the law
or of physical addictions, and awareness of the shortness of time before the end of the world.7

Paul’s New Approach to Ethical Decisions. Throughout 1 Cor. 7 Paul’s innovative approach seeks to avoid legalism and moralism, to renounce dualistic forms of asceticism, and to rely on the judgment of individual members of the community to follow the guidance of the spirit in order to act out of love. Paul refers in this chapter to a variety of factors that need to be taken into account in deciding complex issues such as love, marriage, and vocation. In the context of marriage, he advises people to take account of their own sexual “charisma” (1 Cor. 7:7), leading to an attraction to a particular partner or to the maintenance of the single state. For those who have committed themselves in marriage, he urges that they remain responsible to meet the sexual needs of their partners (1 Cor. 7:3-5). In the case of Christian wives married to non-Christian husbands, he advises maintaining the relationship as long as peace can be maintained (1 Cor. 7:15). For those considering marriage for the first time, he particularly lifts up the eschatological emergency as a crucial factor to be taken into account. He refers to the “impending crisis” in 7:26 and to “distress” in 7:28, probably referring to the stress of persecution and insecurity, which were being experienced by Christians involved in evangelistic activities. But the eschatological emergency involves the more basic idea that the new age was dawning, which meant that people ought to avoid relationships vulnerable to the principalities and power of the old age. Paul’s approach is to give his own opinion on such matters “as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy” (1 Cor 7:25), but he does not lay down the law. Even when he has a “command from the Lord” as in the case of the prohibition of divorce (1 Cor. 7:10), he encourages believers to make free decisions in the light of their circumstances (1 Cor. 7:15). His ethic relies on the fact that believers have been given a new ethical awareness, a new kind of responsibility to act creatively and wisely in the light of the circumstances they face.

Relativizing Marriage and Family Obligations. In the lectionary selection for January 24, Paul develops a hyperbolic statement aimed at taking account of the changed circumstances brought by Christ. Since “the appointed time has grown short,” he advises, “let even
those who have wives be as though they had none. . . ." (1 Cor. 7:28). The hyperbole is neat and provocative, but it was not intended to lead people to abandon responsibility, as the preceding discussion made clear. It is a succinct statement of the principle of penultimacy. In the light of the ultimate issue of the dawn of the new age and the shortness of time until the end of the world, one should treat all other concerns as less than ultimate. Paul Tillich's distinction between "ultimate concern" and penultimate values is relevant here.

Another way to express this idea is setting priorities. In the light of Christ and the extension of his body through the church, which is the first priority, other obligations become secondary. Other ethical concerns are qualified and transformed by love of Christ and are no longer to be viewed as finally binding if they should come into conflict with the first priority. This allows a creative approach to marital and family obligations, keeping things in perspective and avoiding obsessive forms of behavior. It discourages pat answers and tired cliches, because it leads believers to think through their family obligations freshly in the light of ever changing circumstances. In some instances, as illustrated by the film The Music Box, a person may find it necessary to renounce family loyalty for the sake of a higher loyalty to truth and love. Casablanca is a classic film that urges loyalty to a higher cause as more important even than romantic attractions.

It is clear from the discussions in 1 Cor. 7 and Rom. 12:1-2 that Paul encourages groups of Christians to discuss such matters in the light of their experience of the faith. This is why he appeals in the plural to the "brothers" in 1 Cor. 7:28, meaning the male as well as the female members of early Christian churches. It is similar to the idea of Study Circles of Christians that facilitate discussion of ethical choices and help members to set priorities for themselves. Similar opportunities are provided in Christian education classes and Covenant Discipleship Groups throughout the church.

Relativizing Mourning and Rejoicing. Paul's love of rhetorical antitheses leads him to a fivefold development in 7:29-31. The second and third antitheses deal with emotional states, "mourning" and "rejoicing." As in the earlier case of marriage, Paul is unwilling to deny the legitimacy of such emotions as an ascetic
would. He does not advocate the ascetic ideal in the Greco-Roman world of *apathia*, emotional non-involvement. What is called for here in the hyperbolic formulation, "those who mourn as though they were not mourning," is that emotional states need to be qualified by the New Creation. Since the love of God comes to believers in an unconditional fashion, whether they are mourning or rejoicing, they have no need to despair in the former or to lose control in the latter. Paul develops this idea further in Romans 8:26-27, that the spirit intercedes in our weakness, bringing our cares and joys before God and helping us to pray for what is good even when we cannot articulate it. The classic climax of this idea is in Romans 8:28, that "in everything it (i.e., the spirit) works together for good with those who love God." The losses for which we mourn are not final, and our feelings of sorrow are not without solace, because the spirit is working within our sadness toward a constructive end. The joys we experience through our work and our relationships are not ultimate, because the spirit is constantly required to keep our relationships on a healthy level and keep our perspective balanced.

Robert Hudnut deals with how God uses dark emotions and experiences. If we keep our loyalty to the living God and remain committed to the Reign of God, we will be open to the ways these darker experiences can aid in drawing us closer to God. In this way we can escape the effects of our culture's adoration of the positive. A film that deals with this issue is *The Whales of August*.

**Business as a Realm of the Penultimate.** The fourth antithesis relates to the realm of buying and selling, which was a prominent form of business in a trading center like Corinth. Again, unlike the proto-gnostics, Paul did not wish to disparage the realm of everyday work as an evil involvement in the corrupt realm of the flesh. But he wants the Corinthians to keep things in perspective, not to become completely absorbed in their work. He does not want them to be obsessive about their work, or to allow the values of their professions to supplant the new Christian perspective on the meaning of life. Selling and possessing are not ultimate; they represent a penultimate realm of activity which should be conducted honestly and efficiently, for the sake of the larger good that is revealed in the ultimate sphere of Christ. As a businessman working in the tent and
awning trade, Paul probably knew from long experience how the insecurities and demands of his profession could lead to debilitating obsessions. So he advises “those who buy” to act “as though they had no possessions.” Since God is the final owner of everything, humans can never be more than stewards. Their possessions are held in trust for the final owner, the God of all people, who desires that the outcome of human work should lead not to greed and selfishness but to sharing and mutual responsibility. Paul’s approach may be particularly relevant in our current economic situation in North America, when workers are carrying especially heavy loads because of corporate “downsizing.” Many people become even more addicted to their work and concerned about their security in an era when unemployment threatens all levels of workers from the blue collar to the highest levels of management.

Films that deal with the tension between business or professional activities and higher forms of loyalty are *Wall Street, The China Syndrome,* and even *The Godfather.* A television series that constantly relativizes the significance of the financial end result is *The Rockford Files.* Studies on the theory of stewardship are also relevant to this topic.  

**The Final Statement of Penultimacy in View of the Eschatological Hope.** The final antithesis in 1 Cor. 7:31 broadens the scope to include everything in the world with which we are related; it refers to “those who deal with the world,” which would include every relationship for every person in Corinth. The antithesis reveals what is at stake in all of these complex areas of responsibility. Paul uses the rare word *katachraomai* (“use up, become absorbed in”) to urge that everyone dealing with the world should do so “as if not absorbed in it.” Here Paul states the principle of penultimacy most clearly, a principle that was implicit in each of the preceding antitheses. It is a warning against idolatrous participation in the world, allowing the values and demands of the world to become ultimate. It defines all activities in this world as penultimate in value, but not—as the proto-gnostics would have it—as meaningless in value. This provides a basic mindset which guides the Christian in decision-making and working in the world. It requires a reordering of priorities and attitudes. It is not, however, a new law. It leaves Christians free to decide how to act in the light of
circumstances and in the ultimate light of the New Creation being ushered in by Christ.

The lectionary concludes with a reiteration of the primary factor that makes the distinction between the ultimate and the penultimate necessary. "For the present form of this world is passing away." The new age is dawning, says Paul, and the rules of the principalities and powers are no longer finally binding. A new form of responsibility for the world now becomes possible. This theme resonates with films that depict people working toward a distant goal of justice and beauty and reforming their environments in light of that goal, such as The Mission, The Grapes of Wrath, The Milagro Beanfield War, or O Pioneers. A negative counter-example of absorption in the destructive realm of the penultimate would be Chinatown.

January 30, 1994: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

The situation in Corinth regarding meat offered to idols is somewhat difficult for moderns to grasp, since we do not have an exact parallel in the contemporary world. Some of the meat sold in the marketplaces of the Greco-Roman world consisted of portions not used in temple sacrifices, but since the animal as a whole was dedicated to the deity, the use of such meat was strictly forbidden to Jews, and later to Christians. Most of the members of the Corinthian churches would have had access to meat, which was quite expensive, only on public festival days or in the context of mystery religion celebrations or fraternal meals. It was natural, therefore, to associate meat with paganism and sacrificial ceremonies of various sorts. Whether eating such meat was thought to bring a person into fellowship with the particular deity to whom the meat was sacrificed or not is a difficult point being debated by current scholars.

It is clear from Paul’s discussion in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 that there were conflicts between proto-gnostics and pagan conservatives over the question of meat offered to idols, whether experienced in a fellowship meal or bought in the marketplace. As one can see in 8:7, the conservatives were "accustomed to idols" because of their pagan past, and still had lingering fears that eating such meat would bring them under the influence of the pagan deities. They suffered
conscience pangs when eating meat offered to idols, fearing that it would violate their relationship to Christ. The proto-gnostics were certain that such deities were nonexistent and that their influence was purely imaginary, so they goaded the conservatives into violating their conscience and eating the meat despite their qualms. It was a classic instance of a community divided by theological and cultural differences, with conflicts arising out of the demand for consistent behavior no matter what the personal cost. Both sides apparently raised questions about this issue in the letter sent to Paul, and he responds in the answer letter (Letter C), from which this lectionary selection is drawn.¹¹

The Critique of the Proto-Gnostics' Use of Knowledge. Paul opens the discussion with an acknowledgement that everyone in the congregation knows on a theoretical level that the idols are nothing, or that their power has been abrogated by Christ. Every converted Christian can be said to "possess knowledge" of this basic reality, but the question that concerns Paul is what should be done with such knowledge in a complex congregational situation where some members are afraid to act consistently. When people act aggressively to impose their higher level of enlightenment on others, "knowledge puffs up." Its possession leads to an inflated sense of status. In contrast, "love builds up" because its goal is the good of the neighbor rather than the competitive enhancement of the self. Since the proto-gnostics based their salvation on "knowledge" and tended to devalue love, it is clear that the intent of this opening argument was to clarify matters at a basic level. The anti-gnostic thrust of this argument becomes even more clear in 8:2, where Paul contends that anyone making claims about "knowledge" does not really know as a Christian should know, because arrogant claims are inconsistent with love. There are significant textual variants at this point, with the earliest papyrus (P46) and other early Alexandrian witnesses rendering verse 2 as follows, translated by Fee (p. 367):

If anyone thinks he has arrived at knowledge, he does not yet know as he ought to know; but if anyone loves, this one truly knows (or, is known).
The issue addressed in these verses frequently surfaces in churches where some members or leaders feel they are more mature or enlightened than others. Such feelings often lead to sneering and doubtfulness that the unenlightened or slow members can understand the subtleties of inspired theology. Theology is an especially dangerous field in this sense, because it so easily leads people to feel they are superior. Ministers and professors love to reveal their intellectual achievements, to talk about the great sermon idea just developed. Paul provides a healthy antidote by referring to love “building up,” which implies that each person is equally important and stands equally in need of “edification.” This is open-ended and creative, because it is guided by love rather than by intellectual competition. The difficulty of maintaining communities with different levels of knowledge and competence is captured by films like Metropolis and Babbette’s Feast, while the novels of Tony Hillerman deal with similar problems of extreme cultural diversity.

The Goodness of Creation. The acknowledgement of the correctness of the gnostic theology is only done after setting the record straight in verses 1-3. The positive side of the doctrine of creation is stated in 1 Corinthians 8:4-6, and it is linked with a fuller doctrine of creation than the proto-gnostics would have liked. The entire cosmos is created by God, according to verse 6, and is therefore good. There is a healthy affirmation of the oneness of God (8:4), who is responsible for the creation, a viewpoint consistent with Judaism but opposed to proto-gnosticism and especially the later gnostic systems, which disparaged the goodness of the physical universe. This passage expresses the grain of truth in the work on “creation-centered spirituality” promoted by Matthew Fox, although Paul retains a healthier sense of the need to transform sinful and selfish people. This passage has great significance for the issue of ecology, because it not only affirms the unity of the creation by the power of the one God, but it also clearly states the purpose of human life: “for whom we exist” clearly implies that the purpose of human life is related to God rather than to a selfish exploitation of human knowledge and status. These themes are reflected in the C. S. Lewis’s novels such as Perelandra, while Paul’s claim that the idols do not really exist (8:4) is captured in The Wizard of Oz. A lingering fear that the idols and other evil powers may really exist is expressed
in the large number of *Friday the 13th* and horror films, making it clear that a doctrine as basic as creation is not universally accepted in this culture.\textsuperscript{12}

**The Need to Renounce Freedom for the Sake of the Weak.** Paul's advice concerning the conflicts over conscience in Corinth is predicated on a solid understanding of the problem faced by the "weak." Although they know intellectually that the idols to which the meat was sacrificed are nonexistent, they continue to feel dread about eating. They are involved in a "conscience lag" between their mind and their emotions. If they are induced to violate their conscience, even though it was misguided because of their prior conditioning as pagans (8:7), they risk a dangerous loss of integrity and a laming of their conscience that could destroy them as moral agents (8:7, 11, 12). Therefore, Paul calls on the strong to renounce their freedom when it might endanger the integrity of the weak. He supports this with reasoning his conversation partners would accept, referring to the fact that food is morally and spiritually irrelevant in 8:8. This point had been stated in the proto-gnostic motto of 1 Corinthians 6:13, discussed above. It does not hurt the conscience of the proto-gnostics to abstain, but it may do grievous harm to the conservatives if they are led to violate their conscience.

Paul's approach provides the possibility for a community to live in mutual respect and integrity even though its members have differing conscience structures. Paul recognizes the social and psychological conditioning of conscience and wishes to allow it time to mature. He defends the autonomy of conscience, even when it is lagging behind what a person knows in his or her head. The entire doctrine is a working out of the principle that "love builds up," encouraging the maturation of each person along the path of development that is natural.\textsuperscript{13}

**Contemporary Issues Related to Conscience.** When a congregation becomes more multicultural and when it consists of persons of varying levels of education and maturity, the relevance of Paul's advice on protecting the conscience of the weak is enhanced. Its bearing on the issue of alcohol abuse has long been recognized and has recently been embodied in a television series, "The John Larroquette Show." The idea of conscientious objection to military service is also directly related to this passage, because it provides
protection for the conscience of people who do not subscribe to a particular decision to use military force. The film Sergeant York is a classic treatment of this theme. The need to provide protection for religious and cultural minorities whose conscience patterns are somewhat different from others is captured in films like Gandhi and Mississippi Burning. The renunciation of a position of privilege for the sake of the weak who are being persecuted is depicted in the film Au Revoir Les Enfants. The intractable issue of abortion is a classic instance of differing conscience structures, but one sees little evidence among current Christians involved in this debate of the kind of self-renunciation and respect for conscientious diversity that Paul advocated in Corinth.

February 6, 1994: 1 Corinthians 9:16-23

Although this passage appears in the middle of 1 Corinthians, I think it is likely that it originally belonged in Letter E, reflecting a later stage of the controversy with the Corinthians. The issue concerning apostolic remuneration was probably raised by the superapostles who invaded the Corinthian congregation and sought to discredit Paul’s leadership. Since they demanded monetary support for themselves in return for the exercise of their charismatic gifts, they claimed that Paul had refrained from such demands because he knew he was an inadequate apostle. During his founding mission Paul had avoided accepting support from the patrons of the Corinthian house churches, preferring to make his own contribution to the regular love feasts by working with his hands in the tentmaking shop. As in the Thessalonian situation, he wanted to provide a responsible example of community support through constructive work. In addition he probably did not want to enter into a dependent relationship with the competitive patrons of the Corinthian house churches. But now his missionary strategy comes back to haunt him, because the superapostles use it to argue he was unqualified. In the early verses of chapter 9, he claims he had the right to such support but had voluntarily renounced it, so as not to be a burden to the congregation.14
Paul's Apostolic Motivation. The assigned pericope opens in 1 Cor. 9:16-17 with a clarification of his motivation as an apostle, which had come under attack by the superapostles. While he suggests they were in it for the money, Paul explains that his motivation derives from the "obligation" he received at his conversion. He received the unconditional grace of Christ even while persecuting the church and discovered that love rather than conformity to the law was the means by which the world was to be transformed. Since the grace that redeemed him was free, the reward he claims for the exercise of his apostolic vocation is to share it "free of charge." In other words, he preaches grace because he had received grace, and the nature of grace would be violated if his motivation were driven by the need to earn or be rewarded.

Paul's perspective connects with the problem of professional motivations, contrasting with our usual theories of career advancement. It challenges us to ask whether we primarily bound to patrons from whom we expect to earn rewards—in our institutions, in the church, in the system, in the bishop. What does the currently popular motivational system do to our freedom and morale? These issues are dealt with in the classic hardboiled detective novels, where the detective characteristically continues the search for the truth even if he is dismissed from a job or does not get paid, as for instance in stories like A Long Goodbye or The Godwulf Manuscript. The Miss Marple stories by Agatha Christie also fit this category, where the discovery of truth is its own reward.

Paul's Missional Flexibility. In 9:19-23 Paul explains how the orientation to grace produces a flexible and effective missionary strategy in which he is able to "become all things to all people, so that I might by all means save some." He is able to adjust to Jews and Gentiles, to the weak as well as to the strong. Rather than imposing himself on others, insisting that everyone follow his standards, he places himself on the side of his conversation partners. The evangelistic potential of this strategy is enormous, even though it is frequently not followed by leaders who claim to represent Paul's gospel. One thinks of the novel and film Hawaii as a classic example of failing to follow Paul's strategy until it was too late. The "Heat of the Night" and "Hill Street Blues" television series frequently
depicted such flexibility in law enforcement. Twain’s novel *The Prince and the Pauper* also plays with these themes.

There is a problem with maintaining integrity in the midst of this kind of flexibility, which is one reason it is not frequently followed. Paul found a way to remain loyal to the gospel as an inclusive message of love, which kept him whole in the midst of relativity. In 9:23 he says, “I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.” Professionalism in ministry, as well as other fields, tends to erode this kind of flexibility, sadly, because it connects status to following certain procedures and standards. A film like *Stand and Deliver* deals with this theme, as do some of the Sherlock Holmes stories.  

**February 14, 1994 : 1 Corinthians 9:24-27**

Our final passage comes from an earlier phase of the Corinthian controversy (Letter B) in which Paul attempts to deal with the proto-gnostic threat to bodily discipline by using the metaphor of athletic competition and training. It was a powerful metaphor in the Corinthian environment because of the Isthmian Games, which were held every two years in Corinth with competitions in athletics and drama, including religious and artistic spectacles that attracted thousands of participants and spectators from throughout the Mediterranean world. One of the Isthmian Games, which vied with the Olympics in popularity, occurred during Paul’s founding mission in Corinth. Since the spectators were lodged in tents, the suggestion has been that Paul may well have been involved in making shelters for the festivities. There is at any rate no doubt that he would have been well acquainted with the athletic system of training and races which played so large a part in the economy and culture of Corinth.  

**The Use and Transformation of the Metaphor of the Race.** Paul employs the metaphor of a race, developing it in three significant ways. The kind of race at the Isthmian Games in which “only one receives the prize” (1 Cor. 9:24a) is transformed when Paul alters the element of competition to become the single winner. Second person plural forms are used in his admonition, “Run in such a way
that you [all] may win it” (9:24b). This change in the parameters of the metaphor appears to address the problem of competition between house churches, between the proto-gnostics and the conservatives.

The motif of the athlete’s self-control (9:25a) is used to introduce the element of discipline that Paul needs to address the problem of laxity in bodily relations, discussed above. The goal and direction of this discipline are explained in verses 26-27 in terms of subjugating one’s own body for the sake of Christ. The metaphor of the boxer is employed but again transformed because Paul boxes against himself rather than against an adversary. This conveys a strenuous regimen of exercise and self-control, comparable to the modern weightlifter’s motto, “No pain, no gain.”

The third development of the athletic metaphor has to do with the prize, which in the Isthmian Games was a wreath of pine or celery leaves placed on the head of the winner. It was a great honor, but obviously a “perishable” one which Paul contrasts with the “imperishable” prize that Christians (again in the plural!) are going to win.

This passage provides a rationale for various forms of self-control needed by each Christian. In contrast to most of the diet and exercise books of our time, the new norm is self-control for the sake of love, expressed by the lordship of Christ. There is a democratic breadth in Paul’s view, involving not just the great spiritual weight-lifters of the church but every member. This collective sense of working toward a goal in which each will participate could be correlated with a film like Hoosiers and contrasted with a film that is much closer to the ruthless spirit of the Isthmian competition, i.e. Raging Bull. The disastrous consequences of a lack of self-control surfaces in The Natural as well as in films outside of the realm of athletics such as Apocalypse Now or Scarface.17

The Final Issue of Accountability. The possibility of being “disqualified” from membership in Christ’s realm is the negative threat that drives Paul’s approach to self-discipline. He does not spell out precisely what might constitute such a disqualification, but the context of the Corinthian struggles with bodily discipline, competition between house churches, and conflicts between the weak and strong suggest the range of possibilities. This material could be spelled out by reference to 1 Cor. 6:19-20, where the body of
believers is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Bodily relations encompass every arena of our lives, since body is the term Paul uses to depict the whole person. Paul's view is that the New Creation encompasses every aspect of life, therefore requiring physical as well as spiritual and mental discipline. There are striking examples of the consequence of breaking such discipline in films like *Elmer Gantry*, while stories like *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* and *The Firm* depict the difference between those who remain faithful to higher standards and others who are disgraced and disqualified.

Notes


