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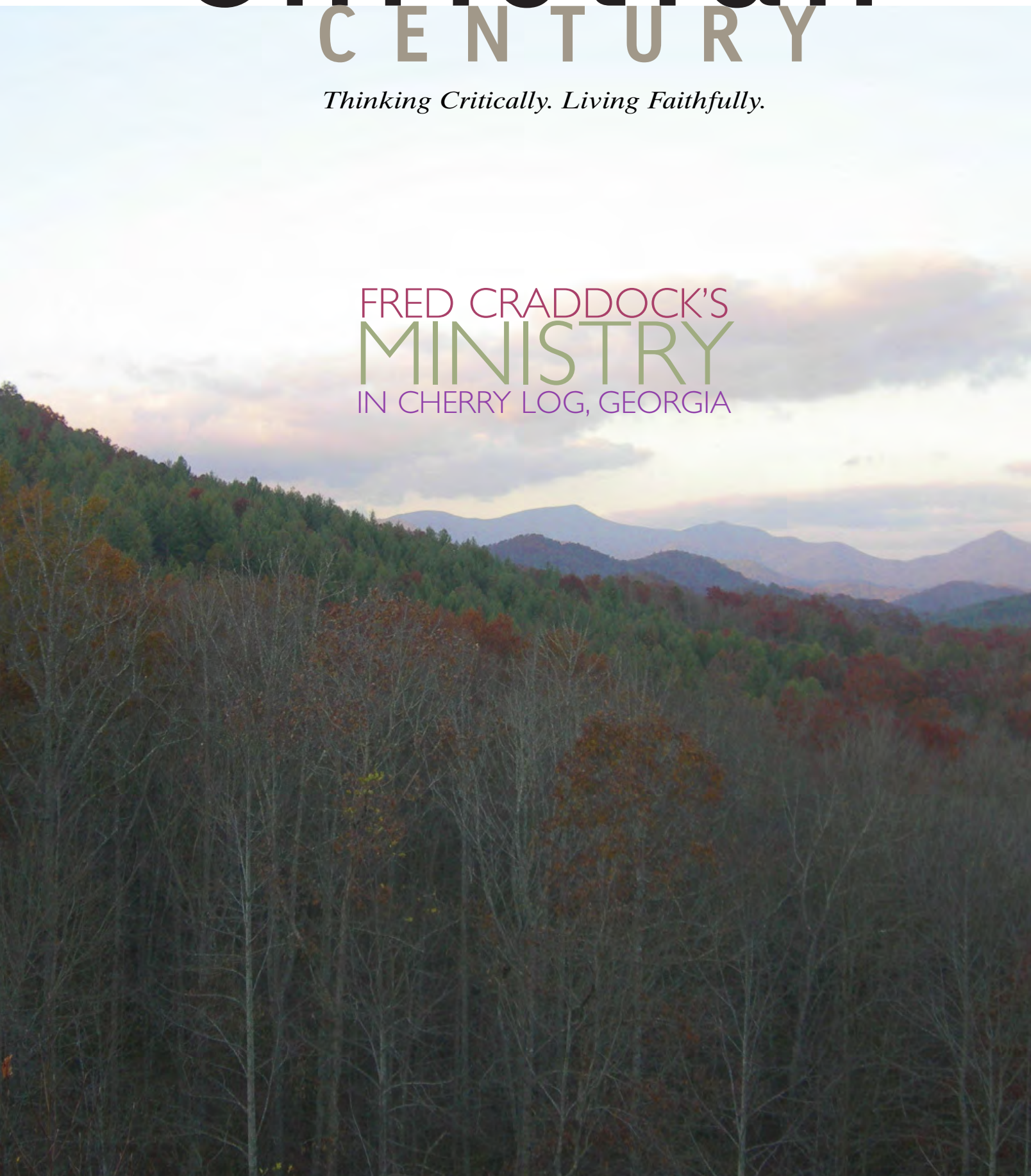
THE Christian CENTURY

March 4, 2015

Thinking Critically. Living Faithfully.



FRED CRADDOCK'S MINISTRY IN CHERRY LOG, GEORGIA

Presbyterians: We can do better than divestment

We, the undersigned leaders in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), are deeply committed to a just and lasting peace between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples. We have watched the events of the past few months with great dismay: the murder of Israeli and Palestinian teenagers; the trauma of increasing rocket attacks by Hamas on Israeli civilians; the extensive suffering and death of Palestinians from Israel's military response; the discovery of tunnels for major terrorist attacks on Israeli civilians; and the unabated expansion of settlements. More broadly, the rise of ISIS, the persecution of Middle Eastern Christians, and a wave of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in Europe and North America all point to the same conclusion: that the extreme elements of this conflict are gaining strength and influence. Meanwhile, those committed to the well-being of all are tempted to join in the polarization or to sink into silence and despair.

Last June, the General Assembly of our church voted very narrowly to approve the divestment of stock in three companies deemed as complicit in the occupation of the Palestinian territories. We are among the many Presbyterians all over the country who have worked against this action, believing that divestment would strengthen the extreme positions on both sides of this conflict without alleviating the suffering of Palestinians — and further divide and discourage the vast center of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that longs for justice with love for both peoples. We continue to dissent strongly from this divestment action, and many of the Presbyterians who fill our pews on Sunday mornings share this conviction.

Yet we are more convinced than ever that those who are concerned for justice and peace in the region must reject polarization, silence, despair, or inaction — starting with ourselves. Only by working together — Muslims, Jews, and Christians; Americans, Palestinians, and Israelis — can we hope to find the true path to a just and lasting peace for both peoples. To this end, we invite Presbyterians and all people of faith and moral conviction to join with us as we commit ourselves to the following aspirations and goals:

- To reclaim the church's role as "repairer of the breach," nationally and locally, among ourselves and between Christians, Jews, and Muslims through deep and relational work that models peace and reconciliation with justice and compassion.
- To reaffirm boldly the church's commitment to a two-state solution with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace, each with secure borders, territorial integrity, and a fair share of natural resources. We also restate our profound condemnation of the threats to a two-state solution, including: violence and terrorism, the Israeli settlements, and any denial of the legitimate aspirations of either party — including their rights to a viable and secure homeland.
- To seek out opportunities in Palestine, Israel, and between Israelis and Palestinians for proactive investment in economic, educational, and interfaith ventures that promote understanding across ethnic and religious divides and that offer the tangible signs of a future where both Israelis and Palestinians may dwell in justice, security, and peace.

Most of all, we pledge ourselves anew to work with Israelis and Palestinians, with American Jews and American Palestinian Christians and Muslims, to affirm the aspirations and address the deep needs of both peoples, and to work toward the day when "they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid" (Micah 4:4).

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Presbyterians for a Just and Peaceful Future in the Middle East
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Editor's DESK

by John M. Buchanan

Embargoed pensions

I VISITED CUBA 19 years ago, long before the recent softening of relationships between the Cuban and American governments. As a representative of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), I was visiting the Independent Presbyterian Reformed Church of Cuba, which was established by Protestant missionaries in the late 19th century. The IPR churches had thrived over the years and had built a theological seminary at Matanzas.

After Cuba became a communist state the churches learned how to exist under the Castro regime's strictures and subtle—and sometimes not so subtle—persecution. There were some arrests and imprisonments. Churches were mostly allowed to remain open, but evangelism efforts were forbidden, and it was almost impossible to print and distribute literature. Government agents often came to worship services; a Christian's public affirmation of faith could have economical, professional, and educational consequences.

At the time of our visit a warming of the relationship between the two nations had come to a sudden end, and there was a reemergence of suspicion, hostility, and fear. Despite these demanding and sometimes dangerous circumstances, Cuban Christians had remained faithful to their Christian commitments and their churches.

Then I made a distressing discovery. The Cuban Presbyterian Church was formerly an organic part of PCUSA, and Cuban pastors had paid into the Presbyterian Pension and Benefits Plan—but they weren't receiving the benefits. After the Castro revolution, the assets of American corporations that were doing business in Cuba were expropriated, and our government placed an economic embargo on Cuba. Suddenly 50 retired Cuban pastors and church workers were deprived of their pension benefits.

For many years the Presbyterian Board of Pensions worked to persuade our government to allow the board to make payments. The legal issue was acquiring licenses that are required to make monetary payments to Cuban nationals or to release money from accounts held in the United States in their names.

Meanwhile the money sat in U.S. accounts where it increased in value to nearly a million dollars. But that money was not getting into the hands of the people who had earned it.

Presbyterian Pension Board officials would not give up. Frank Maloney, chief operating officer of the Board of Pensions, went to work with legal counsel Jean Hemphill. They continued to request the release of the funds and were denied each time by the Office of Foreign Assets Control of the U.S. Treasury Department. PCUSA Board officials and officers visited U.S. lawmakers—only to encounter the strong anti-Castro lobby in Congress that opposes any political or economic accommodation with the Castro government or the Cuban people.

Progress came in the mid-1990s when a license was issued to pay the Cuban retirees $100 per month, but it was still held up by the prohibition against U.S. banks doing business in Cuba. In the meantime, retired Cuban pastors were aging and starting to die. In 2006 the government licensed the church to pay up to $500 per month and permitted board staff to travel to Cuba to find the pensioners and their survivors.

Now, in the new atmosphere in U.S.-Cuban relations initiated by the Obama administration, the blocked accounts will be opened and full payment made to surviving Cuban pastors and their heirs.

The mainline denominational agency's faithfulness and relentless commitment to justice reinforces my conviction that these structures do absolutely critical work and faithful mission.

Meanwhile, the Cuban church has pointed the way to faithful work with its courageous and durable witness. During visits nearly two decades ago and again in 2001, I developed ongoing friendships with Cuban pastors and church leaders. My experiences in worship, preaching, and baptizing a Cuban infant were inspiring.

The Christians in Cuba have carried on. They are still there. There is, I think, something in Jesus' promise to Peter that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church.

March 4, 2015 Vol. 132, No. 5

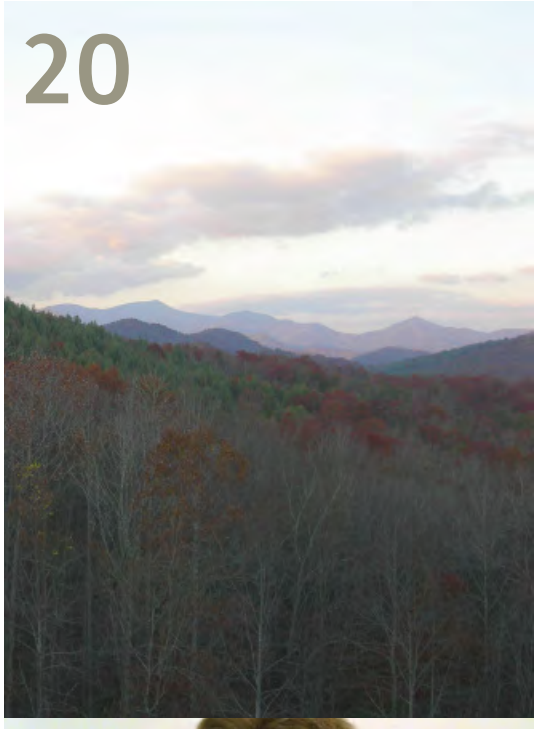
IN THIS Issue

NEWS

IN REVIEW

COLUMNS

POETRY



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This I believe

I appreciated Amy Frykholm's article on the Nicene Creed ("Believe it or not," Feb. 4). I've had a number of younger people tell me that they tried the church, but when the congregation stood and said, "I believe . . ." they said they don't believe all that and never came back.

Once when I was a visiting preacher I had to "introduce the creed." I said, "Let us stand and remember what our mothers and fathers in the faith said almost 2,000 year ago with their limited knowledge and worldview." The creeds were written and voted on by human beings. Most of the time dogma was written afterward to support what was in the creed.

William R. Phillippe
Princeton, N.J.

In the cloud of unknowing, love for God trumps understanding.

Creeds represent best guesses in historical context, based on a community's founding documents and traditions. We quickly forget how relative they are in their expressions of what matters. Love and relationship matter more than any set of words.

We might be writing new creeds that link the past and our historic identity with more present-context expressions of faith (trust) and love.

Thomas Johnson
christiancentury.org comment

I was a dedicated Pentecostal for more than 20 years when my belief system suddenly derailed on a trip to the Middle East. I stuck with my church for a couple of years, trying to make sense of what had happened, but finally gave up and left. My husband remained Christian and was confused and upset by what I was going through.

Eight years later, I met some Episcopalians who welcomed me to fellowship with them even though my beliefs aren't orthodox. It's been good attending church with my husband again the past few months. But yes, every Sunday I have to decide what to do with the creed and other aspects of the liturgy that push my buttons. It's rather exhausting. I want to be open and engaged in worship, which requires finding a way through the defensiveness I'm experiencing.

Also, I am much more drawn to "beloving" than to believing. These Episcopalians have totally won my heart. The liturgy is their dance. The words may not always light my fire, but honoring these precious people by joining their dance does.

Sarah Bensen
christiancentury.org comment

I have led creedal affirmations many times in worship. I have often stated before beginning that though I believe every phrase of the creed, one need not believe everything in those phrases to be a Christian. The only true requirement for being Christian is to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Following is an active lifestyle of challenging powers that disrupt life-giving grace—powers which also exist in dogmatic application of creedal content.

I say I believe all the creedal statements because I have tested many of them in my own heart by challenging them in my studies and prayer life. And those I have yet to fully challenge remain true until proven false, because I trust those who wrestled over these understandings to provide guidelines for our engagement with each other in the community.

Still, when I say I believe them, I may not believe them exactly the way the original writers believed them. My life experiences, being different from theirs, provide nuances that incorporate broader understandings than what has been distilled for us from their writings.

I also hold in my spirit while reciting the struggles of those who have been excluded for their disaffirmation of these creedal statements. This dissonance within me provides a background for the melodious hope of unity through grace (not belief) that draws me into fellowship with many, whose frames of reference range from exposure to these statements from birth to those who have no knowledge of their existence. For it is "in Christ that all things hold together," not in creeds designed by the majority who crave human order.

Mijdi Wedre
christiancentury.org comment

Do unto others . . .

J S. Mill, the consummate consequentialist, argued that trust is so essential, so sacred, to our communal existence that any act that violates it does us all great harm ("Tortured ends and means," by John M. Buchanan, Jan. 21). This is true even if the lie is ultimately justified by the good it achieves. All the more, torture harms and demeans us, the torturers, as well as the victims. As thinkers from Aristotle to the Buddha argue, we choose who we become. Will becomes choice, choice becomes action, action repeated becomes habit. Drop by drop, we become just, or unjust, by acting justly or the reverse.

So, the means become the ends. Our nation will forever be one that legally sanctioned torture at the highest level of elected office. Is that the nation we really want to be?

Remember also that Mill insisted that "in the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth, we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility. To do as one would be done by, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, constitute the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality." How often does that ethic justify torture?

Bob Mesle
Lamoni, Iowa

THE Christian CENTURY

March 4, 2015

Locking up kids

President Obama's proposed $4 trillion budget wisely includes $1 billion to address the conditions in Central America that sent tens of thousands of women and children fleeing to the United States last summer. (Similar numbers are anticipated this coming summer.) Some of this money is directed at helping El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras reform their judicial systems so that fewer people have need to flee. Most of the women and children entering from Central America are victims of domestic and gang-related violence, and they would benefit from more effective local governance.

But the budget unwisely calls for increased funding to house these families in detention centers in the United States—even though human rights groups have advocated for an end to child and family detention, citing the negative effects of incarceration on children and the injustice of locking up innocent people. Despite these criticisms and the lawsuits filed to protest conditions at family detention centers, up to $850 million is slated for the "apprehension, care, and transportation of unaccompanied children and families with children apprehended along the southwest border."

Much of that money would go to Corrections Corporation of America, which operates a newly opened family detention center in Dilley, Texas. At Dilley, the largest such center in the country, 2,400 detainees will be housed at a cost of $300 per person per day. The average age of children incarcerated there is six.

There is a cheaper and more humane alternative to placing children behind razor wire. As officials at Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services point out, the current immigration system already has most of the resources it needs to deal with these women and children. The vast majority don't need housing because they have relatives to stay with. What they need is not larger detention centers but more effective management of refugee cases, more immigration judges to ensure that refugee cases get a prompt hearing, and more partnerships with nongovernmental groups that resettle refugees. The solution, in other words, is to treat Central American refugees like all other refugees and to bolster a system that already works.

The U.S. should treat Central American refugees like all other refugees.

Unfortunately, the Obama administration sees detention as a way to send a message to would-be asylum seekers that the United States does not welcome their presence. Meanwhile, the harmful effects on children persist. Women detained at a center in Artesia, New Mexico—since closed—reported that their children lost weight, had suicidal thoughts, and expressed despair and hopelessness.

The protocol for refugees laid out in the 1951 Refugee Convention and codified into U.S. law declares that refugees be recognized as vulnerable human beings whose "special protection" is the responsibility of the government that receives them. Putting families in detention centers is a parody of providing special protection.

CENTURY marks

ABSOLVED: Following a speech by Nadia Bolz-Weber at the First Baptist Church in Madison, Wisconsin, a woman in tears spoke up to say that she was unable to forgive herself, because she had been told many times she was unforgivable. Bolz-Weber, widely known as a tattooed, salty tongued Lutheran pastor from Denver, responded: "Maybe for as many times as you've been told that, you need to hear that God is gracious, and merciful, and slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and loves you as you are. And as a called and ordained minister of the church of Christ, and by Christ's authority, I declare to you the entire forgiveness of all of your sins." The congregation responded, "Amen" (*Wisconsin State Journal*, February 2).

KINDEST EVER: At a public event, a teenager asked Elizabeth Gilbert, author of *Eat, Pray, Love*, "What advice do you have for my generation? And where do you think we are going wrong?" Gilbert responded that the teen's generation is doing nothing wrong. "I love your generation. You guys are wonderful. And don't listen to anybody who says otherwise." Compared to her own generation, she said, youth today don't smoke or drink as much, or have as much sex, or beat up on each other as much. They may spend too much time on their cell phones, but they are the most sensitive, most compassionate, and kindest young people ever (Gilbert's Facebook page, January 22).

RIGHTEOUS GENTILES: Near the end of World War II, Shalom Lindenbaum and his father were released from a concentration camp in Poland and sent on a death march. Freezing to death, they were taken in by Katarzyna Froehlich and her 20-year-old daughter Dorota Froehlich Kuc. It was a risky act; if discovered, they could have been killed by the Germans. Kuc said she and her mother did it because as Catholics they had been taught to help the poor and needy. Lindenbaum, now 88 and a retired literature professor in Israel, has kept in touch with Kuc over the years. He has visited the Polish village a number of times, most recently during the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. He also hosted Kuc, now 90, during a trip she made to Israel. Kuc and her mother have been designated "Righteous Among the Nations" by the Israeli Holocaust center (RNS).

BASIC SERVICES: A study on international development released last month in the United Kingdom predicts that it will take decades and in some cases more than a century for some of the earth's inhabitants to obtain basic services. Kenya has one of the fastest-growing economies in sub-Saharan Africa, yet at current rates of development it will take 150 years for the nation as a whole to get sanitation services. It could take up to 85 years for Rwanda, Burundi, and Lesotho to improve nationwide water supplies. "Our research for the last three years has shown us that projects delivering good results are locally led, politically smart, and often employ entrepreneurial techniques," said the lead author of the report (Overseas Development Institute, February 3).

HEAD COUNT: To little fanfare, Denis McDonough, President Obama's chief of staff, joined a team on the streets of San

Francisco doing a head count of the homeless. It was part of a survey required of cities every two years in order to qualify for federal funding for homeless programs. The president had told McDonough he wanted to know firsthand what the city was doing about the homeless. San Francisco has been able to get 19,000 homeless off the streets during the past decade by expanding housing and support services, but it still had over 6,000 people on the street during the 2013 count. "This is the same sort of challenge we face all over the country. The numbers tell the story," McDonough said. "I had no idea anyone gave a damn," one homeless man told the team (SFGate.com, January 30).

PRISON STATE: The highest incarceration rates in the United States are in red states, especially in the South, but some conservatives are having second thoughts about the war on crime launched by President Nixon. Among them is Chase Madar, former Virginia state senator and attorney general who was president of Prison Fellowship for ten years. Madar was persuaded that a new approach to crime is needed by visiting prisoners, seeing the conditions they live in, and discovering that virtually no rehabilitation of criminals is taking place. He now advocates the use of restorative justice, a plan that returns criminals to the communities where they committed their crimes to confess at public meetings and ask forgiveness (*American Conservative*, February 3).

INFERNO: During his only visit to America, theologian Karl Barth in 1962 visited three prisons: Bridewell House of Correction in Chicago, San Quentin in California, and Rikers Island in New York. He called Bridewell "Dante's inferno on earth" and said it was a contradiction of the wonderful message on the Statue of Liberty. Barth wondered aloud why theologians weren't denouncing the deplorable conditions in American prisons, calling out Reinhold Niebuhr in particular (Jessica DeCou, "The First Community: Barth's American Prison Tours," in *Karl Barth and the Making of Evangelical Theology*, Eerdmans).

CHRISTIAN PRESENCE: More than 10 million non-Muslims still live in the Arab world, according to Gerald Russell, a former British and United Nations diplomat. The majority of these non-Muslims are Christians. It would be a big loss to the Arab world if they all were to leave—though many have already done so. Since the failure of Lebanese Christians to hold onto power through force, Christians in the Middle East have largely become neutral politically. They often exert a liberalizing influence in the region, since they don't support Shari'a law, and their schools are usually more open to diversity. Their presence is a reminder of a time when the Arab world was much more pluralistic (*New Statesman*, January 29).

GOSPEL IN ANOTHER KEY: Israeli music teachers Ofer and Iris Portugaly have formed a gospel choir that sings Hebrew translations of songs like "Oh Happy Day," plus gospel arrangements of Jewish prayers. The Portugalys encountered gospel music as students at the Berklee College of Music in Boston, and they started their own choir after being inspired by gospel music in Nigeria. So far, the Portugalys' choir has not been invited to sing in any synagogues in Israel, although they have sung in New York synagogues (PRI, February 4).

TIMES A-CHANGIN': Bob Dylan gave a wide-ranging interview to *AARP Magazine* and declared that if he hadn't been a musician, he would have been a schoolteacher, and would likely have taught either Roman history or theology (AP).

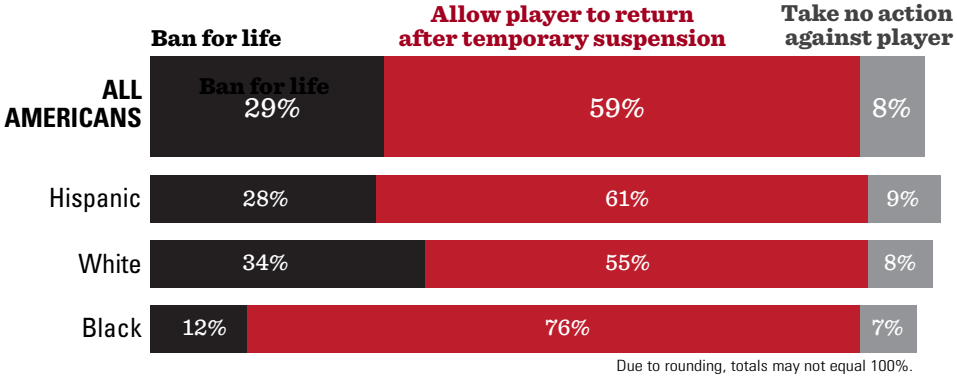
> "Hate is not for humans. Judgment lies with God. That is what I learned from my Arabic brothers and sisters."
>
> — A tweet (from four years ago) from the Japanese hostage **Kenji Goto** that went global after he was executed in January by the militant ISIS group (BBC News, February 3)

> "We've seen professions of faith used both as an instrument of great good, but also twisted and misused in the name of evil."
>
> — **President Obama** at the National Prayer Breakfast, where he reminded Christians that terrible deeds like the Crusades, the Inquisition, and slavery have been done in Christ's name. Some conservatives were incensed that he compared these historical actions to recent brutalities by Islamic extremists like ISIS (*Washington Post*, February 8).

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & THE NFL

SOURCE: PRRI/RNS

How should the National Football League handle a player who has been found guilty of domestic violence?



Due to rounding, totals may not equal 100%.

Ministry counselor Ross Peterson

The pastor as person

PHOTO COURTESY OF ROSS PETERSON

ROSS PETERSON, a minister in the Evangelical Covenant Church and a clinical pastoral counselor, is executive director at the Chicago office of Midwest Ministry Development, an organization that serves pastors who are wrestling with questions about ministry and vocation. He earned a doctor of ministry degree from Chicago Theological Seminary.

Why do clergy come to Midwest Ministry Development?

Some come because they know they are in the midst of a significant time of discernment about their vocation: Do I stay in this church? Do I go? Do I move toward a different kind of ministry? I am feeling dissatisfaction—what does that mean?

Some are referred to us by their denominations; maybe they are struggling to be effective in ministry, or there may be some misconduct involved, or fitness for ministry questions might have arisen.

There are several points in life at which people come to Midwest. One is during first call, when people are experiencing the reality of church life, which can be disillusioning. First-call pastors are often trying to understand if they made the right decision.

At midcareer and midlife, a lot of questions come up. People are asking: Who am I, and is this what I want to be doing?

And toward the end of their careers, people often want to finish well and wonder what that means for them. We often see pastors in their midfifties who feel trapped: "I can't move out of the ministry because nobody else is going to want me." Or maybe their ideas of what they were going to accomplish someday look like they aren't going to happen.

What do you see as trends in seminaries regarding discernment of vocation?

I see an increasing focus on the pastor as a person—an increasing awareness of the importance of self-care and of developing strong spiritual disciplines. It used to be that seminary was a time when people's spiritual discipline waned and their academic discipline increased. Now many seminaries emphasize integrating the spiritual, reflective process with the academic, which I think is all to the good.

> "When people are working close to their sense of call and purpose, they can work really hard without feeling burned out."

We often talk about burnout as a problem among clergy. How do you understand that term?

When we see pastors who are experiencing burnout, sometimes it is simply because they are working too hard. But more often they are doing a lot of things that are not central to their sense of call. When people are working close to their sense of call and purpose and meaning, they can work really hard without feeling burned out. But when they are doing a lot of things that people are telling them should be done or that feel urgent but aren't close to the heart, that is a strong indicator of burnout.

It's been said that most pastors are a "quivering mass of availability," eager to please everybody. That is a path to destruction.

When a pastor comes to Midwest, what happens next?

Most of our work is done in a two- or three-day intensive process. It includes inventories that people take on personality, vocation, and wellness.

These profiles give us a context, but in order to come to life, they need to be integrated into a person's story. So most of our time is spent in individual conversation. People often come in with a lot of anxiety; they may come in guarded and defensive. But 90 percent of the time, we find that people want to be understood, and they want to minister well. Once people engage in the process, they tend to be open and reflective and ready to think more deeply as a person and as a person in ministry.

Can you describe a success story that came out of this process?

A pastor who came to us was a hard-driving person and had been successful in pastoral leadership, but she was rough on other people and perceived as

being angry and too hard on her subordinates. These problems derailed this pastor in ministry.

In exploring this reality, it became clear that the pastor was under tremendous self-induced pressure "to be the hero." Every situation was critical, and there was no margin of error. She experienced a chronic sense of crisis and strain. Along with that, the pastor had a hidden need to be appreciated. Not being in touch with that need, the pastor didn't know how to reach out for it.

After an initial and very natural defensiveness, this pastor became genuinely curious: Why am I treating myself and other people so badly?

Our recommendations had to do with developing more compassion and self-acceptance, which would lead naturally to more compassion and acceptance for others. The pastor pursued those traits in a number of ways: seeing a therapist, doing some physical activity, and attending to some family issues.

When we saw this pastor later, we saw a person who had developed a considerable capacity for gentleness and was ready to reenter ministry. Her unconscious need to minister in a way that was almost panic-driven had been dealt with. When people begin to understand some of the unconscious factors that are underneath their call, they are freed up to manage them well.

The dynamic of running on empty and then getting angry when no one notices one's efforts—I think that dynamic is common among pastors.

What are some of the most helpful practices for clergy who want to stay effective?

You need to have a good network of people that you can process things with. Resilience in stress is not a quality that I have as an individual. It is much more related to the quality of my relationships. The vast majority of pastors who get into trouble are people who are working in some kind of isolation or depletion.

Having contexts in which you engage with colleagues who are supportive is so life-giving for pastors because they often can't share what they are going through in their church or sometimes even in their families.

Attention to physical well-being is important. Getting enough rest, eating well, and exercising—that sounds trivial, but it contributes considerably to people managing ministry well.

Having a workable balance among the dimensions of one's life is central—so that one's personal life and ministry life are not at war with each other. At Midwest, we talk a lot about the boundary and the intersection between one's personal identity and one's pastoral identity. This is crucial for pastors who minister in small towns. Wherever they go, they are still Pastor Jones. Finding someplace where you can just be yourself is a health-giving practice.

How is the cultural context for Midwest's work changing?

The Midwest region of the country is an area where churches are dying and many are in retreat. It's hard to feel good about your success in ministry if your measure of success is: "I'm not losing members as fast as the other churches are." Denominational structures are laying off a lot of people. It can be depressing.

But I am seeing a shift. For a long time, I saw an attitude of "Our ranks are thinning, but we are going to keep up doing the same thing." Now, people are saying, "We have entered a new era." Denominational structures are being reenvisioned. The mission of the church is being separated from the institution of the church.

Bivocational ministry certainly plays into this; it allows a way of doing ministry that gives the pastor some flexibility. This is a time of openness to experimentation that would not have been possible 15 years ago.

How does that affect your center?

The original name for centers like ours was not "Ministry Development Centers" but "Career Development Centers." That was when a pastor thought of having a "career" in ministry. People don't think in quite that way anymore. Ministry has become less institutional, more of a verb than a noun. CC

— Amy Frykholm

Boundary

I often arrive at a boundary
that leaves me at the gate
at a time to fish or cut bait
or just wait
at the border of this or that
for better or worse
perform or rehearse
begin again or end—
on my mark to *there*,
at the finish from *where*.

And that's when I need
some now-or-never word, as when
Jesus sat with the woman at the well
waiting for a snarl of men to stone her,
and reach out to her
writing something in the sand
for her for them and wrote again,
then spoke his boundary-breaking words
piercing to the bone
that would kill their will
and let them all go home.

Warren L. Molton

China cracks down on Protestants

Prospective Communist Party members in the region of China where Christianity is growing the fastest must renounce religious belief, and current party members must write letters stating their rejection of faith, according to a new mandate by authorities in Zhejiang Province.

The policy comes amid extended and systematic harassment of Protestant churches in Zhejiang. More than 450 church buildings have been desecrated or destroyed since November 2013. Chinese analysts quoted in state-run media say the new vetting of party members for religious belief is part of a larger campaign in Beijing against "hostile foreign forces" infiltrating China.

Wenzhou, the capital of Zhejiang, on the prosperous east coast, is sometimes referred to as "China's Jerusalem" for its high number of devout Protestants—at least 1 million in a city of 8 million. The area is known for its business acumen and overseas population.

Officially, Communist Party members have long been expected to embrace atheism and Marxism enthusiastically. But oversight of religious practice has been lax in many parts of China for the past 20 years, and in places like Zhejiang it has been an open secret that some families of party members are actively practicing Christianity.

Zhejiang officials spelled out the policy on January 29, according to the state-run *Global Times,* based in Beijing: "Checking on religious beliefs is the first step towards approving applicants to the Party, and Party members found to have participated in or embrace religions will be required to 'rectify' their beliefs."

For the first time, the attack on churches has gone beyond the large unofficial "house" church movement to reach the officially approved Protestant churches that are part of the Three Self Movement.

In December, a party-mandated ban on Christmas celebrations in Zhejiang was seen as an effort to single out Christians at a time when Beijing has been promoting Buddhist faith. China—which has five official faiths, Islam, Taoism, Protestantism, Catholicism, and Buddhism—announced last summer that it was creating its own official version of Christian theology.

Christians in Zhejiang say the policy against them is carefully designed to foment a collective psychological taint on their faith among ordinary Chinese, yet not be so severe as to cause international sanction.

The *Global Times* quoted Li Yunlong, a professor from a prominent party college in Beijing, who gave his interpretation of the latest move.

"Party members are banned from joining religions," said Li. "Believing in communism and atheism is a basic requirement to become a party member."

Li said that Zhejiang authorities stressed this basic requirement due to the local situation, adding he hopes this will set an example to other provinces.

"This could be a part of efforts against the penetration of Western hostile forces," Li said.

The vetting of new party members may also be due to the attractiveness of Christianity to an urban and educated generation of young Chinese who no longer see biblical faith and their Chinese identity as incompatible.

The new Zhejiang policy is "the newest escalation of the national campaign against religious freedom in almost all sectors of the society in China," said Bob Fu, a Chinese-born Christian who runs a group in Texas that monitors reli-

2006 PHOTO BY FABIEN LELARD (VIA CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE)

CHINA'S JERUSALEM: People shop in Wenzhou, the capital of Zhejiang Province, which is known as the birthplace of China's private economy—and for its substantial Protestant population.

gious persecution in his home country. "The religious freedom of [Communist Party] members, like any other citizens of China's society, should be guaranteed as enshrined in the Chinese constitution and international human rights norms, including rights of choice for religious faith and freedom of conscience." —Robert Marquand, *The Christian Science Monitor*

Ugandan Anglican bishop defends rebel commander accused of war crimes

In its heyday, the Ugandan rebel force known as the Lord's Resistance Army was accused of killing more than 100,000 people, abducting 60,000 to 100,000 children, and displacing more than 2.5 million civilians.

Yet a retired Anglican bishop in northern Uganda says he is ready to defend a top LRA commander who was accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court in The Hague.

PHOTO BY CRUNKYGILL (VIA CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE)

Nelson Onono-Onweng

Nelson Onono-Onweng said rebel commander Dominic Ongwen was a victim of circumstance, having been abducted at the age of ten and transformed into a marauding killer.

"I am willing to go and give evidence at the ICC about him; I am not afraid," Onono-Onweng said. "The world betrayed this child. The state, which had the instruments to protect him, did not. The international community also took too long to act [against the] LRA. The world can see how things conspired against him."

Ongwen appeared at the ICC in late January after surrendering to U.S. special forces in the Central African Republic. He was indicted in 2005, together with three other top commanders.

Onono-Onweng said he had met Ongwen in 2006 when religious, cultural, and political leaders took a trip into the Congo forest to ask the rebels to end the violence.

Ongwen commanded the deadly Sania Brigade within the LRA. The LRA, led by Joseph Kony, a former Catholic altar boy, appeared in northern Uganda around 1986. Combining African mysticism and Christian fundamentalism, it fought to replace President Yoweri Museveni's government with a theocratic one.

In 2008, the LRA left northern Uganda, and it is now believed to be operating in a densely forested area between the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, and the CAR.

In 1997, northern Uganda religious leaders formed the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative. Since the ICC indictment, the peace group has been calling for a cultural justice system called Mato Oput in place of the international court.

Mato Oput, which is based on forgiveness, can achieve more than the ICC, since it aims at healing and transformation and restores relationships, according to Sheikh Musa Khalil, a Muslim leader in Uganda and vice chairman of the peace group. —Fredrick Nzwili, Religion News Service

Report reveals full history of theologian's abuse, institutions' response

A 73-page report in the most recent issue of the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* provides the first-ever comprehensive and detailed examination of theologian John Howard Yoder's sexual abuse and the church's response to it.

News of his transgressions first broke in 1992, but Rachel Waltner Goossen, a history professor at Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas, found that Yoder, who died in 1997, had been "methodically perpetrating sexual violence" against women since at least 1973. His offenses included suggestive comments and "physical coercion." While the precise number of those abused is not known, it could exceed 100.

The report was commissioned by the Mennonite Church USA and Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana.

Goossen conducted dozens of interviews with victims who received Yoder's unwanted advances as well as with Yoder's colleagues, church administrators, and those involved in attempts to discipline him. She also had access to documents previously unavailable, notably church records in the MCUSA archive and the papers of Marlin Miller, who died in 1994. Miller served as president of Goshen Biblical Seminary, one of AMBS's predecessor bodies. Those collections are now in the denominational archive in Goshen, Indiana, and open to researchers. Yoder's personal papers are also in the archive, but the relevant files will remain sealed until 2047.

Yoder's method of operation was to invite women to assist in the exploration of a new Christian ethic of sex. With the sexual revolution and surging feminism of the 1960s and '70s serving as a backdrop, Yoder started writing about sex and intimacy, particularly as it related to single people. Citing Jesus' interactions with women, Yoder, who was married, said that "freedom of bodily affection and intimacy is not necessarily correlated with the satisfaction of genital drives." Thus people not married to each other could engage in sexual relations as an expression of Christian intimacy without it being considered erotic or an act of adultery.

Many women refused Yoder's invitations, and he claimed he always respected their decision. Others initially appreciated an esteemed professor's "personal attentiveness," "friendship," and appeals to their intellect, according to Goossen.

"A generation later, professionals knowledgeable about sexual abuse would label his range of opportunistic approaches as 'grooming' behaviors," she wrote.

Many of the women were GBS students, but at least two were from the nearby University of Notre Dame, where he also taught. Notre Dame declined to comment on Yoder, calling it a personnel matter and confidential.

Miller, a former student of Yoder's at GBS, began hearing about his mentor's extramarital sexual pursuits shortly after

succeeding him as seminary president in 1975.

Miller later convened seminary groups to engage Yoder, first to discuss the theoretical aspects of his position and then to discipline him. Furthermore, Yoder believed that his work was so advanced that it was necessary to hide it from "those who could not help but misunderstand this liberty," Goossen wrote, quoting Yoder. The secrecy also included the destruction of some documents by Miller and others at church offices, largely at Yoder's request.

In addition, Yoder invoked Matthew 18 and demanded to confront his accusers, but none were willing to meet with him face to face. Yoder would later state that the inability to meet with them denied him the opportunity to apologize.

By mutual agreement between Yoder and the seminary, Yoder resigned in 1984. Yoder had continued his "experiments" in sexual ethics, despite Miller's orders to cease, and claimed to be persecuted by Miller and those who had made accusations.

Yoder had joined the faculty at Notre Dame and asked Notre Dame administrators to "avoid giving the matter unnecessary prominence."

Yoder served as president of the Society of Christian Ethics in 1987–88. Current SCE president William Schweiker said: "The SCE, as a scholarly society, is not in the position to make judgments about the lives of past or present members. At the same time, the SCE cannot and does not condone immoral and/or abusive actions, and as a society we work tirelessly to advance the dignity of our members and the responsibilities we bear as scholars of religion and ethics."

Goossen rejected claims that the disciplinary process the Indiana-Michigan Conference of the Mennonite Church undertook, ending in 1996—which included suspending Yoder's credentials in 1992 and urging therapy—was a successful case of restoration and reconciliation. Such claims, she wrote, "deflect attention from institutional complicity and reveal Yoder's followers' attempts to explain away his misdeeds so that they might reclaim his theology."

Among those who had called for Yoder's restoration was theologian Stanley Hauerwas. Earlier he had counseled Yoder to submit to the church's discipline. After reading Goossen's article, he was contrite.

"I was wrong," Hauerwas said. "I just hadn't realized the extent of John's behavior."

AMBS is planning a Service of Lament, Confession, and Hope and other events on campus March 21–22 "to acknowledge institutional responsibility for the harm inflicted" by Yoder and for "seminary leaders' prolonged failure to intervene effectively." MCUSA, the successor to the Mennonite Church of which Yoder was a lifelong member, is planning a similar observance during its convention this summer in Kansas City.
—Rich Preheim, for Christian Century

South Sudan peace unclear as talks leave out clergy, other key stakeholders

While the parties in conflict in South Sudan signed a recent peace agreement, it did not include key stakeholders—faith groups among them—making long-term hopes for peace uncertain.

An estimated 50,000 people have died, and 2 million have been displaced in the latest phase of fighting, according to the International Crisis Group, a think tank that aims to prevent and resolve such conflicts.

"South Sudan's conflict is not getting much attention due to shifting interests towards Islamic extremism," said Fred Nyabera of Kenya, a social scientist who is director of the Interfaith Initiative to End Child Poverty at the global faith-based organization Arigatou International. "But leaving South Sudan alone at this time when the people are trying to define their identity and country, under very fragile circumstances, is to postpone a big problem," Nyabera added.

On February 2, South Sudan president Salva Kiir and his former deputy—now rebel—Riek Machar signed a peace agreement in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, that proposes a coalition government. A power struggle between the two sparked the fighting in December 2013.

PHOTO BY FREDRICK NZWILI / RELIGION NEWS SERVICE

PEACE BROKEN: A family before the war in South Sudan, where fighting has displaced 2 million people and 50,000 people have died.

Within months, the violence took on an ethnic dimension, with government troops largely from Kiir's Dinka tribe and the rebels from Machar's Nuer tribe engaging in deadly clashes.

Since then, the parties have signed and broken six peace agreements.

But the peace negotiations leading to the pacts have concentrated on Kiir and Machar, leaving out religious groups, nongovernmental aid organizations, and community leaders.

"As long as the prospects of peace are seen as [the] preserve of the two, then the prospects of peace will remain bleak," Nyabera said.

Sixty percent of South Sudan residents are Christian, 33 percent follow traditional African religions, and 6 percent are Muslim, according to the Pew Research Center.

South Sudan became an independent state in July 2011 after voting to secede from Sudan in a referendum. But independence has not brought stability to the region, ICG said in its January 29 report.

According to the South Sudan Catholic bishops, the war is about power, not about the people.

"The aspirations of individuals and factions have led to a cycle of revenge killing," said Roman Catholic archbishop Paulino Lukudu Loro of Juba in a statement on January 30. "We say to all who are involved in any way: if you continue fighting, you will finish yourselves and you will finish the nation. The nation needs to be salvaged from this sin."
—Fredrick Nzwili, Religion News Service

Breakaway Episcopalians in South Carolina win major court case

The Episcopal Church lost a major court battle on February 3 when a South Carolina judge ruled that the Diocese of South Carolina legally seceded from the denomination and can retain control of $500 million in church property and assets.

The Charleston-based Diocese of South Carolina voted to secede in 2012 after the national church accused its bishop, Mark Lawrence, of abandoning the church and taking his diocese with him. The diocese said it helped form the national church in 1789 and was not legally bound to stay.

Lawrence insisted he and the 38 parishes that followed him out of the national church composed the Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina. The 30 parishes that remained part of the national church sued, asking a judge to determine which body could legally claim the name "Episcopal" and who controlled the property.

Circuit judge Diane Goodstein ruled that the national church has "no provisions which state that a member diocese cannot voluntarily withdraw its membership." The diocese was chartered in 1785, four years before the national church.

"With the freedom to associate goes its corollary, the freedom to disassociate," Goodstein ruled.

Goodstein's decision affects the fates of some of Charleston's most iconic churches, whose towering steeples and colonial charm helped earn Charleston the nickname "the Holy City."

The ruling follows similar decisions in Fort Worth, Texas, and Quincy, Illinois, in which judges have ruled in favor of breakaway dioceses, even as most courts have said that the property of individual breakaway parishes belongs to the denomination.

Lawrence said the national church's decades-long battles over sexuality were just a "distraction" in the South Carolina fight.

"This has never been about exclusion," he said in a statement. "Our churches, our diocese, are open to all. It's about the freedom to practice and proclaim faith in Jesus Christ as it has been handed down to us."

The parishes that remain loyal to the national denomination, known as the Episcopal Church in South Carolina, plan to appeal Goodstein's ruling, with its chief lawyer, Thomas S. Tisdale, saying the ruling was expected.

"We have understood from the beginning that this lawsuit was mounted after years of planning by individuals who were intent upon taking the diocese and its property out of the Episcopal Church," spokeswoman Holly Behre said. "We have also understood that defending ourselves will be a long legal process."

A separate suit in federal court accuses Lawrence of "false advertising" by "continuing to represent himself as bishop of the diocese."

A spokeswoman for the national denomination, based in New York, declined to comment on either case.
—Kevin Eckstrom, Religion News Service

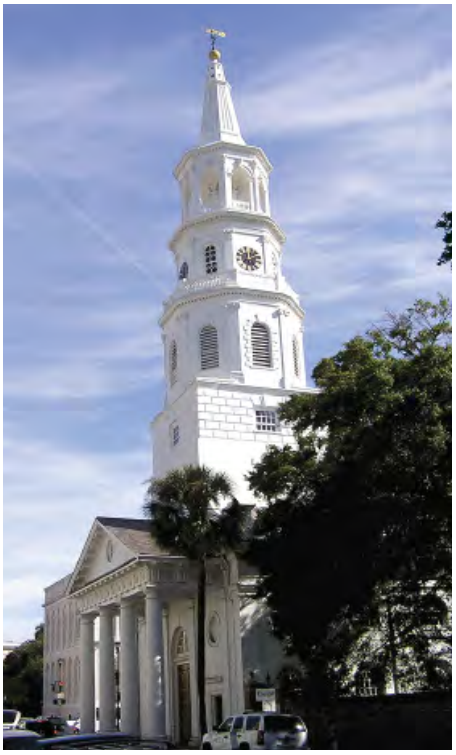


PHOTO BY HENRY DE SAUSSURE COPELAND (VIA CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE)

SECESSION: A circuit judge ruling in favor of the breakaway Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina affects the fates of some of Charleston's most iconic churches, including historic St. Michael's Episcopal Church.

Surprise gift largest ever for Pittsburgh seminary

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) received a surprise gift of $20.25 million.

Robert Thomson, an insurance company owner who died in September at age 94, did not tell the school about his estate plans, nor did he place restrictions on the gift, said William Carl, seminary president.

"These are wonderful surprises," Carl told the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. "This is the biggest gift that has ever come from anyone, living or deceased, in the over-220-year history of the school."

Carl also told the *Post-Gazette* that Thomson would meet with students at scholarship dinners and make comments such as, "I'm so impressed with your students, impressed with where they're going to serve in churches and mission fields around the country and the world."

The gift allows the seminary to reach its goal early in a $26 million capital campaign that began in 2010, although the school's board of directors has yet to determine where to allocate the funds, said Melissa Logan, seminary director of communications.

"A gift like this really allows an institution to think about the future and how to serve the church," Logan said.

The largest private gifts in 2013–2014 to institutions of higher education exceeded $50 million, and none were to theological schools, according to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*'s website. In a list of gifts of that size in recent decades, only three went to theological schools, with the largest being a 1999 donation of $83.3 million to Emory University's School of Theology. (Some donations to universities with divinity schools do not specify the nature of the gift.)

Thomson grew up at Shadyside Presbyterian Church, also in Pittsburgh, and was a member there until his death, serving as treasurer and in other roles.

Jackie Spycher, a former youth director at Shadyside who studied at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, remembers Thomson as being "very active and very present, but in a quiet way. This public acclaim is not something he would have sought out." —Christian Century staff

In Israeli election, ultra-Orthodox women push to be on party lists

A group of determined ultra-Orthodox women are rejecting the male monopoly on politics in their community as, for the first time, they press to be represented on the lists of candidates of the Haredi parties running for Israel's Knesset, or parliament.

"No one represents us," said Esty Shushan, head of the No Voice, No Vote group, which is calling for a boycott of ultra-Orthodox, or Haredi, parties that do not list women on the ballot. "A man's way of looking at things is different."

While the women concede that only a miracle will enable them to place a candidate in time for the March 17 election, they are breaking new ground in what promises to be a long struggle and are staking their claims for future elections.

"Our goal is to raise awareness," said Shushan, a mother of four who runs her own advertising company and lives in a predominantly ultra-Orthodox area of Petah Tikva, near Tel Aviv. "The more it's talked about, the more the social taboo is broken."

Ultra-Orthodox parties, guided by rabbis from both the Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities, have often been kingmakers in Israeli coalitions, but they were left out of the broad government formed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu two years ago. (Ashkenazi Jews are primarily from eastern Europe, and Sephardic Jews are from North Africa and the Levant.)

Now they are eyeing an opportunity to return to power, especially if a rift persists between Netanyahu and the secular, centrist Yesh Atid party of Yair Lapid, which finished second to Netanyahu's Likud in the last elections in 2013.

Kimmy Caplan, a specialist in Jewish history at Bar Ilan University, said the demand for Knesset representation is an outgrowth of a 40-year process in which ultra-Orthodox women have gone beyond traditional jobs in education to establish themselves in accounting, graphic design, administration, and many other fields. These working women often support husbands who devote themselves to the study of sacred texts rather than paid employment.

"Someone successful as a lawyer or graphic designer could see the Knesset as something women should be part of as well," Caplan said. But, he said, so far this is "not a huge phenomenon. There are tens of thousands of Haredi women in the workforce and maybe 50 in the political arena."

While ultra-Orthodox rabbis agree that women can leave the house to work, serving in parliament is another matter, they say. Maimonides, the 12th-century Jewish philosopher and jurist, was against such public roles for women, said Mordechai Bloy, chairman of the Guard for Holiness and Education of the United Torah Judaism party.

"Why can't a male member of the Knesset represent women?" he said. The demand for women's representation "is all folly and chauvinism." —Ben Lynfield, *The Christian Science Monitor*

England debates legalizing in vitro technique giving baby DNA of three parents

England could become the first country to allow the creation of human embryos from the DNA of three people to try to eradicate a type of genetic disease that has caused the deaths of thousands of babies.

"This is world-leading science within a highly respected regulatory regime, and for the many families affected, this is light at the end of a very dark tunnel," said Jane Ellison, health minister.

Prime Minister David Cameron voted in favor of the technique when members of Parliament approved it February 3, which has provoked fierce ethical debate in Britain and elsewhere. Senior church figures called for the procedure to be blocked.

But with approval from the House of Lords, Britain's upper chamber, which is expected, the first three-person baby could be born as soon as next year.

The technique could help women in England who have lost babies to mitochondrial disease.

Mitochondria are tiny compartments inside nearly every cell of the body that convert food into usable energy. They have their own DNA which does not affect characteristics such as appearance.

Defective mitochondria is a condition that is passed down only from the mother and leads to brain damage, muscle wasting, heart failure, and blindness. The controversial new technique uses a modified version of in vitro fertilization—the process by which eggs are removed from ovaries and mixed with sperm in a laboratory dish—to combine the DNA of the two parents with the healthy mitochondria of a donor woman. The technique has been dubbed the three-parent baby technique by the media.

The Catholic and Anglican churches in England raised concerns about whether the procedure is safe or ethical, not least because one method involves the destruction of embryos.

"The human embryo is a new human life, and it should be respected and protected from the moment of conception," said Catholic bishop John Sherrington. "This is a very serious step which Parliament should not rush into taking."

Brendan McCarthy, the Church of England's adviser on medical ethics, told the BBC, "We need to be absolutely clear that the techniques that will be used will be safe, and we need to be absolutely sure that they will work."

He said the ethics of the issues should be properly discussed.

Anglican bishop Lee Rayfield of Swindon said the procedure was a "massive step," and some of his colleagues were concerned about how it was going to be regulated once it was approved.

"If the safeguards are there," he said, "the Church of England will be behind this."

Sharon Bernardi of Sunderland, who has lost seven children, supports the new move.

"I would ask the Church of England desperately to please look at the bigger picture and look at the children who have been affected by this dreadful disease," she said.

About one in every 6,500 babies is born with mitochondrial disease, which can be fatal. —Trevor Grundy, Religion News Service

People

PHOTO COURTESY OF COLUMBIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

■ **Stephen A. Hayner**, 66, president emeritus of Columbia Theological Seminary and a national leader in campus ministry, died January 31 in Decatur, Georgia, less than a year after being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

He went on medical leave as president this past summer while undergoing treatment.

Born June 23, 1948, Hayner held degrees from Whitman College, Harvard Divinity School, and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

In 1973, Hayner was ordained and installed as university pastor at University Presbyterian Church in Seattle, where he was involved with students and faculty. The campus ministry, which started with 17 students, quickly grew to over 1,200. During two sabbaticals, he completed his Ph.D. in Hebrew and Semitic studies at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland in 1984.

Hayner served as vice president of student affairs at Seattle Pacific University until 1988, when he became president of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (USA), a nondenominational ministry to students on college campuses across the country.

"Steve brought pastoral care, healing, and hope to an InterVarsity community that had undergone much trauma in the 1980s," said Alec Hill, current InterVarsity president. "He is one of the kindest and most authentic people I've ever known."

Hayner also was an adjunct professor of Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Regent College, and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

In 2001, Hayner returned to parish ministry as a pastor at High Point Church and at the Fountain of Life Family Ministry Center, both in Madison, Wisconsin.

He moved to Columbia Theological Seminary in 2003 to become the Peachtree Professor of Evangelism and Church Growth, while also serving as scholar in residence at Peachtree Presbyterian Church. He was named president in 2009.

Deborah Flemister Mullen, dean of faculty and executive vice president of CTS, remembered their partnership as president and dean.

"Steve was not only my closest colleague on the administrative staff, he was a beloved brother in Christ and my friend," she said. "The seminary is a very different place because of Steve Hayner's gifts of life, especially his commitment to God's wide welcome of everyone to the table."

M. Craig Barnes, president of Princeton Theological Seminary, who had been friends with Hayner for nearly three decades, noted in a September article for the CHRISTIAN CENTURY that Hayner "signed his letters with the word *joyfully* before his name" and that he approached dying as he approached living: "In his latest e-mail he wrote, 'Both grief and joy knock us about like outsized ocean waves. The waves take us by surprise but also remind us of what it means to be human—and pursued by grace.'" —Michael Thompson, Columbia Theological Seminary; added sources

■ **Charles Hard Townes**, a Nobel laureate who helped invent the laser and a pioneer in the dialogue on science and religion, died January 27 at age 99.

PHOTO VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Townes, professor emeritus of physics at the University of California, Berkeley, also won the $1.5 million Templeton Prize for Progress toward Research or Discoveries about Spiritual Realities for 2005.

Upon receiving the award, Townes said, "I believe there is no long-range question more important than the purpose and meaning of our lives and our universe," according to a statement from the John Templeton Foundation.

Townes, who grew up as a progressive Baptist in South Carolina, attended First Congregational Church in Berkeley for decades.

Townes shared the 1964 Nobel Prize in Physics with two Russian scientists for the invention of the laser. In 1964, while a professor at Columbia University in New York City, Townes delivered a talk at Riverside Church that became the basis for a groundbreaking article, "The Convergence of Science and Religion," which appeared in the IBM journal *THINK* and later in an MIT magazine.

That article, according to the Templeton Foundation, "established Townes as a unique voice, especially among scientists, that sought commonality between the two disciplines. Long before the concept of a relationship between scientific and theological inquiry became an arena of investigation, his nonconformist viewpoint jumpstarted a movement that until then few had considered."

■ **Richard McBrien**, 78, a theologian at the University of Notre Dame and liberal commentator, died January 25. He had been in poor health for several years.

PHOTO COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

McBrien joined Notre Dame in 1980 and became a standout for the theology department. In media punditry and a weekly column that ran in some diocesan newspapers, McBrien argued for the ordination of women, optional celibacy, and birth control, among other things.

"At his peak in the 1980s and '90s, it is arguable that McBrien had a higher media profile than anyone in the Catholic church other than Pope John Paul II," wrote the *National Catholic Reporter*, where McBrien was a regular contributor. "He was . . . knowledgeable, able to express complex ideas in digestible sound bites, and utterly unafraid of controversy."

McBrien wrote 25 books, among them *Catholicism, Lives of the Saints*, and *Lives of the Popes*.

McBrien was born in 1936 and grew up in West Hartford, Connecticut. He was ordained in 1962 and went to Rome to study for a doctorate in theology at Gregorian University.

In a 2008 interview with the *Boston Globe*, McBrien was asked why he never left the church over his differences with official teaching.

"I have affirmation from so many good people," he said. "I feel that I have a responsibility to them to continue working at it and doing the best I can." —David Gibson, Religion News Service

LIVING BY The Word

March 8, Third Sunday in Lent
John 2:13–22

WHAT IS JESUS so mad about? He has recently been to a family wedding, a joyful event, where his mother imposed on him to help out with the wine. Now he goes to Jerusalem after a few days at home with his mother, brothers, and disciples. Is he upset with his family?

When the disciples try to explain Jesus' wrath, they quote Psalm 69:9, "Zeal for your house has consumed me." John neglects to include the verse just before it, however: "I have become a stranger to my kindred, an alien to my mother's children." Is Jesus suffering rejection from his family, or maybe more likely a sense that his calling is separating him from them? His mother seems to have annoyed him just a bit by asking him to do something about the wine shortage in Cana. And why does John take the story and put it at the beginning of Jesus' ministry and not toward the end, as the synoptics have it?

Could this be more like Jesus coming to take up his identity as the son of his father, as well as that of his mother Mary and his family? There is a faint echo of the young boy Jesus astounding the elders in the temple at the age of 12. He knows the temple is his because, as he thunders, it is his father's house; he knows the business he must be about. From this view, Jesus' rage at the sellers of sacrificial animals and the money changers takes on a richness. As the Passover lamb, which he will be at the end of John, he knows that animal sacrifices will no longer be necessary.

As the Passover lamb, Jesus knows animal sacrifice will no longer be necessary.

For those of us who are accustomed to walking into temples and finding them quiet, clean, and awe-inspiring, the brawling scene Jesus confronts—the caterwauling of the sacrificial beasts, their waste, the chaos of the exchanges between buyers and sellers—would be beyond distressing. Most of us live far from the barnyard today, but if you have ever spent time around oxen, you know that these big animals, while docile, are hardly prospective church members. Neither are bleating sheep, live Christmas pageants aside. This is a wild and clamorous scene. Prayer would seem to be the farthest thing from these people's minds; it would be for most of us. At least, that is what Jesus sees.

Jesus drives this bawling mass of creatures out with a whip—one he makes out of cords, the appropriate material for dealing with animals. The reference to the cords is one of those vivid little details that make us say, Huh? Wouldn't just mentioning "a whip" be enough? It is typical of John to give us such a detail, like the name of the slave Malchus in John 18. Does it give us a more vivid sense for the scene? Who knows?

It is what Jesus does with the cords that is of the most interest, and it is this moment in the narrative that painters like to portray. Most famous is El Greco's depiction: Jesus standing in the center with a whirl of people around him as he flails away, in almost the same stance as Michelangelo's Jesus in the *Last Judgment* from the Sistine Chapel. The chaos all around is worth examining. In the version of the painting at the Minneapolis Institute of the Arts—one of several that exists—El Greco does not include big animals, only doves. And unlike the money changers, those selling doves don't seem to be the objects of Jesus' wrath. They know they will be sent out as well, but they do not face the full brunt of Jesus' fury.

What we see in the painting is the distress of the people on Jesus' right being forced from their work, with their tables flipped over and the resultant chaos. To his left are the scribes looking on, trying to deduce what Jesus is up to. One can see by their gestures that they are puzzled by his actions.

In the scribes' reaction we see that their reality and Jesus' reality are completely out of sync. The scribes appear to be living in a kind of spiritual flatland, one that John is always exposing in his Gospel. (Edwin A. Abbott's little classic *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* is well worth reading or rereading to help one think about the two realms of John.) Jesus says they can destroy the temple and in three days he will raise it up. This, of course, bewilders them. "This temple has been under construction for 46 years," they say, "and will you raise it up in three days?" It is almost funny. John has to explain that Jesus is talking about the temple of his own body, not the temple where they are standing. The disciples do not understand it either; they only remember it later, after Christ's resurrection, when they believe.

Christ has come to bring the heavenly kingdom near. Christians, especially preachers, are called to bring that heavenly reality into the very plodding reality of daily life. This account should help us tune our ears to catch the miraculous reality of an incarnate God walking among us, trying to put things right, giving us a new reality—as he moves from his mother's world of flesh and family into taking charge of his father's house. His presence brings a new dimension into our ordinary lives of buying and selling. Everything is new and changed.

March 15, Fourth Sunday in Lent
John 3:14–21

HERE BE DRAGONS, as the old map says. John 3:16 may be well-charted territory, one of the most memorized Bible verses among Christians—all good news. But this week's Gospel reading starts back with Moses and the brass serpent (or dragon) and then goes on to talk about those in darkness and those who are or are not condemned. By the time we hear all Jesus has to say, even Nicodemus himself has disappeared into the darkness whence he came.

The binary world of John's Gospel is well drawn in Jesus' talk here. But it is troubling to people who have been raised on uncertainty principles, who hate bright lines. Bright lines are fundamental to understanding this lesson. That God loved the world enough to give the only begotten Son is good news, but we don't always focus on this news. We prefer being in the place of the decider, not the decided upon. Thus we are worried about the darkness and the unknowns that frame the verse. How could a God of love condemn people? What does it mean to be in darkness?

Here is where the dragons be. The map ends here. In this region, there are things we do not know—truly uncharted territory. It is the nature of darkness to be frightening. It cannot be charted, because we cannot see what is there.

So instead of thinking of others lost in the night, maybe we could put ourselves in Nicodemus's place and think what it is like to be in the dark and truly lost. We know such feelings from our childhood, if not now. It's scary out there, as poet Kenneth Patchen (1911–1972) writes in "All the Roary Night": "All around us / The footprints of the beast . . . / Of something above there / Something that doesn't know we exist." This poem—from the point of view of an airplane pilot or space voyager trying to make contact—gives flesh to our fear of the dark. We don't understand it because we can't see, yet people seem to be filled with a kind of nameless dread or anxiety. We know something is out there—something, maybe "the footprints of the beast."

We have all looked out at space and realized our insignificance. We may know that we are not very significant in the face of the entire universe, which "doesn't know we exist." (Is this why Nicodemus came to see Jesus?) We may even have an inkling that there is heartbreak out there, as Patchen goes on to say. It feels hopeless, and we feel meaningless. The poem is filled with fear and terror, something that is gnawing at the public psyche today as it hasn't so much before. Nicodemus's visit with Jesus makes more sense in this context, I think.

The good news in Jesus' contrast between darkness and light is that it does, in fact, have to do with us. The whole drama of salvation is that God has come into this world to find us and give us meaning. God, the God of all, is going to do everything to bring us into the light. The incarnation is about *us*. This is what the whole project is about, to bring us into the light, into communion with God.

I often feel I am living just at the edge of Patchen's "roary night." Is that the darkness Nicodemus feels trapped in? Has he glimpsed some beam of Jesus' light and felt drawn toward it? Artist Henri Lindegaard draws Nicodemus with horizontal lines and Jesus with vertical ones. The light floods down from heaven to Jesus; he is free to go up and down. Nicodemus, however, looks to be caged in his earthbound reality. Jesus is the man from above, the one who can bring new birth and light to us. After we see the light and walk in it, like the Samaritan woman whom Jesus will soon meet, we begin to understand what the darkness was and that we were trapped in it.

From the darkness we are drawn to the light. It naturally draws us toward itself, as Jesus says he himself will do. Once we have seen it, how can we want anything else? Like the Israelites bitten by snakes in the wilderness, we cry out for salvation. Life is found by looking at the image of the very thing that kills.

After we see the light and walk in it, we begin to understand what the darkness was.

The glory of this discourse is that now, because of Christ's journey to bring divinity to us in our own shape, we have seen a reality and a life so compelling that we must tell others. As Peter says in Acts 4, "We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." Light is like that; it will be shared, not kept under a bushel basket. This is the urge behind what missionaries do—they go not to create clones but to show others this shining light, this new reality that could change everything.

The author is Gracia M. Grindal, *professor emeritus of rhetoric at Luther Seminary.*

Fred Craddock in retirement

The people's preaching class

by William Brosend

SOMETIME IN THE late 1980s I was presenting a paper on my dissertation when I noticed that the most important person in postwar American preaching was sitting in the first row. I had the opportunity to meet Fred B. Craddock later, and that day changed my life.

During the 1960s and '70s Fred Craddock reshaped preaching in mainline pulpits through two of his books: *As One Without Authority* (1969) and *Overhearing the Gospel* (1978). The world of homiletics has embraced, resisted, and grudgingly revisited the message of these books. They remain among the most important works on preaching in the last 60 years, and their wisdom undergirds most of today's best preaching.

A few months ago I went to Cherry Log, Georgia, to talk with Craddock and find out what he has been doing since his retirement from Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta. I also wanted to find out about the work of the Craddock Center, which was established to carry on his passion for preaching the gospel in words and deeds.

"What was your vision for the Craddock Center when it was created?" I asked.

"We did not have any vision," Craddock said. "It was all by accident, by need."

He told me about his life growing up in Humboldt, Tennessee, and about the impact of the Great Depression on anyone born into rural poverty. He tells this story in *Reflections on My Call to Preach*. His preaching, he says, has always been "semiautobiographical."

"Ours was a family of words," Craddock told me. "There were three books in our home: the King James Bible, *The Billy Sunday Story: The Life and Times of William Ashley Sunday*, and Shakespeare's works. My father was a storyteller, and the language of Shakespeare thoroughly infused his speech. My mother set the world to music, making up songs and ditties, accompanied by her guitar or harmonica—that softened the hard edges of our lives. My oldest brother Bill was the editor and publisher of two newspapers in Tennessee; Alvin worked as layout editor for the *Journal of the American Medical Association*; Roland started as a reporter in Memphis, with a colleague across his desk who wrote the novel *True Grit*. Words everywhere."

"In high school I wrote a 75-page paper on Shakespeare. It wasn't for a class; I just wanted to write it. The teacher asked why I did it, then handed it around and said, 'Look at this, a student who knows what he wants to do.'"

But Craddock did not know what he wanted to do. He suspected that he was being called to be a minister, but like pastors and priests before him he could not imagine that it was his call. The ministerial task that he feared the most was preaching.

The call to ministry turned out to be stronger than his resistance, and there was a small college in the family's tradition—Johnson Bible College (now Johnson University)—that, like the better-known Berea College in Kentucky, allowed him to pay for his tuition, room, and board by working on the college farm. Berea was only 19 miles farther away from Humboldt, but "geographical fright"—crossing the state line, something he had never done—kept him from considering it.

He thrived at Johnson and went on to Phillips Seminary, the Disciples of Christ school in Enid, Oklahoma. He graduated in 1953 and went to Vanderbilt Divinity School to earn a Ph.D. in New Testament. His dissertation on Colossians was written under the direction of Leander Keck and Lou Silberman. He returned to Phillips to teach.

> Craddock's homiletic is based on communicating what can't be communicated directly.

Where in all this was Craddock the preacher being formed? As sometimes happens in small denominational seminaries, Phillips Seminary asked Craddock to teach outside his field—in this case, a course in preaching and the literary criticism of the New Testament. Craddock admits that the class was a failure. The students complained that at the end of the class they were further away from the pulpit than when it started. The class he taught on the subject was the first class in preaching that Craddock had ever been in.

Craddock took a leave at the University of Tübingen, with the aim of studying preaching. "As you can imagine," he said, "it did not go well."

Professor Hermann Diem at Tübingen, on learning that Craddock was there to study preaching, told him to go home

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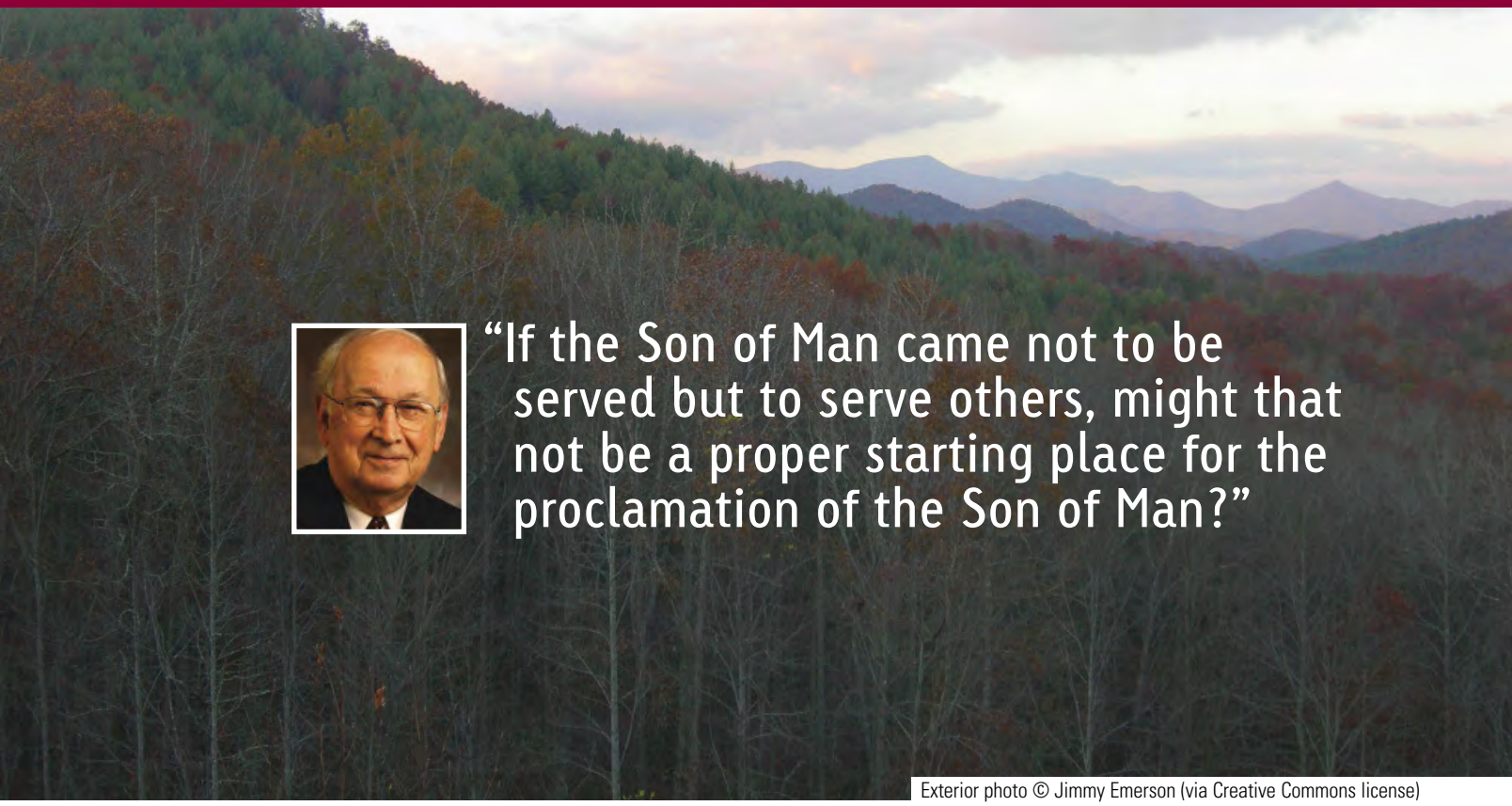

"If the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others, might that not be a proper starting place for the proclamation of the Son of Man?"

Exterior photo © Jimmy Emerson (via Creative Commons license)

and read Kierkegaard. In those days, Craddock said (quoting the great biblical scholar Ernst Käsemann), "preaching was mocked as a 'bastard discipline.'"

Craddock did read Kierkegaard, and he was struck especially by this line from the 19th-century Danish theologian: "There is no lack of information in a Christian land; something else is lacking, and it is something one person cannot communicate directly to another." This theme became the center of what became Craddock's Beecher Lectures in Preaching at Yale, which were published as *Overhearing the Gospel*.

Craddock's point was that preaching should focus not on preacher, text, or sermon, but on the listener and on "gaining a hearing" for the gospel in a culture that thought it already knew what the gospel was about. He argued that the way to gain a hearing for the gospel is by communicating indirectly. The "something lacking" in a Christian land is "something one person cannot communicate directly to another." Preachers were invited to shift from trying to prove a point to putting the listener in a dynamic conversation with the text. There was room for the preacher to ask questions—and room for the listener to draw his or her own conclusions.

As one just beginning to preach Sunday after Sunday in those days, I found Craddock's move from deductive, expository preaching to inductive, narrative preaching to be a great personal blessing. The move probably saved preaching from irrelevance.

Not all experts on preaching today endorse Craddock's approach, but their own preaching style often gives them away. For example, when Thomas Long, who holds the same chair in preaching at Candler that Craddock did, gave the DuBose Lectures at the School of Theology, Sewanee, in 2012, he began by saying that "narrative preaching is taking on water"—but then proceeded to tell stories that argued otherwise.

He directly challenged the quotation from Kierkegaard that inspired Craddock: "There is no lack of information in a Christian land." In our day, it can be argued, there is a widespread lack of biblical and theological knowledge.

Nevertheless, the second half of the quotation remains unchallenged—"something else is lacking, and it is something one person cannot communicate directly to another." Craddock's homiletic is based on communicating—through story, anecdote, and questions—something that cannot be communicated directly, and that insight remains crucial.

Craddock's limitations as a preacher are well documented. He is famously not tall, his voice is too high-pitched and only gets higher, and he refuses to leave the pulpit. His gestures consist of knocking the pulpit once or waving his hand over his head and saying, "Whew."

How did he become a towering figure in preaching? He mentioned to me three things that I think answer this question—tradition, liturgy, and character.

His preaching is first of all biblical. "I never stopped being a student of the New Testament. All through my career I worked on something that was different from what I had done before. I stepped out of the grasp the apostle Paul had on me in graduate school by studying John. Then I concentrated on the parables. I always kept some kind of little exegetical fire going, because I never knew where it would take me."

Tending the exegetical fire, reading deeply, doing more than preparing the next sermon was to Craddock "not really a

method, but a discipline. A discipline of study that allowed the method to more or less take care of itself." It is a discipline he has not abandoned; he is still working daily in his study even though he's decided at age 86 that his preaching and teaching will likely be in print, not in person.

The context of the liturgy is a second characteristic of Craddock's preaching. He comments, "I was walking down a sidewalk in Decatur, Georgia, on the way to the church where I was to preach when I met an acquaintance sitting at an outdoor coffee shop. We chatted and she asked me to join her, but I said that I needed to get to church. I invited her to join me, but she held up her Sunday paper and said, 'This is my Bible,' and then her coffee cup, 'This is my communion.'"

"I think the days of that nonsense are ending. I believe that our traditions are going to return with strength, both to the Eucharist and to carefully crafted sermons that will demand to be published and reread after they are heard." He knows that coffee and the Sunday *Times* are not sufficient. He also knows that the church has work to do. "The question," Craddock has often said, "is not whether the church is dying, but whether it is giving its life for the world."

Character is an obvious but tricky characteristic. On this point Craddock turned to Pope Francis and toward the everyday work of ministry. He expressed the hope that we are near the end of the era of the "church of Oprah," with its focus on the inner life of the believer, and "back to a focus on the love of God and love of the neighbor." Oprah Winfrey's personal example includes starting schools in Africa and other notable acts of charity and generosity, but the church of Oprah begins and ends with self. "If the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others," Craddock asks, "might that not be a proper starting place for the proclamation of the Son of Man?"

Craddock's answer to this question led, after retirement from Emory, to his desire to teach preaching to people in Appalachia who could not afford to attend seminary. When he and his wife, Nettie, moved to Cherry Log, Craddock let the

After retiring, he wanted to teach people who couldn't afford to go to seminary.

There was silence in heaven for half an hour

—at a writing retreat

The full inhalation
before the coming of the kingdom.

Pencils scuttling over legal pads,
hands whispering in beards.

Friend, I know the sound
of your water bottle flipping open.

Brother, I've memorized
your bare feet on wooden floors.

One of you runs a bath upstairs,
a year of sorrows draining down.

One of you spreads out a manuscript,
pages setting sail in your fingers.

The lake sobs on the shore.
Rain perpendiculars the panes,

Beloved, and you stretch
your knuckles to the ceiling.

The golden censer of thunder
shudders just above the shingles.

We pass around a bowl of candy,
holding each other's breath.

Tania Runyan

word get out that he would be available at no charge for a weekend of preaching and teaching in the small towns of North Georgia, East Tennessee, Western North Carolina, Kentucky, and West Virginia. Only those without a seminary diploma should attend.

These sessions would start, he said, "with a scripture and a sermon by me. Then [participants] would tear it apart, and we would talk about how to put it back together—what had I missed in the biblical text, or what had they missed or regretted in my sermon. Then I would preach it again, and as likely as not they would say, 'I really liked it better the first time.' I would use some of those methods in my teaching today if my life was going in the other direction."

When the Craddocks were planning the move to Cherry Log they had not taken into account a search for a church home. There was no church in their tradition anywhere nearby, and while they enjoyed visiting the Methodists or Presbyterians, they did not find a home among them. Eventually some people in the area from the Disciples tradition asked Craddock if he would lead them in worship. One service led to a service once a month, then to services every other Sunday until eventually Cherry Log Christian Church was founded. It was easy to draw a crowd—the church put up signs on the highway in the old Burma Shave style, "Fred—Craddock—preaching—this—Sunday." Forming a church was something else again. "Anybody can draw a crowd," Craddock said. "But to what purpose?"

The Craddock Center was founded in 2001 to meet the needs of the children in a nine-county area. Its work, said Craddock, "turned Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs at least sideways, if not completely on its head." It assumes that children need books and music as well as food and shelter (see sidebar).

Craddock's legacy is not just the Cherry Log Christian Church, the Craddock Center, and his many articles, books, sermons, and presentations. That part is obvious. A less obvious part is the impact that is being made by the thousands of preachers who have read his works, heard his preaching, listened to his lectures, and sought to pass on in their own way his wisdom and delight in preaching. CC

THE CRADDOCK CENTER

The idea for the Craddock Center began when a Head Start staffer in Ellijay, Georgia, called Cherry Log Christian Church and spoke to Fred Craddock.

"I hear you care about poor people," she said.

"Well, yes, we do," Craddock replied.

"I have a woman here with four children, another one on the way, and no place to stay and nothing to eat."

"I'll come down."

The poverty in the nine counties of Georgia, Tennessee, and North Carolina that are served by the center is immense. Craddock realized that children need to have their basic needs met and that they need something more: they need to be delighted, to laugh, sing, and dance. And they need a book of their own.

Under the leadership of Julie Jabaley, executive director, the Craddock Center provides services to 1,100 children each year, mostly pre-K to second grade. The public schools have no music programs, so the center sends someone each week to teach songs. They also send Story Express, a bookmobile with a difference—the children can pick out a book to keep. The center stuffs backpacks with snacks for the weekend and coordinates "seamless summers" of meals (funded by a federal government program) at Camp Craddock (Craddock is said to hate the name). In the basement of the center, people can find used furniture and warm clothing, including caps knit and crocheted by volunteers. The center also supports a food program in Ellijay.

After years of teaching preaching, Craddock now limits his appearances to the Preaching Day held on the first Mondays of March and October at the Cherry Log Christian Church. Free and open to all, the Preaching Day has welcomed preachers such as Tom Long, Amy-Jill Levine, Will Willimon, and Barbara Brown Taylor. —*WB*

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CRADDOCK CENTER

BOOKS AND MUSIC: The Craddock Center seeks to enrich the lives of people in southern Appalachia through programs of service and cultural enrichment.

Religious violence?

by Ted A. Smith

THE GRAPHIC KILLINGS, captured on video and posted for the world to see, are horrific enough—and they only begin to tell the tale. The insurgent force known as ISIS, ISIL, or, as it now demands, the Islamic State has slaughtered more than a thousand civilians and practiced ethnic cleansing on a massive scale. Leaders of the Islamic State have justified these acts as part of the process of establishing what they have declared to be a caliphate, a political entity governed by a successor of the Prophet and ordered by Islamic law. In the name of this higher law, the Islamic State has committed acts of violence that seem to know no limit.

From crusaders to colonizers to bombers of abortion clinics to revolutionaries of many kinds, people who declare their loyalty to a higher law have been responsible for terrible violence. To justify their actions, they may appeal to Christianity, Judaism, Islam, or other religious traditions or to traditions that are not usually identified as religious. What they share is a commitment to some code that stands above the established laws of the land.

This long history of violence has led many people to reject any kind of appeal to a higher law. Andrew Delbanco, a scholar of American literature and culture, criticizes what he calls the "abolitionist imagination" (in reference to some fervent 19th-century Americans' effort to abolish slavery). "All holy wars," he writes, "whether metaphoric or real, from left or from right, bespeak a zeal for combating sin, not tomorrow, not in due time, not, in Lincoln's phrase, by putting it 'in the course of ultimate extinction,' but *now*."

Delbanco recommends instead a posture of "articulate ambivalence," which involves a little less conviction and a little more patience. He would turn our gaze from higher laws to the slow, difficult task of working with others to improve the laws that exist.

Delbanco assumes that a politics oriented toward a higher law is more likely to produce violence. This line of argument has intuitive appeal: it seems commonsensical that holding firmly to ultimate values is likely to lead to ultimate violence. And this *can* happen, as in the case of the Islamic State. But Delbanco ignores the ways that ambivalent, pragmatic, earthbound convictions can also lead to violence without limits.

Civil War general William Tecumseh Sherman, for instance, had nothing like an abolitionist imagination. He refused both the narrative that made war into a theater of glory and the invocation of higher laws that sustained that narrative. "War is cruelty," he wrote to the mayor and city council of Atlanta in September 1864, "and you cannot refine it."

When Sherman's troops left Atlanta two months later, they burned much of the city on their way out of town. Winning the war, Sherman had come to believe, required the destruction of anything that could be used to support the enemy's war effort. Whether these tactics met the threshold for "total war" or were, as Mark Grimsley argues, merely a form of "hard war," they clearly went beyond established constraints on violence. But Sherman's goal was not to make the South conform to a higher law but simply to win the war and enforce the rule of existing federal laws. It was ambivalent, this-worldly pragmatism that pushed violence to new levels.

Appeals to a higher law need not lead to violence.

This pattern of escalation exposes a fault line in Delbanco's argument about the higher law and violence. Rejecting all talk of higher law does not necessarily prevent the emergence of something close to total war. Furthermore, when political processes refuse talk of higher laws, the prevailing laws and institutions can become insulated from a thoroughgoing critique. They can attain what the German critic Walter Benjamin called "mythic" qualities. They can begin to appear natural and necessary. The work of preserving these existing laws and institutions then assumes something like an ultimate importance, and this presumption of ultimate importance can justify even extreme violence so long as it is done by agents who are authorized by existing laws to preserve the order created by those laws.

Martin Luther King Jr. named these dynamics in his 1963 "Letter from Birmingham Jail." King addressed the letter to moderate white religious leaders who displayed all the virtues of Delbanco's articulate ambivalence.

As tensions rose in Birmingham, eight leaders of Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish communities in Alabama wrote a public

Ted A. Smith teaches at the Candler School of Theology. This essay grows out of his book Weird John Brown: Divine Violence and the Limits of Ethics *(Stanford University Press).*

letter they dubbed "A Call to Unity." The authors of the letter were not fanatical segregationists. On the contrary, all eight of them had signed an earlier public letter condemning the extremism of Governor George Wallace. On April 12, 1963—Good Friday—they again called for moderation and the rule of law in a letter criticizing King and other leaders of the Birmingham civil rights campaign. Positioning themselves against the "extreme measures" of both Wallace and King, the white moderates expressed their sympathy for "the natural impatience of people who feel that their hopes are slow in being realized." But they termed the demonstrations "unwise and untimely." They counseled patience and respect for the laws of the land.

King, on the other hand, displayed an abolitionist imagination. Responding to the moderates' call for law and order, he argued that working for justice might require breaking some earthly laws and accepting the penalty that came with such actions. Just laws deserved to be obeyed, but unjust laws had no authority.

"How does one determine when a law is just or unjust?" King asked. "A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law, or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law." Such laws, King wrote, citing Augustine, were "no laws at all." Justice as defined by the higher law required immediate action. African Americans had already waited, King wrote, for more than 340 years. He called for justice in the very time frame that Delbanco says defines the abolitionist imagination: "not tomorrow, not next year, but *now*."

King saw the need for a politics of the higher law. Appealing to a standard above the established law of the land has the power to break the hold of an unjust order on moral imaginations.

King's definition of a just higher law could end up legitimating violence—if it was pried out of King's larger gospel vision. As this example shows, what we need is not a ban on appeals to a higher law but the capacity for critical, theological conversations about the form of the higher law and its relation to earthly politics.

References to a higher law often regard it as the same kind of thing as positive, earthly law. That is, the higher law is frequently presented as a code involving obligations and prohibitions. These codes are phrased in the imperative mood; they are commands. And these commands offer mythical legitimation for violence. For if the higher law is something like the perfection of public policy, and if fulfillment of the law is earthly conformity to this heavenly rule, then believers in the higher law can understand themselves as called to violent action to establish this state of affairs. The logic of code is the logic of theocratic violence.

Christian ethics is steadily tempted by such theocratic logic. When Christian ethics sees its task as discerning God's code for ordering the world, devising a set of policies that approximates that code, and figuring out ways to realize and enforce them, a theocratic logic is at work.

This logic sits uneasily with commitments to democratic

process. It also sits uneasily with commitments to a pluralist society that involves people who would resist the implementation of the divinely sanctioned code. Both of these commitments require amendments to the theocratic impulse.

One strategy for managing the violent potential of the higher law joins great confidence about the ability to know the higher law with a principled refusal to do violence for the sake of fulfilling that law. This strategy informs much of contemporary Christian ethics, which often joins theocratic logic to something like a rider clause forswearing violent action outside the law.

But this strategy still assumes that the higher law takes the form of a code that requires some kind of violence for its fulfillment. It typically assigns that violence to the state. Even if it would limit violence in wars abroad and criticize excessive violence in enforcing policies at home, this ethics still presumes a necessary role for state violence in establishing and maintaining justice. And it is just that notion of "necessity" that opens the door to mythic justifications of violence.

Jesus does not offer a plan to bring God's reign; he announces that it's here.

When the higher law is reduced to a code, we are left with a choice between a higher law that legitimates variations on holy war, on the one hand, and on the other, a flat, immanent pragmatism that legitimates a stealthier form of mythic violence.

The poverty of these choices reveals the real cost of secularization: not the declining numbers of members of religious institutions but the constriction of the imagination, the reduction of beatific visions to policy proposals, the loss of the ability to think of a higher law as anything but a better code.

I want to take seriously the danger of violence in the name of a higher law. But the answer to that problem is neither to refuse all talk of higher law nor to write a code with better content. What is needed is a better and deeper understanding of the higher law.

This better and deeper version of the higher law is marked by four qualities: an *indicative* mood that serves to *negate* absolute obligations in this age in ways that invite a *free response* in history that is *permeated by the presence of God*. I will focus here on the first two qualities.

Understanding justice as an *indicative* rather than an imperative detaches the higher law from its alliance with violence. An imperative usually calls for enforcement. An indicative, on the other hand, just is. An indicative higher law would require no more enforcement than the law of gravity. A higher law in the indicative mood would still give a picture of justice, a vision of relationships in the New Jerusalem, but it would not demand that we take action to establish that city.

Just so, Jesus does not give people a plan for bringing in the reign of God but announces that the reign is at hand. Mary does not return from the tomb waving a list of things to do but proclaiming that Christ is risen. Paul writes that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Godself, naming the indicative quality of a past event that continues into the present. The great creeds of the church are entirely in the indicative.

We can, of course, fashion imperatives from these indicatives. But they are derivative and constructed. The higher law, the new commandment, is not first of all a code we are called to enforce.

The indicative of the gospel relates to the world as negation. It shatters the structures of obligation of earthly laws not by proposing better content for those laws but by declaring a fulfillment in Jesus Christ that undoes the absolute quality of the whole category of earthly law. The proclamation that the reign of God is at hand does not bring with it a new set of imperatives, for such imperatives would betray the gift they announce. The proclamation of the reign of God instead relativizes the full spectrum of this-worldly obligations. Because God's reign is at hand, obligations to Caesar, to families, and even to one's own life lose the sheen of absoluteness.

And because the sign of the reign is the cross, new obligations do not arise to fill the gaps left by the old. On the cross Jesus does not squeeze himself into Caesar's throne. He does not offer a new and improved edition of Roman law. The indicative of the higher law breaks the absoluteness of every earthly imperative without establishing a new one in its place.

Because the reign of God is always already among us, like a seed growing secretly, this dynamic is always at work. But sometimes it becomes more visible to us, as it did in the mass civil rights demonstrations in Birmingham. They shattered the facade of legitimacy that sustained the laws on the books of the city as policed by Bull Connor. The words of King and other

Pearly everlasting

(Anaphalis margaritacea)

Are you really? Underneath the snows
of winter, do you blossom on and on?
Do the pocket gophers crave you,
tunneling beneath that blanket,
pray to enter your secret chambers,
rest inside your open gates?

I see your flowering, fruiting
clusters, hanging on into October,
leaning into the open path,
making way, ushering whatever is holy
into the presence of things that stay.

—Ross Lake National Recreation Area

Paul Willis

leaders made the case. And those words were sealed by the testimonies of thousands of people willing to defy unjust laws, even in the face of dogs, truncheons, water hoses, imprisonment, and worse. Their actions made plain the indicative statement that was already true: the laws on the books of Birmingham were no laws at all. And the use of force to sustain those laws was mob violence in uniform.

The shattering of that old order makes possible a different kind of politics—but it does not determine the form those politics must take. King's letter from Birmingham jail, like the actions of the protesters, did make positive claims about the nature of God's justice. But if we read those claims about justice as divine legitimation for a new code, we perpetuate the old pattern by which revolutions devour their own children.

We should rather see these claims as destroying the legitimacy of one order and opening up space for the free pursuit of a different kind of life. This freedom has direction: it is for politics that are not bound to the project of sustaining racial hierarchy. But it is still a freedom to create a life together and not merely a command to bring the world into conformity with a code, even if that code is just. It therefore locates temporal authority and responsibility in human choices. It does not pretend to offer divine sanction for violence.

This vision of the higher law makes possible a messianic politics that is an inversion of theocratic politics. For theocratic movements, politics are prior to the fulfillment of a higher law. They seek to make the world what a divinely given code says it should be. Politics—with words or weapons—is the means to make the world correspond to the standard set by the code. When that correspondence has been achieved, politics comes to an end.

If, on the other hand, the higher law is an indicative that has already been fulfilled, then these patterns are reversed. The fulfillment of the law precedes politics. Fulfillment undoes the need for violence. But it makes possible new kinds of collective deliberation about the nature of a free and faithful response.

The richest forms of political life are possible only when people are free to do more than conform their societies to preexisting codes, whether those codes claim to be set by earthly or divine powers. Because people are born into a world already ordered by codes of many kinds, some kind of emancipation is necessary for political life to begin. If talk of "divine violence" makes any sense at all, it is only to describe this shattering of the mythical pretensions of earthly orders. And, as Jesus and King saw, such shattering does not require the shedding of blood.

This account of a politics of the higher law suggests some ways that Christians might make sense of the Islamic State. Christians have no reason to join those who criticize the Islamic State simply for mixing theology and politics. Christians too believe that God has relevance for how humans order our lives together.

Moreover, banning theological reasoning from politics contributes to the conditions in which the secular state can become absolute in itself. Ironically, it takes a dose of political theology to preserve the secularity of the secular.

The question is not whether theology should shape politics, but how. The theology I have sketched here would not denounce the Islamic State for looking to a higher law. It would argue instead with the Islamic State's interpretation of Shari'a as a code that could and should be imposed by violence. It would seek out Muslim allies who think of Shari'a in other ways. And it would not propose some rival Christian, secular, or cosmopolitan code that should be imposed instead of Shari'a but in the same way that the Islamic State imagines. For even if the content of that code stressed democracy, human rights, and peaceful coexistence, regarding the code as a divinely sanctioned imperative would authorize ideological escalations of violence—as we saw in the administration of George W. Bush.

A better understanding of the higher law would reveal the violence of the Islamic State to be fitful and fruitless, a real but not ultimate threat. It would break the spellbinding quality of the Islamic State's terror, refusing the sleight of hand by which it becomes an evil so evil that it justifies limitless violence in response. It would reject both the fantasy that violence can create a final peace and the destructive, reciprocal violence of an eye for an eye. It would make different kinds of responses possible, including nonresistance, nonviolent resistance, and even limited violence in defense of life. And it would remind Christians that the event that most demands a response from us is not the rise of a terrorist movement but the fulfillment of the law in Jesus Christ.

Such fulfillment does not prescribe the content of every faithful response. It does not become a new code, not even in the purified form of a principled pacifism or the chastened form of a realist ethics. Instead, its breaking of the spell of terror creates freedom for a range of responses—and for collaboration in and dialogue about them with Muslims, Jews, secularists, and other members of a plural society. The messianic fulfillment of law is the beginning of politics.

Carbon and compost

by Norman Wirzba

WHAT IF ONE of the most compelling responses to the overabundance of carbon in the atmosphere is to restore the carbon in the ground beneath our feet? And what if the best inspiration and model for this carbon-restoring work is to be found in the life of a gardening God?

Like a good gardener, God loves compost because compost is the basis for fertility and fecundity. It is where carbon takes some of its most dense and complex forms.

In his lovely book *The Gardener's Year*, the great Czech writer Karel Čapek says that heaps of compost are the primary monuments that gardeners love to build. If such a gardener could have been at the Garden of Eden, he or she would have sniffed excitedly and said, "Good Lord, what humus!" God loves the rich layers of organic matter and the billions of microorganisms, fungi, bacteria, and earthworms that move through soil because it is in their movement that terrestrial life's richness is found. Healthy soil comes first. It is quite literally the foundation upon which our life rests. No humus, no humanity.

People having become almost exclusively the shoppers rather than the producers of food, soil is easily forgotten or taken for granted. But the story of scripture and the story of our lives speak an essential truth: soil is precious because it is the material medium of God's life-giving and life-nurturing love. In its degradation all creatures suffer, and God is dishonored.

Having made the first human from the ground, God then instructs this earthling to take care of the garden. This work is not a punishment. It is, rather, an invitation to the human to participate with God in the work of caring for soil and feeding creatures, and thereby also coming to understand and appreciate God's nurturing life and the character of the world. It is an invitation to become smart and sympathetic in our life on the land and with other creatures. Working with God, we have an opportunity to learn the habits and refine the gardening skills of attention and care. One could argue that our divinely appointed vocation to care for the garden is really God's way of saying, "Understand the carbon cycle that makes all life possible, and then figure out how you can be a nurturing and harmonious member within it."

Anthropogenic climate change is the clearest indication that people have forsaken their gardening vocation. We have not attended to the balance of carbon in the ground. We see this in much of today's agriculture where vast fields of one crop (corn, soybeans, rice, wheat) are grown, thereby degrading the soil with regimens of plowing and the steady application of fossil-fuel-derived fertilizers and herbicides. Meanwhile, herbivores have been taken off the land and put in confinement where, instead of aiding soil fertility, they contribute to the production of greenhouse gases (methane and nitrous oxide). The result: it is estimated that industrial agriculture alone contributes 30 percent of the greenhouse gases that are warming the planet.

Like many others, I find it overwhelming to try to wrap my mind around planet warming and all that it means: ocean levels rising and coastal developments drowning, springs and rivers evaporating, species losing their homes and dying, regions burning up and drying out, people fighting over scarce water, extreme weather destroying homes, and coastal residents becoming refugees. And this is just a partial list! No wonder more and more people are saying that climate change represents the single biggest threat to life as we know it that humanity has ever faced. Is the American dream over? Is capitalism finished? Can I keep my iPhone?

Humus is a stable place to store carbon.

The temptation is to stick our heads in the sand and pretend that global warming isn't happening. But if we take the idea of God the Gardener seriously, the better response is literally to work our hands into the soil, commit to the soil's healing, and in that action contribute in a major way to the cooling and healing of our planet. How? By advocating for a better agriculture that returns atmospheric carbon to the ground.

Carbon dioxide is not evil. It is a vital player in ecosystems and biophysical and meteorological processes. The key is in the proportions. Too much carbon in the atmosphere and we all overheat. Too little and we freeze. Without carbon dioxide, vegetative life is asphyxiated. Plants breathe in carbon dioxide as food and breathe out oxygen for creatures like us. We then get to eat the plants (and, if you are a carnivore, the herbivores that eat the plants we can't). It really is a magnificent, awe-inducing arrangement.

What does soil have to do with any of this? A lot. What has

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not been appreciated well enough is that healthy soil *stores* carbon. The carbon cycle works roughly like this: sun energy shines on the plant, enabling it to photosynthesize or digest atmospheric carbon dioxide. Oxygen is released back into the atmosphere, but the carbon is synthesized into the glucose that feeds the plant (and eaters like us who then eat the plant). Through a complex process of chemical reactions, this glucose is then resynthesized to make various carbohydrates, proteins, and oils—all carbon compounds. From the standpoint of addressing climate change, the truly exciting thing is that a considerable amount of this glucose carbon—between 30 and 40 percent—travels underground, leaking into the soil through the plant's roots. When underground, this carbon feeds the soil microbes that contribute to soil fertility and to vibrant plant life. In a process called humification, complex molecules made up of carbon, nitrogen, minerals, and soil particles form to make humus. Humus does not decompose much, making it a stable store of carbon that remains locked in the ground for a long time.

The key to carbon sequestration is to promote the soil microbes that make soil thrive. For that to happen, a vigorous and deep plant root structure needs to develop. When that happens, even more carbon is taken out of the atmosphere, rainfall is absorbed and retained, and the land becomes more productive. In other words, when people commit to the building of compost and the care of the soil—that is, when they work to promote vigorous plant growth and deep root structures—they will not only grow more nutritious and flavorful food, but there will be less carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. By some estimates, a lot less. According to scientists, if we could increase by just 2 percent the carbon content of our soils, we could bring carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere down to levels that have made the life we now know possible.

We need to pause now to let that bit of information sink in. Insofar as people become good gardeners and farmers by 1) nurturing soil, 2) building compost, 3) drastically reducing the application of poisons, 4) stopping unnecessary tillage, 5) stimulating deep root growth, and 6) taking herbivores out of confinement and returning them to the land (where their manure can further aid soil fertility), a truly major step can be taken toward reversing the buildup of carbon in our atmosphere. We don't need to mount the hugely risky geoengineering feat of spraying our atmosphere with sulfate aerosols to create a "global dimming" effect. What we need to do is accept the work that God daily performs and has called us to from the beginning: take care of the soil.

It sounds simple enough, but it is a huge and revolutionary task. Major financial players have been and are continuing to promote an agricultural system that degrades soil. Moreover, in the form of the farm bill, the U.S. government seems committed to the perpetuation of production practices that compromise natural fertility. Billions of dollars hang in the balance as companies like Monsanto, Cargill, and ADM seek to intensify our reliance on chemical inputs and toxins that destroy the microbial life that makes soil healthy. This is a double whammy: industrial techniques degrade the soil's ability to absorb and hold carbon, and they burn ancient carbon from the ground to fuel the whole process. The clear sign that this agricultural method is in trouble is that it burns rather than restores carbon to boost fertility!

Naomi Klein is correct in saying that climate change "changes everything," because it challenges to the core the economic system and the civilization that have been waging war against the planet for centuries. Insofar as people commit to the care of the soil, not just agricultural practice but also new cultural forms and priorities are going to have to be developed in politics, economics, education, and our social institutions. Why? Because to become the kinds of people who are attentive to the nurturing of soil means that correlative sympathies and dispositions will have to extend into all other aspects of our economic life too.

This essay is not a recommendation for everyone to become a farmer. The farmers we need in the future will be very special people, committed to refining the knowledge, skill, and inventive powers that relatively few people have. What the great majority can do is figure out how to be the farmers' moral and economic support. Can we demand from our politicians that they give us a farm bill that directs tax dollars to a healing and regenerative agriculture? Can we develop and financially support local food economies that honor good work and good food? The choice is made every time we sit down to eat.

Churches need to be the champions of growers and nurturers, showing how their work is a participation in God's own healing ways with the world. Churches should make their landholdings and their finances available to gardeners and farmers who want to do this work. The time is ripe, even urgent, for a new kind of CSA—church supported agriculture—in which the faithful follow God to the soil, grow nutritious food and beautiful flowers, and thereby contribute to the healing and the cooling of the world.

That we worship a gardening God means that we are not doomed to a warming, dying planet. The inspiration, the tools, and the knowledge we need to care for soil are alrea

Faith MATTERS

by M. Craig Barnes

Lone leaders

PASTORS OFTEN TALK about their loneliness, even though in their work they're surrounded by many people. What pastors mean by loneliness is not what most people think of it as. And it's not unique to their calling.

According to more than one editorialist, President Obama has given up on building a grand American consensus and is now focused on what he always wanted to do as a leader. His old slogan "Yes we can" has become "I'll figure out a way."

This makes me wonder exactly what goes on in the mind of a leader who tires of building consensus and just strives to get things done. Americans have never agreed about anything. So our greatest presidents eventually found ways to be loyal only to the still small voice that kept whispering in their ears, "You know what you need to do."

This is how Washington found himself leading a revolution, how Lincoln got us through the Civil War, and how Roosevelt pulled the nation out of a depression. They were never leading a parade.

Opponents threw everything they could at them. All of these presidents had flaws that made them easy targets for gossip. And the politics of accomplishing their goals were staggering. At the end of every long day they were completely alone, but they kept moving in the right direction, haunted by a still small voice that would not let them stop.

The most striking portrait of John F. Kennedy depicts him standing alone in the White House with his head bowed down, lost in a ponderous thought. I think he's arguing with the still small voice. I can hear him saying, "They will never buy it." But the voice just kept pushing him into his lonely convictions about leadership.

It doesn't matter if you are leading a nation, company, congregation, school, or family—a time comes when you just have to do what you believe to be right. You give up on consensus, being admired, or even appreciated. It's the inner voice you have to serve.

This is never how the leader begins. Even the process of being chosen implies a contract to serve those who made the choice, and all leaders assume that means figuring out a way to bring everyone together around a spectacular dream. But it just doesn't work out that way in the end. We shoot our dreamers. Sometimes literally, but always metaphorically.

There is something in our ever-so-democratic, antihierarchical, big-on-transparency, questioning-the-process affections that make us resist this core of leadership. But the Bible is filled with examples of women and men who had a vision from God and knew they had to throw their lives into fulfilling it even if it meant leaving town in a shower of rocks. It's hard to find a prophet, apostle, or Jesus in search of a grand consensus.

I understand that crazed suicide bombers also listen to voices in their heads. But that involves mental illness. And I know that many churches have been devastated by a messianic, narcissistic pastor. But these abuses of power cannot prevent a congregation from living out of a vision from God. There is nothing in the history of Christianity to support the "best practices" principle that a vision arises from a strategic planning retreat.

What we've always needed is a visionary leader, someone who hears the still small voice and is made lonelier because of it, but who understands what God means by a "calling." It's more than a bureaucratically sanitized job description. It's a holy passion that overtakes your life.

I often have the opportunity to talk to young adults about their calls. Some are clear about what they must do and just need advice on how to do it. Others struggle with the whole notion of calling. They talk in circles, show me their journals, and offer exegesis of their Myers-Briggs personality patterns. We pray. But they leave my office without either of us getting a glimpse of a burning bush. Then it occurs to me—they have no visions worthy of their lives.

Every leader has to begin with a passion for at least one or two great visionary ideas. In time the ideas will mature, and offer strategies for a focused leadership. But we don't shop for these holy ideas. They seek us.

A vision from God doesn't have to arrive through a supernatural revelation. The call can be stuck in a theology textbook that was abandoned after a final exam. It can arise through a late-night conversation with friends or on a trip to the West Bank. My wife once heard Nat King Cole singing "O Holy Night" on the radio. When he came to "till he appeared and the soul felt its worth," she couldn't stop crying. Heaven is inflaming bushes around us all of the time. The question is, are we paying attention?

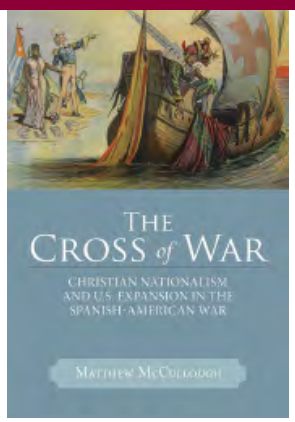
I am certain that we must. There is no such thing as a vibrant congregation without a leader who's been called to burning bushes and great ideas and is willing to surrender everything to them.

M. Craig Barnes is president of Princeton Theological Seminary.

IN Review

Baptizing empire

by Randall Balmer



The Cross of War: Christian Nationalism and U.S. Expansion in the Spanish–American War
By Matthew McCullough
University of Wisconsin Press, 218 pp., $29.95 paperback

Harry S. Stout's monumental history of religion and the Civil War, *Upon the Altar of the Nation*, has prompted other historians to write about the often vexed and complicated relationship between faith and warfare. Recent contributions to this long-neglected genre in American religious history include works by Thomas S. Kidd and James Byrd on the American Revolution, by Jonathan H. Ebel on World War I, and by Rick L. Nutt on Vietnam.

In this important contribution to the conversation, Matthew McCullough argues that the Spanish-American War signaled a crucial turning point in American self-understanding and self-justification. Although it was relatively brief in duration and occurred between two much larger conflicts, the Civil War and World War I, the Spanish-American War saw the emergence of what McCullough calls "messianic interventionism" to justify an increasingly imperial foreign policy. Religious leaders, he contends, played a crucial role in this transformation.

McCullough makes a persuasive case. Whereas the Civil War was inward looking and fought in order to resolve a domestic crisis, Woodrow Wilson defined the nation's task in World War I in far more global terms: "making the world safe for democracy." How did we move from A to B?

What McCullough describes as "an often forgotten little war" would seem an unlikely proving ground for messianic interventionism. From the mysterious destruction of the USS *Maine* in Havana's harbor on February 15, 1898, to the Treaty of Paris, in which Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines were ceded to the United States, the Spanish-American War lasted only ten months. Although no casualties should be taken lightly, the toll of the war was relatively modest. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, 385 Americans died in battle in that war, compared with more than 53,000 in World War I; according to historian J. David Hacker's recent estimate, perhaps 750,000 people died as a result of the Civil War.

By the end of the 19th century, McCullough argues, Americans were taking a keen interest in world affairs, partly because of robust missionary activity on the part of American Protestants. Although the perception—not unfounded—of Spanish misrule in Cuba might have predisposed religious leaders to action on humanitarian grounds, McCullough finds that they initially resisted calls for military action in response to the *Maine* disaster.

When President William McKinley declared war, however, these same leaders climbed aboard the bandwagon, initially framing their reason as "concern for oppressed humanity." As the *Christian Standard* opined, any war "should be in behalf of the weak against the strong, to secure liberty for the down-trodden of the earth."

Once aboard the bandwagon, Protestant ministers began spinning out theological justifications. The United States was both the Good Samaritan and the Crucified One. Henry Van Dyke of New York's Brick Presbyterian Church declared that the heavy cross of war "must be carried in the same spirit in which Christ bore his Cross and fought his battle on Calvary."

As the United States scored quick military victories, ministers began to ascribe their success to divine providence and the obvious superiority of American—that is, American Protestant—righteousness over the "barbarism" of Catholic Spain. Just as providence had sent favorable winds to help the British defeat the Spanish Armada in 1588, so too the Almighty had superintended American victories in the Spanish-American War, especially George Dewey's rout of the Spanish fleet in Manila.

Soon, perhaps inevitably, rhetoric about American destiny emerged. The United States is "a Christian nation," Methodist minister James King declared. The war with Spain was not primarily a military confrontation; it was a "contest in which the character of civilization and the interpretation of the Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount are involved."

How did Roman Catholics in the United States respond? In one of the book's most fascinating passages, McCullough finds that the "Americanist" bishops, led by John Ireland, resolutely lined up with the American cause. "No true American Catholic," Ireland declared, "will think of espousing the cause of Spain against that of this coun-

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try because the former is a Catholic nation."

Having rationalized the use of military force, the clergy turned their attention to a justification of imperialism. The United States itself had moved from adolescence to what one minister described as "a glorious manhood," and so America, the font of liberty, had an obligation to pass liberty along to others. Indeed, the rhetoric of development and coming of age pervades the era. "We have come to our maturity and take our place as a power," the *United Presbyterian* announced, "and we do so, not in the spirit of conquest or aggrandizement, but for humanity and right, for God and his truth." In McCullough's words, "a mature America led by the providence of God now embraced a responsibility to extend that freedom to others."

Not everyone jumped at the U.S. offer of freedom, of course, as indicated by the Philippine-American War—and by not a few interventionist wars since then. Religious leaders cast the American annexation of Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines as a reluctant duty, a variation of the "white man's burden," necessary because the people there lacked the moral character to govern themselves.

It's impossible to read *The Cross of War* without discerning the long rhetorical, theological, and ideological shadow that the Spanish-American War cast over successive American military engagements. When Wilson initiated a series of interventions in Latin America, for instance, particularly the Mexican Expedition of 1916, he explicitly invoked the precedent of the Spanish-American War. Further along, the parallels between McKinley's statement that he "went down on my knees" for guidance and George W. Bush's declaration that God told him "to go and end the tyranny in Iraq" are difficult to miss.

Although McCullough mentions 20th- and 21st-century wars, his analysis is not heavy-handed, and he wisely avoids the trap of presentism—he allows the reader to connect the dots. The Spanish-American War and successive rationalizations for both violence and imperialism have much to teach us about the malleability of theology to justify bellicosity.

Who's Afraid of Relativism? Community, Contingency, and Creaturehood

By James K. A. Smith
Baker Academic, 192 pp., $19.99 paperback

James K. A. Smith is a philosophical theologian concerned about truth. In this simply structured and transparently argued book, he suggests that the work of Richard Rorty can be a source of renewal even though it makes many conservative Christians shrink in horror. Hating Rorty, on the other hand, reveals the shortcomings of people's theological assumptions.

Smith perceives the preponderance of American Christians as people bent on security, comfort, and autonomy—functional deists and practical atheists whose vision is shaped by ideals of independence. Such ideals trigger a Promethean project of making themselves direct, rational, individual knowers whose status and knowledge cannot be subverted by unpredictable changes in circumstances. For such Christians, truth is equated with terms like *absolute* and *objective*, words that turn Christianity into a mechanism for achieving all-seeing impregnability. In order to preserve the power and privilege such a perspective is designed to secure, it's necessary—at all costs—to hold on to representational notions of truth by which one's interior impressions precisely mirror external reality.

But once it's acknowledged that Ludwig Wittgenstein was right and that language is a game that explains how rather than an arrow that identifies what, the whole edifice of solitary, independent knowing is in danger. If knowledge is control, then saying "it depends" is more or less the same as saying "it's not true." Hence the fusillade directed from conservative quarters at Rorty and his pragmatic companions.

As Smith acutely points out, this project is powerful and widespread—but it isn't Christianity. What is Christianity? Christianity is a form of life in which the

Reviewed by Samuel Wells, *vicar of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, London, and author of* Learning to Dream Again *(Eerdmans).*

conditions of our knowledge are coincident with our status as material, contingent, finite, created social beings. Thus the pragmatism of Wittgenstein, Rorty, and Robert Brandom, far from undermining any aspiration to truth, offers guidelines about where that truth is to be found.

It turns out that Christianity is pretty much everything George Lindbeck said it was in his landmark work *The Nature of Doctrine* 30 years ago. God is not distant, independent, and absolute. And salvation is not about displacing God and becoming all-powerful beings ourselves. Instead, in the incarnation and crucifixion we see God in Christ, who enters our contingent existence. Human flourishing lies in interdependent communities where growing in faith is like learning a language and where life together is made up of practices of grace and worship.

This compelling thesis is especially electric because it was composed by a professor at Calvin College and is thus a critique written within, not just about, evangelical culture. The broad outline—that the conservative gospel has become one of individual escape rather than ecclesial solidarity—is, of course, very familiar. And the remedy—the cultural-linguistic model of Lindbeck—is not new.

Smith does not develop Lindbeck's model beyond the broad terms its author offers. What's remarkable about Smith's book is that it takes a notorious enemy—relativism—and makes it a friend. This displays the right kind of confidence, a humble faith that's not looking to make itself impervious to threats but that listens attentively to its critics and realizes that they have the key to its own renewal. In this sense Smith admirably practices exactly what he preaches.

The style of writing is that of a restless, energetic, infectious college teacher. Each philosopher discussed gets a chapter, and in each case one key book is identified and expounded on, with key phrases repeated often. Frequently the language spills over from the introductory to the advanced, exposing the difficulty of fulfilling the book's modest and grand purposes simultaneously. The most enjoyable parts of the exposition are Smith's absorbing narrations of films that illustrate and are made intriguing by the arguments of each philosopher. These accounts are beautifully done.

Two other agendas are playing out here. One is Smith's larger project. He writes, "I hope this brief primer on pragmatism can be received as the philosophical springboard for understanding postliberalism, which is, in many ways, an embodiment of the religious and theological implications of pragmatism." He imagines his book as "the long-lost prequel" to Lindbeck's *Nature of Doctrine*, charting a philosophical path to Lindbeck's theological commitments. Smith's larger "cultural liturgies" project is concerned with exploring the hinterland of Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model and contrasting the character-forming significance of secular conscious and unconscious liturgies with that of Christian ones. Thus this book is an extended footnote to Smith's larger vision.

The other agenda involves a rhetorical

contest for the mainstream of postliberalism. Radical orthodoxy has consumed a lot of theological oxygen at conferences and among those pursuing doctoral studies in theology. Smith is making it clear that his notion of truth is different from that of some of truth's fashionable advocates. Smith sees Platonic notions of truth—where there are "forms" of goodness, truth, and beauty that govern meaning—as rationality from above. By contrast, Smith sees his version of pragmatism as very much a form of rationality from below. Plato's philosophy looks suspiciously like a different form of the same all-seeing impulse to know everything from a distance—the accusation Smith has against conservative, almost Gnostic, independent seers. In this sense what is latent in the book is the ancient tension between Plato and Aristotle, and Smith is upholding the Aristotelian flag and aligning it, as others have done, with both the philosophical school of Wittgenstein and the theological school of Karl Barth.

Reading Lindbeck's *Nature of Doctrine* was a threshold moment for me. It didn't cause a conversion; it gave me a structure and vocabulary for a transformation that had taken place in me over the previous two years. Smith's book is aimed at students who are more evangelical, more moviegoing, more sophomoric (Smith's word) than I was. But it could have the same effect on many. And in the process it makes a large step toward claiming Rorty as a fellow traveler for Christians open to a humble view of truth that emerges in community. It is no small achievement.

Medicine and Religion: A Historical Introduction

By Gary B. Ferngren
Johns Hopkins University Press, 256 pp., $24.95 paperback

The Cincinnati hospital where I work was founded in the 19th century by women of the Episcopal diocese to provide medical and surgical care for local children, but it has since become a large, secular research facility. Internationally known for its subspecialty research and practice innovations, the hospital receives referrals from around the globe. I have yet to meet a patient who came for the spiritual environment, though the hospital's pastoral care division employs chaplains of various faiths and denominations who are highly trained in theology, counseling, and the use of sophisticated assessment tools. Although some families develop therapeutically valuable relationships with pastoral care staff, what gets them in the door is our clinical competence in the applied science of medicine. Everything else is value-added.

Gary Ferngren's handy new volume on the history of religion and medicine in the West reminds the reader how new and odd this is. From the time of the ancient Near East until very recently in the economically developed countries of

Reviewed by Brian Volck, *a pediatrician in Cincinnati, and coauthor of* Reclaiming the Body: Christians and the Faithful Use of Modern Medicine *(Brazos).*

THE MARTIN E. MARTY LEGACY CIRCLE

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the Global North, the categories we now call religion and medicine were intricately related and often inseparable. But to the degree that the relationship between religion and medicine was acknowledged during my undergraduate and medical education, it was viewed as a tale of scientific progress triumphing over religious obscurantism. Using considerable recent scholarship that calls that Whiggish narrative into question, Ferngren reveals a richer, more interesting story.

Before surveying 40 centuries in a geographical area stretching from Mesopotamia to North America, Ferngren announces that his book is "neither a history of medicine nor a history of religion, . . . but rather an introduction intended for nonspecialists." As such, the book serves the interested novice while leaving much for scholars to quibble with.

What Ferngren does well is considerable. He recognizes that the "imaginative gulf" separating us from our predecessors obscures continuing challenges that technology and scientific control are unlikely to eliminate or solve: our own pain and suffering, our response to such things in others, and the question of how to make meaning in the presence of bodily limitations. Yet he also knows that most of what we moderns consider universal attitudes toward suffering and care are, in fact, historically contingent.

Ferngren begins his survey in the ancient Near East with the civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Israel, and the Hellenistic period. Buttressed by written documents and archaeological evidence, his narrative stresses complexity over uniformity across and within these cultures. If he perhaps devotes excessive attention to distinguishing between "religious," "magical," and "natural" medicine—as if such categories are unproblematic, transhistorical, and transcultural—he nevertheless demonstrates that ancient medicine was more than just charms and incantations.

Ferngren identifies fifth-century BCE Greece as the location and moment when medicine became a science as well as a craft. Greek medicine and syncretistic polytheism dominated the Hellenic, Hellenistic, and Roman Mediterranean. Another critical point came with the advent of Christianity, which built on a Jewish understanding that all humans are created in the divine image and that service to others—especially the poor—is a religious imperative. Ferngren demonstrates that Christian philanthropy, from the founding of the first true hospitals to Christians' life-saving ministrations to plague victims when wealthy non-Christians (including the famed physician Galen) fled for their safety, transformed the way persons in late antiquity understood what we might now call access to health care.

A chapter on medieval European medicine debunks several myths: that Christian Europe primarily saw illness as divine punishment or the work of demons, that the church banned scientific dissection, and that Christians systematically destroyed ancient medical texts that were considered pagan. Hospitals and centers of learning thrived in the Christian East, and monasteries were the conduits and repositories of medical

texts, learning, and practice in the West until the formation of the first European medical schools around 1200. Human dissections were documented by the end of the 13th century.

Ferngren's treatment of Islam, without which any history of Western science or medicine is woefully incomplete, is informative if far too short, sacrificing depth for scope. If Ferngren wants to leave his readers wanting more, he's successful in general, but particularly here.

When he returns to Europe to discuss early modernity, he relies heavily on the Reformation as his unifying conceptual theme, conflating Protestant Reformers with humanists (like Erasmus, a Catholic) and early modern scientists (like Copernicus, also a Catholic), regardless of confession, ecclesiology, or motivation. When Ferngren considers Catholics as such, as in a brief section on Tridentine Catholicism, his focus is on institutional responses to Protestantism. The Enlightenment comes almost as an afterthought. Although I understand that an author must make compromises when covering so vast a history, in this discussion I found myself more frustrated than newly informed and desiring more.

The chapter on the 19th and 20th centuries concentrates increasingly on North American developments, with brief considerations of Reform Judaism, renewed interest in miraculous healing among some Protestants, novel ethical challenges, and the growth of a secularized, professionalized, and bureaucratized health-care system. Ferngren then offers brief reflections on his whirlwind tour of four millennia in an epilogue, which includes the most tantalizing evaluations in the volume. Here he writes:

> Compassion is a quality that is fully compatible with scientific medicine and with progress in medical technology, but it is not one that grows naturally out of either. It is the desire to treat the sick patient, not in a medically competent and professional manner alone, which was the Greek practice, but knowingly and tenderly as a human being who bears the image of God.

Ferngren may be on to something, and I would like to see him better develop this idea, building it up from the historical record—including primary sources—rather than merely asserting it in an epilogue. Once again, he leaves the attentive reader wanting more. I hope he provides that in subsequent work.

A Political Theology of Climate Change

By Michael S. Northcott
Eerdmans, 345 pp., $30.00 paperback

Imagine the homes and cities of nearly half of the world's population under water; the Amazon rainforest turned into a desert; and most of the western United States, Mexico, North and South Africa, southern Europe, and Australia rendered uninhabitable and useless for agriculture. This is not the background of the latest Hollywood blockbuster, but a collection of predictions shared by many climate scientists and discussed in a major World Bank report titled *Turn Down the Heat*, published in 2012.

Given the contested nature of climate change science in the United States and the deeply politicized nature of related public policy, many Americans dismiss these reports as sensationalized attempts at fearmongering. Christian ethicist Michael Northcott sees the use of apocalyptic imagery in the climate debate very differently.

Northcott highlights how "climate apocalyptic" serves three functions similar to those of New Testament apocalyp-

tic. First, it unveils or demonstrates the ways in which humanity's actions are influencing and reshaping the natural world. Second, it warns that although changes in the planet and its atmosphere may have a disproportionately damaging impact on the world's poor and the marginalized, they will also harm the world's elite. Third, it is a call and an opportunity for moral and political transformation.

Northcott's starting point is the profoundly political reaction to the scientific consensus on climate change. He argues that this political reaction is due to the fact that the scientific evidence regarding the causes of climate change points clearly to industrial economies' dependence on fossil fuels as the primary culprit. He remarks that climate scientists have been surprised to find themselves accused of "anti-capitalism, corruption, fraud, perfidy, and selfishness" in political attempts to discredit their findings.

These attempts to discredit the climate scientists and challenge the anthropogenic origin of climate change are funded largely by energy companies and others who hold a deep financial stake in the continued maintenance and growth of industrial capitalism. Given that trillions of dollars in fossil fuel reserves of oil companies currently show up on the balance sheets of corporations and investment portfolios across the world, the morally necessary decision to leave those remaining fuels in the ground would undoubtedly wreak havoc on the global economy.

Northcott argues that impending climate change poses an apocalyptic moment of judgment on the present form of fossil-fueled consumerist civilization. This claim is made terrifyingly ominous by climate scientists' estimation that the 4-degree Celsius (7.2-degree Fahrenheit) rise in temperature that would prompt a radical reshaping of the planet will arrive by 2070. No wonder my 14-year-old daughter, like many teens and young adults, is obsessed with the dystopian literature and films that currently permeate popular culture. Young people fear that this will be their future and that their generation will have to figure out how to pick up the pieces of a world that is falling apart on our watch.

In 1992, on the eve of the world's first Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, then president George H. W. Bush famously declared: "The American way of life is not up for negotiation. Period." This determination not to make lifestyle changes is widely shared not only by many Americans, but by people living in developed countries who have designed their lives, livelihoods, and communities around a deep and abiding dependence on fossil fuel.

This dependence is not limited to the developed world. It is being exported to the Global South, where countries are encouraged to develop industrial economies as the path toward human flourishing.

Among government officials and economists who acknowledge the threats posed by climate change, the political debate tends to focus on the relative merits of carbon taxes versus cap-and-trade policies, or on how to capture and bury emitted carbon dioxide. Debates about how to mitigate the damage of fossil fuels sidestep the more fundamental question of whether we should continue to use them and how we can create viable national and international plans that transition us to social, cultural, and economic models that are not dependent on fossil fuels. The debates over mitigation also divert the public's attention from deeper ethical questions about how we are ordering our lives in the 21st century.

Northcott's book examines the ways in which our philosophical orientation toward self, others, and the divine shapes our worldviews and how these worldviews shape our perceptions of the crisis and our response to it. The neoliberal worldview that underlies and supports industrial economic development is a logical extension of the Enlightenment attitude that humans are free to shape the world and our destiny as we see fit. Northcott argues that the belief that we as humans control our own destiny and future is a theological flaw that must be overcome.

Reviewed by Rebecca Todd Peters, *professor of religious studies at Elon University, whose latest book is* Solidarity Ethics: Transformation in a Globalized World.

Given the interdependence of the natural world, mitigating climate change must be a planetary enterprise. The only course of action that will save the planet and not merely retain a place for postapocalyptic human survivalism is for us to overcome our current Enlightenment-inspired cultural narrative of human domination and control and listen to the wisdom of the natural world alongside the wisdom of the sacred traditions of Christianity—including covenant theology, justice in distribution of the fruits of the earth, respect for ecological limits, and attention to asceticism. This sort of paradigm shift will require the development of new narratives that can reshape our cultural, religious, and social understanding of our relationship with nature from one of control to one of partnership.

Northcott does a better job at demonstrating the nature and scope of the problem and analyzing the intellectual history and politics of the climate crisis than he does at offering a path forward, but he does end the book with a discussion of the Transition Movement, which focuses on the necessity of working together in communities of resistance and solidarity to build alternative economies and social structures that are consistent with continued human life on the planet. Regardless of how much we humans neglect our sacred duty to care for God's creation, the creation will survive our folly. The question is whether we will be able to honor the gift of God's wisdom, given to us in the form of the *imago Dei*, and reimagine our understanding of human flourishing in ways that reflect our interdependence with the rest of creation.

The Soul of the World

By Roger Scruton
Princeton University Press, 216 pp., $27.95

Philosopher Thomas Nagel has pointed out that a complete scientific description of the world would identify all the objects, forces, and laws of motion but fail to address one important question: Where am I in that world? Roger Scruton cites Nagel with approval, and his point is the basic theme of *The Soul of the World*: "Science cannot tell who I am, let alone where, when, or how."

The book is based on the Stanton Lectures that Scruton delivered to the faculty of divinity at the University of Cambridge in 2011. The location is worth noting. Cambridge philosophy has been haunted for years by Ludwig Wittgenstein, a specter not uncongenial to Scruton's own style of philosophy: Scruton's presentation is marked by allegiance to Wittgenstein's espousal of "ordinary language." Because lectures on divinity easily fall into insoluble profundities, this ordinary-language take on traditional issues is refreshing.

Nagel considers the question of how we use the words *I* and *you*. I address you, I implore you, I promise you: these are basic moves in any dialogue of moral responsibility. In the language of science, addressing, imploring, and promising are nonstarters. But I-you moral dialogue is not rooted in science.

In his initial chapters Scruton considers several sophisticated arguments that seek to undermine the integrity of moral discourse. Critics want to dismiss morality as the outcome of natural causes. Darwinists hold that supposed moral altruism is a genetic strategy for the preservation of the species. Modern brain science claims to locate morality in synapses related to pleasure and disgust. Scruton rejects all such arguments as examples of what Mary Midgley calls the fallacy of "nothing buttery": altruism is nothing but a ploy for survival of the species; moral discourse tells about nothing but my brain. Scruton contends that not only is moral discourse more than a natural reaction, language cannot be causally explained because it has intentionality. It is about something.

In the moral arena, Scruton cites with mixed appreciation Freud's view of the incest taboo. Evolutionary explanations of taboo relate to an intense desire not to do something, but the incest taboo arises from a primal disgust, like aversion to certain smells. For Freud, incest is taboo because we have an intense desire to engage in it; however, the taboo forbids it. Taboo is thus a negative moral injunction against a particular type of conduct for which we have a natural desire.

Morality asks for reasons, not causal explanations. The moral inquiry, "Why did you do that?" requires me to give some reason for my action. When you ask me for a reason, you probably want to understand my action, not to hear me explain it. "I felt like doing it" may explain my action, but it does not make my action reasonable. Reasons are more than reminders about how one happens to feel.

The dialogue of *I* and *you* creates the world of morality, beauty, and religion—a world in which humans are active participants, not merely scientific spectators. Scruton's position is dualistic, resting on a sharp distinction between the world of scientific explanation and the *Lebenswelt*—or life world—of human reasons and understanding. Having affirmed dualism, Scruton is at pains to note that this is a cognitive, not an ontological, dualism. The human soul and the "soul of the world" are not separate entities—the human soul as some "ghost in the machine" or God as a supernatural cause. Supernatural cause is a contradiction, Scruton argues; a cause is a natural event by definition. God arises in the *Lebenswelt*.

Scruton goes on to examine how the distinctly human world reveals itself in the human face, in sexuality, and in architecture, music, and religion. In a chapter titled "Facing Each Other" he elaborates on our perception of soul. "When I confront Mary face-to-face, I am not confronting a physical part of her. . . . I am confronting *her*, the individual center of consciousness." Regarding the other as soul, as an embodied subject, is "a well founded phenomenon," he writes. On the other hand, failure to see the other as soul distorts sexuality to "the pursuit of pleasure in the private parts." The fact that much pop culture accepts sex as nothing but pleasuring is an example of

what Scruton nicely labels "the charm of disenchantment"—the urge to be "realistic" that leads one to shoddy thought and equally shoddy behavior.

In *The Soul of the World*, Scruton recapitulates views on the human meaning of our built environment that he expressed some 35 years ago in *The Aesthetics of Architecture*. He extols the traditional "orders" of column, lintel, and arch that once gave a human scale to architecture, contrasting that classical style with the glass facades of contemporary office towers. The glass tower is faceless, glazed. It has no base or capital, moldings, or ornaments. "It escapes upward as though fleeing. . . . It concludes in nothing." The glass tower is not a place of human habitation, so the workers flee their functional cubicles for an ever-expanding exurbia. In contrast, a truly human city is founded on and centered in the temple, a place where the people's gods abide, thereby granting authority to settle rather than wander in the desert—or in the decentered world of global commerce.

In the penultimate chapter, "The Sacred Space of Music," Scruton says, with Rilke, that music is a "godly home." Why? John Scotus Eriugena wrote (as Scruton appreciatively quotes): "We do not know what God is. God himself does not know what He is because He is not anything. Literally, God is not, for He transcends being." How can something that is not, and is beyond anything we can know, be real for us? Scruton suggests that music is just such a reality. "Music is a movement of nothing in a space that is nowhere, with a purpose that is no one's, in which we hear a nonexistent feeling the object of which is nobody." If we apply "nothing buttery" to music, it would be nothing but one sound after another. But "musical culture . . . requires us to respond to a subjectivity that lies beyond the world of objects, in a space of its own. . . . Music addresses us from beyond the borders of the natural world."

In the final chapter Scruton asks the ultimate question: "Is the sacred merely a human invention, or does it come to us also from God?" Surprisingly, Scruton turns to Jean-Paul Sartre, whose *Being and Nothingness* he describes—correctly, to my mind—as "a great work of post-Christian theology." It may be the case that music transports us to another world, but real life ends in death and nothingness. In Sartre's novel *Nausea*, a character claims that Chopin had been a great consolation after the death of her husband. The Sartrean narrator comments, "What fools human beings are." Music is no consolation for the nothingness of death. Religion also attempts that consolation. Does it suffice? Scruton offers no easy answer; he quotes Phillip Larkin, who writes that religion is "that vast, moth-eaten, musical brocade / Created to pretend we never die."

Scruton interprets Sartre's stark vision that we come from nothing and go back to nothing as a doctrine of creation. As I-you we are created, unique beings that cannot be explained as instances of the species. The self is a creation *ex nihilo*. For Sartre our radical uniqueness rounded by nothingness is just a given; it is absurd. But we may also regard the given as a gift. Even an atheistic Sartre might regard personal life as a gift within which we advance the human project. In any version of life as gift, we bear the responsibility to honor that gift; wasting it is sin.

In an interpretation of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice the gift of Isaac, and of the cross as God's gift of Godself to humanity, Scruton offers a final account of faith and religion—not, in his mind, the same entity! His answer to Larkin: "The idea of salvation . . . in no way requires eternal life. . . . It does require an acceptance of death, and in the sense that in death we are meeting our creator, . . . to whom we must account for our faults. We are returning to the place from which we emerged and hoping to be welcomed there."

The Soul of the World is a short book that contains many insights about classic religious concerns. Clearly written and carefully argued, the text is rich and subtle, well worth reading and rereading.

Reviewed by Dennis O'Brien, *who lives in Middlebury, Vermont, and is author of* The Church and Abortion: A Catholic Dissent *(Rowman & Littlefield).*

NOTES FROM THE GLOBAL CHURCH

"What happens when you look at Christianity outside its Euro-American framework?

"That question becomes pressing when we look at numerical changes in the churches today—when, for instance, we realize that Africa will soon be home to the largest population of Christian believers on the planet.

"Although I describe my area of study as Global Christianity, that's a flawed phrase: if it's not global, is it really Christianity?"

Philip Jenkins's *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* is a landmark book for understanding contemporary global history. *Publishers Weekly* called it "a clarion call for anyone interested in the future of Christianity."

Philip Jenkins writes Notes from the Global Church for the *Christian Century*.

THE Christian CENTURY

Sheepdog or sheep?

In a scene in *American Sniper*, Chris Kyle (Bradley Cooper) is told by his father (Ben Reed) that there are three kinds of people in the world: There are sheep, helpless and clueless. There are wolves, dangerous and predatory. And there are sheepdogs, who protect the sheep from the wolves. The father's story serves as a justification for the career of the "most lethal sniper in U.S. military history."

In the opening scene, an Iraqi child is running toward a unit of American soldiers with a grenade in his hand. Will Kyle kill the child and protect his friends? Director Clint Eastwood cuts away, leaving us in suspense.

The suspense works. This is a riveting film. Every war movie is in essence a pro-war movie, even when it tries to be against war. The depiction of soldiers suffering on behalf of a nation makes us accept subconsciously the rationale: this is a great sacrifice for a great cause. The young men and women going door-to-door looking for bad guys in Fallujah or Sadr City are taking terrible risks on our behalf. It must be justified.

Kyle is no ordinary sniper. He has 160 "confirmed kills," and in the book on which the film is based, Kyle claims hundreds more "unconfirmed kills." "Aim small, miss small," his instructor says. "Aim big, miss big." Aim for a shirt button and hit the shirt. Aim for the person, and you miss altogether. Kyle never misses in this film. And everyone he hits "had it coming." He becomes famous for his exploits. When he finds the job too safe, he volunteers to go door-to-door with marine units, who lionize him for his expert protection.

But Kyle's work comes with costs. As he piles on tour after tour, Kyle's relation to his family deteriorates. He is irritable at home, flinching at noises and nearly attacking the family dog. Kyle's PTSD is mild compared to that of many others, but it extracts a serious toll on Kyle and his family.

When Kyle dies, his funeral is held at the Dallas Cowboys' stadium. The film shows his coffin set over the Cowboys' star and a bugler playing. We get it: this is an American hero. We are the sheep he protected.

This unabashed patriotism has made for great ticket sales—$169 million after two weekends. At my local theater the line wrapped around the block on opening night. Cooper is magnificent. He becomes Chris Kyle. I am sensitive to how often southern accents are done badly in movies, but Cooper's clipped twang is so spot-on Texan that I quit thinking about it after one scene.

While the sheepdog metaphor serves as a justification for Kyle's actions, his motivation has darker layers. He places a skull insignia from a graphic novel everywhere he goes—a sign of the Punisher, a character from the Marvel universe who keeps score of wrongs and avenges them. Kyle is more judge, jury, and executioner than sheepdog. His other insignia is a crusader's cross. This not-so-subtle sign plays right into the worst stereotypes of America's role in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Kyle never questions the premise that the world needs sheepdogs. While he's home on leave he receives a letter from a friend expressing fear and anxiety about his role in the war. Soon afterward the friend dies. "That letter got him killed," Kyle pronounces with shocking certainty. Questions should not be asked. Doubts should not be raised. Kyle does not think questioning merely wrong; he thinks it deadly.

WITHOUT A DOUBT: Sniper Chris Kyle, played by Bradley Cooper, didn't question the American mission in Iraq.

Yet the film raises questions. In one scene Kyle meets his brother on a tarmac in Afghanistan. On the surface, Jeff Kyle (Keir O'Donnell) appears far more traumatized than Kyle. "Fuck this place," he says. Why are we here? The question remains unasked and unanswered, but still hovers.

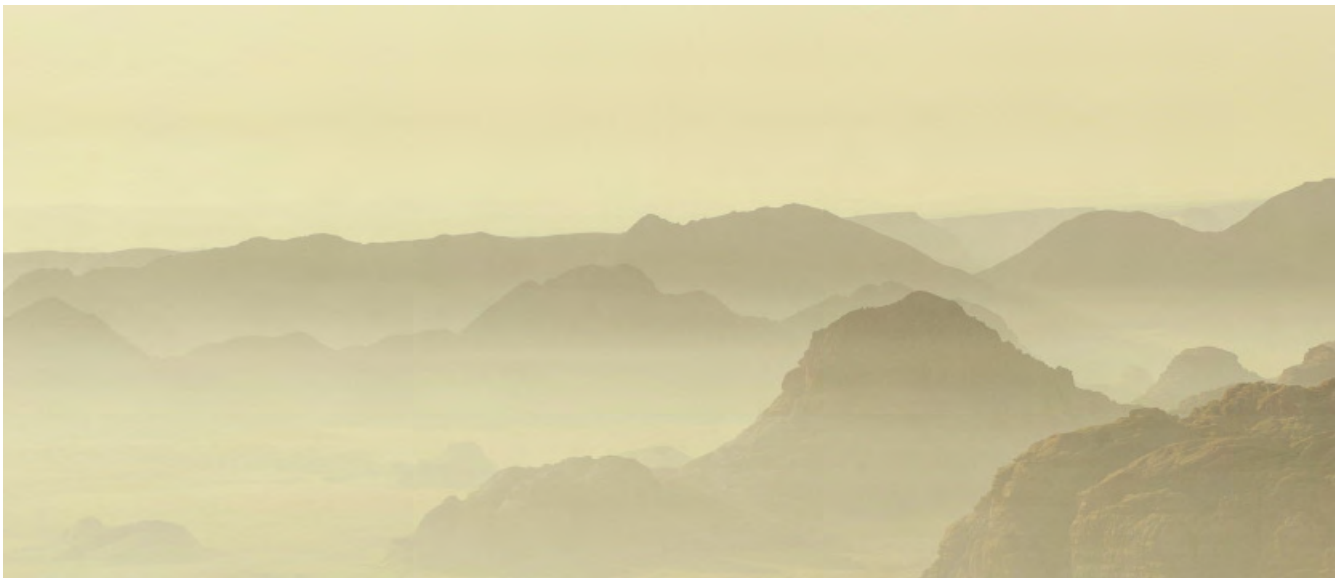
And when people fight and kill for "our freedom," who is the "we" they defend? Those who serve in the armed forces are often greater servants of our society than those of us who ask the question. Their lives are on the line, while the rest of us question the meaning of war from our safe homes, listening to NPR.

Yet in this movie soldiers ponder whether they are sheepdogs or sheep. Are those they kill deserving of death? In one scene a group of angry Iraqis cries out, "This is a good man you killed." The marines drive away, perplexed, unsure, and even disgusted by the sudden ambiguity. When you are the punisher, the avenger, even the protector, you fire first and ask questions later. Or never.

Christians tell a different story. There is one shepherd. We are all sheep. The thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. But the shepherd comes to give life.

How can we square this with the sheepdog story? I don't think it can be done.

The author is Jason Byassee*, senior pastor at Boone United Methodist Church in Boone, North Carolina.*



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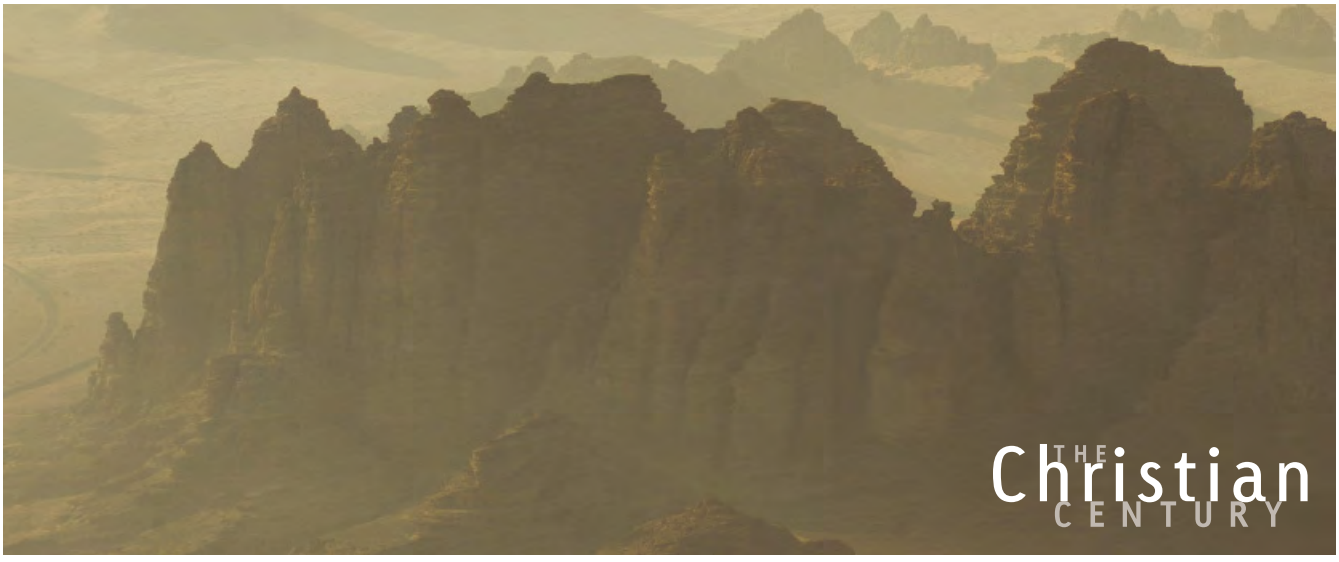
Faith Matters

"We need places to pray as if someone were listening, to study as if we might learn something worth writing on our hearts, to join with others in service as if the world might be transformed. Churches are places to learn to practice, with others, a continual conversion of life, a permanent openness to change."

(from "Soul experiments," Faith Matters)



CHURCH in the MAKING

by Carol Howard Merritt

Shut up and learn

At a meeting of ecumenical leaders working on church planting and evangelism, I noticed that the room collectively leaned in and listened carefully whenever the moderator spoke. He was Ruben Duran, the program director for new congregations in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Under Duran's leadership, the ELCA has started an impressive array of worshiping communities in homes and bars and on the streets and in train stations. These communities have found different entry points into conversations with their neighbors, gathering around ecological issues, or concerns about paycheck lending, or the need for day care. The Denver area alone has 48 new ELCA communities, and nationally 352 new communities are being developed.

The burgeoning ministries are ethnically diverse. Though the ELCA has strong ties to people of European ancestry—especially Norwegians, Swedes, Germans, and Finns—Duran reports that people of color lead 56 percent of the new communities. Instead of reflecting the established denomination, these communities look like the neighborhoods in which they are planted.

When I telephoned Duran to find out how the denomination is doing so much, he was hesitant—as most church planters are—to talk about strategy, and he quickly dismissed the idea that he himself is a moving force in what is happening.

"There are no formulas. It's about listening and connecting." Then, like most people who are really good at starting new churches, Duran began to explain his strategy, describing how the ELCA works to connect neighborhoods, denominations, and seminaries.

"Luther says we live in and through our neighbor," Duran explains. "Most of our congregations were planted for the neighborhood." But when neighborhoods changed, congregations often resisted transformation. Members began commuting to attend church. Then, Duran said, "the neighbors became the object of the church's ministry rather than the subject." Duran wants the neighbors to be the subject again.

The church's strategy is to "shut up and learn"—to listen and reconnect with diverse neighborhoods, including the working poor and young adults who grew up in the suburbs but are now relocating in cities. "There are so many people in our neighborhoods who are doing God's work," Duran said, "but they just don't know it yet."

The ELCA has set up a process by which men and women who have the gifts and skills for ministry but who haven't attended seminary can be full-time pastors—"lay mission developers"—serving with the blessing of the community and the bishop.

Duran has also worked with his own alma mater, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, to set up Theological Education for Emerging Ministries. The TEEM program allows students to take classes on campus two times a year and learn with a pastoral mentor while they remain in ministry. The program has 140 students.

"Seminaries are shifting very quickly," Duran said, as he described online courses that allow students to stay rooted in the communities they serve.

Duran points to a story in Acts 6 about the early church that inspires his work. When Greek widows saw that church leaders were giving Jewish widows more food than they gave to the Greek widows, they organized and pointed out the unfair treatment. The disciples responded by handing over the work to the community.

"That's what we're doing," Duran said. "We are getting people from the community to do that type of work. We are looking for the Greek widows."

A great deal of the ELCA's work has been focused on urban areas. While the movement of young adults into the city certainly makes this emphasis important, I wonder what can be done in suburban and rural areas, especially as some minorities are moving to the suburbs in response to urban gentrification.

Duran's energy seems boundless, but he admits to being overwhelmed. I cannot tell if this sort of work could be done without such charismatic leadership. Duran has great humility, even as he understands his unique position. "I'm very blessed that I'm able to test the waters. We have become a laboratory of ministry exploration."

"The Book of Acts was named incorrectly," Duran said. "It was the Acts of the Apostles, but it should have been named the Acts of the Holy Spirit. And right now, the Holy Spirit is writing a new chapter in Acts."

Carol Howard Merritt's Church in the Making appears in every other issue.

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ON Art

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***Christ Driving the Money Lenders from the Temple,* by Ippolito Scarsellino (called Scarcella)**

This painting of Christ driving the money lenders from the temple, by the Late Renaissance painter Ippolito Scarsellino, depicts a story told in all four Gospels. In John's Gospel, the event occurs near the beginning of Jesus' public ministry (John 2:13–22). Jesus is immediately identifiable slightly to the left of center in the painting, with arms raised and wearing a pink gown and green mantle. He has removed his belt and made it into a flail. The scene takes place on the porch of the temple in Jerusalem with the Solomonic twisted column clearly visible as one of the money changers grasps it while he stoops to collect the basket of coins he has spilt onto the ground. Sheep, birds, cattle, and horses are all present in the painting, echoing details of John's version of the incident and indicating that the temple has become a marketplace where sacrificial animals are sold and money is exchanged. One of the birds has escaped, and a young boy, oblivious to Jesus' actions, tries to trap the bird on a stick. Two women rush off while attempting to regain the attention of a child who is enthralled by what Jesus is doing. During the Catholic Reformation (the time of this painting) this scene, also known as the Purification of the Temple, was used to illustrate the church's need for reform.

Art selection and commentary by Heidi J. Hornik, *who teaches in the art department at Baylor University, and* Mikeal C. Parsons, *who teaches in the school's religion department.*

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June 22–26, 2015

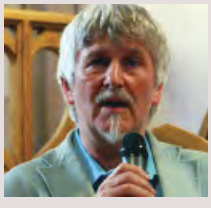
Reappropriating the Word

with John Bell

In this series of talks, John Bell will go beyond a Protestant preoccupation with "what the Bible really means," focused on a "right answers" mentality. Bell will open up a more holistic appreciation for the Word of God that values its intentionally diverse character and is informed by his interactions with scripture in contexts of social deprivation.

Registration: $299

John Bell, from Scotland, is a member of the Iona Community. He is a liturgist, preacher, and collector and composer of church music. His work takes him frequently to Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia. He is well known in North America from numerous speaking tours and musical compositions published by GIA.



The Curse of Literacy: Most Christians in every age have either been unable to read scripture or have not had access to a Bible. Yet these people have much to teach us about scriptural literacy.

Retell Me the Old, Old Story: Some of the most familiar biblical texts fail to excite, incite, or bless us because the way they've been commonly read and expounded owes much to the cultural norms of a previous era.

Missing Women: Finding a monogamous Jewish patriarch requires almost as much work as finding a virtuous woman in the Hebrew scriptures. Why is this and can the situation be redeemed?

The Importance of the Imagination: The imagination is sometimes seen as the bogus gift of the Holy Spirit. Without it, our understanding of scripture will most certainly be diminished.

What Shall We Tell the Children? Are there other pertinent scriptures to teach young people besides Moses in the bulrushes, Daniel in the lion's den, and the Baby Jesus asleep in the hay?

For more information go to wichurches.org and look under "events." Or call Wisconsin Council of Churches at (608) 837-3108.