

THEOLOGY & PHILOSOPHY  
**REVIEW**  
THE DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY & CLASSICAL LANGUAGES



**TLU**   
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TEXAS LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY

# THE *THEOLOGY/PHILOSOPHY REVIEW* WANTS YOU!

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The *Theology/Philosophy Review* is a collection of technical essays and non-technical writings (sermons, homilies, etc.) having to do with the vast range of topics found in the fields of theology and philosophy.

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## COVER IMAGE

BY RALPH VALDEZ, TLU CLASS OF 2011

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This pencil and marker drawing was inspired by the story of Hagar in Genesis 16 and 21. I believe it is a story about God's helping an oppressed woman to survive. In the picture, Hagar and her son Ishmael have been cast out of the house of Abraham and Sarah and are dying of thirst in the wilderness. In the moonlight, El Roi (the God who sees) opens Hagar's eyes to see the well that will enable her and Ishmael to live and thrive.

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## Life, Death and Resurrection

By Cierra Tingley (TLU class of 2012)

Throughout the Bible, the themes of life, death, and resurrection play an important role in displaying the power and reign of the God Almighty. Although each theme on its own has individual importance, life, death, and resurrection are subsequently interrelated. Life, states theologian Douglas John Hall, is “God’s gift for us.”<sup>1</sup> In the beginning, the LORD God formed humans from “the dust of the ground,” breathing the “breath of life” into our nostrils (Genesis 2:7). It is by the grace of God that we as humans are given life.

When it comes to the origin of life and humankind, however, two theories compete for the right to be claimed “the truth”. According to the scientific origin of life, our universe developed because of what scientists call the Big Bang, an event in which nothing suddenly became something, expanding to the extent of its current state (where it continues to expand). Within that universe, the planet Earth eventually was developed, and upon that planet, life began. In the eyes of science, we, as humans, are to thank natural selection for the advancement of our species. According to the story of the origin of life in the Bible, however, “God created the heavens and the earth,” and followed with the creation of man and woman (Genesis 1). Are these two stories of the creation of life as we know it compatible? Humanity has for several centuries struggled to decide the “truth” when it comes to our origins. The question is, do we believe science or religion, or perhaps, even both?

In reality, the compatibility of science and religion differs from person to person. An important factor contributing to difference of opinion is how literally or loosely one interprets the Bible. For literalists, Genesis 2 may portray God as molding the earth in his hands like clay. For more loose interpreters of the Bible, Genesis 2 may represent a metaphorical representation of the nitty-gritty process of creation—as is more interesting for storytelling. In this case, a loose interpretation may not necessarily create any obvious discrepancies when compared to the likes of scientific creation. The Bible was, in actuality, written by people; thus, it is their interpretation of faith, and likewise, our faith in that interpretation. The stories will never *per se* go hand-in-hand with one another, but the realms of science and religion may be in dialogue with one another.

At first glance, science and religion may look like polar opposites, since science deals with the physical world and religion deals with the spiritual world.<sup>2</sup> However, when it comes down to the basis of science and religion, both are searching for the same thing: the truth. Theologian Barbara Brown Taylor compares this resemblance of motive by reminding us that “in

the ancient world, science and religion were little more than two ways of being curious.”<sup>3</sup> In fact, the two were not considered mutually exclusive until the “definitive divorce” of the secular and sacred realms came in the sixteenth century, when Copernicus guessed that the world revolved around the sun instead of vice versa.<sup>4</sup> Rather than describing the two aspects as mutually exclusive, scientist Stephen Jay Gould argues:

No scientific theory, including evolution, can pose any threat to religion—for these two great tools of human understanding operate in complementary (not contrary) fashion in their totally separate realms: science as an inquiry about the factual state of the natural world, religion as a search for spiritual meaning and ethical values.<sup>5</sup>

While science poses no threat to religion’s creationist stronghold, it does share an important characteristic which is often overlooked: faith.

Just as the Lord does not appear physically before us, no one has ever seen the likes of a quark.<sup>6</sup> Murray Gell-Mann invented these “particles within particles,” quarks, in 1961 because he needed them to make one of his scientific theories work.<sup>7</sup> From the microscopically small to the phenomenally large, we can neither see the particles that compose us nor the cosmos that we are told lies light years beyond our atmosphere. Taylor alludes to this when she says, “That humans can even conceive of such things is phenomenal, although perhaps no less phenomenal than our ability to conceive of God.”<sup>8</sup> Likewise, we have to put just as much faith into science as we do religion. Scientists cringe at the inability to prove or disprove the existence of a higher being, when in fact the scientific theories they base their profession on can never be proven right. Some scientific theories, unlike God however, can be proven wrong; as technology and scientific insight expand, corrections continue to be made to what we call the “facts”. Scientific theories in relation to origins, however, are almost impossible to disprove as well because no one can replay the beginning of life or duplicate it in an experiment. Perhaps, religion and science are not so unlike after all. Who am I to believe in what occupies that vast space beyond our sky over an intangible Being, both of which I cannot, with my naked eye, perceive?

When presented with the facts of the matter, which from both sides are hardly justifiable with hard evidence, it is clear to me that the compatibility between science and religion differs for each person. Depending on your interpretation of the Bible, the two may or may not seem interrelated in your mind. I, as a Christian and believer in many concepts of science, have allowed room in my thoughts for both religion and science to roam freely. There is no concrete answer to the question, “Are biblical and scientific accounts of our origins compatible?” Therefore, just as we put faith into our belief of religion or

science (or both) we must put faith into our opinion about our origins.

While creation alludes to the basis of life, it is obvious that with life, one cannot avoid the idea of death. In the midst of life, Douglas John Hall says we as humans “are ever conscious of life’s inevitable ending,”<sup>9</sup> reinforcing the idea that life and death are interconnected, whether we like it or not. God wants life for us, but we “are kept from life on account of our preoccupation with death and all that death stands for by way of life’s negation.”<sup>10</sup> What exactly is death, other than life’s obvious end?

For biblical faith, death does not just refer to the “termination of life, [or] biological death.”<sup>11</sup> According to 1 Corinthians, death is the enemy, and more specifically, the last enemy to be destroyed in the end (1 Cor. 15:26), waiting for its final eradication by the Lord and Giver of life. Unlike common perception, death is not sleep, nor “an automatic translation into the realm of the immortals.”<sup>12</sup> Even though in our American society the funeral industry personifies death as a lavish ending, as our dead “rest in peace,” Hall argues that there is “no camouflaging the grim reality of death.”<sup>13</sup> Death is real, painful, and must be confronted in order to be overcome. Hall even suggests that death can even be seen as God’s servant, much like Satan.

As life’s negative, death is present in the Bible for the purpose of serving the positive, such that “death is there in order to enhance life and the beauty and joy of life... and has to be gone through before life can be experienced in something approximating its fullness.”<sup>14</sup> Life is moreover dependent on death, such that “life becomes the miracle it is only as we confront its antithesis.”<sup>15</sup> Apocalyptic literature uses the concept of facing death to experience life in order to capture the interest of the audience.

One element of apocalyptic literature and Revelation, says author Barbara R. Rossing, is the visionary journey, where a person travels “out into the future or back into the past, up to heaven or down into the underworld.”<sup>16</sup> The visionary typically returns from the journey with “an urgent message—usually a call for repentance and faithfulness,” or in other words, a wake-up call to change or suffer the consequences foretold.<sup>17</sup> One major example of apocalyptic literature in the Bible is the book of Revelation. The author of Revelation, John, is transported through a series of visionary journeys. He is confronted by numerous earthquakes, plagues, and extraordinary human and natural disasters. John’s visions are not predictions of the future, but rather, they are warnings of death and destruction, of what may happen if we do not follow God’s nonviolent Lamb, meant to “exhort us to faithfulness to God by means of a new vision.”<sup>18</sup> This new vision, in terms of Revelation, is to expose the Roman empire as the demonic beast of oppression, rather than the great eternal power it claimed to be, as well as present the Lord as the true power of the universe. John’s vision includes the reward for God’s people, after facing the tribulations imposed upon the

world, the beautiful city of New Jerusalem. The heavenly city of New Jerusalem descends from heaven, as the culmination of all God’s promises fulfilled: security, love, food and water without a price, tears wiped from our faces, eternal life, and the absence of death. God’s ultimate ending for his followers, who face the terrors of death, is not only the absence of death, but eternal life. John used his visionary journey in Revelation to reach out to those who were oppressed by the Roman Empire, portraying the death and destruction that would result from following Rome as opposed to the beautiful city and absence of death within the kingdom of God.

One way in which Hall says that life and death are connected (especially the life and death of Jesus to us as people) is through baptism. The death and resurrection represented in baptism are considered a connection with the death and resurrection of Jesus because baptism is the rite expressing that one has been adopted by God the Father as a child of God through Jesus (God the Son). Commenting on Romans 6, Hall says that “we are thrust down beneath the waters of baptism—we are brought that close to death—so that we may at long last face it and see through it to the life that is God’s gift for us.”<sup>19</sup> Paul expresses the idea that we must accept death in order to truly live when he writes, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4).

Not only is death considered an end, but Hall points out that since we are to live as Jesus did in life and death, we must have faith in the idea of rebirth after death, or resurrection. The divine Spirit “takes us by the hand... [and] shows us that [death] is also a beginning, that this death is entrance into newness of life.” In fact, Hall states that resurrection means exactly that: “Faith affirms that God, who gave life, can give life again—and wills to do so.”<sup>20</sup> In this sense, death is not only the ending result of life, but life is also the possible result after death. Little is said in the Bible, however, about life after death beyond the idea that we are to conform to Jesus’ life, (which includes resurrection).

According to the story of the Bible, Jesus Christ, son of the Holy Father, was crucified, convicted as a sinner on Good Friday for “preaching the imminence of God’s new rule,” which the imperial occupiers of Palestine had perceived as “a threat to their authority and peace.”<sup>21</sup> On the day that followed, Easter Saturday, Jesus’ body was entombed, sealed, and guarded behind a large boulder. Subsequently, on Easter Sunday, Jesus, the innocent and perfect son of the Lord, was resurrected, raised from the tomb from which his lifeless body was sealed. What does it mean that Jesus rose from the dead?

Professor Alan Lewis explains Jesus’ resurrection as “an event of exaltation and divine transcendence, promising that

God has erupted into the godless world and begun to finalize the reign of righteousness and love.”<sup>22</sup> The Holy Son, who “[became] cursed for us,”<sup>23</sup> acquiring the sins of humans and sacrificing himself in order to deliver us and save us from our sin, triumphed over evil by being reborn after crucifixion. Lewis continues by emphasizing that “God’s Easter acknowledgement of Jesus, and of all he did and claimed to be, was God’s Amen to every fellow man and woman among whom Jesus lived and alongside whom he died” and “what the good news of Easter does so stunningly to the Jesus story is confirm that after all, in this person who lived so humanly and with such inhumanity was put to death, we have been witnesses to heavenly love embodied and enacted.”<sup>24</sup> This triumph was not only over evil, but over the Domination System, the concept of suppression of others in pursuit of God. Walter Wink argues that “in a world sinking into ever-deeper injustice and violence, Jesus offers an alternative to the Domination System that just cries out to be tried.”<sup>25</sup> In fact, Jesus was killed because the reign of God went against the powers of the Domination System, and he died in order to swallow up the Domination System and establish the reign of God as all-powerful. Initially, Jesus’ death was seen as the Domination System’s victory. However, upon resurrection, victory was in fact in God’s hands. Therefore, Jesus’ resurrection not only means the forgiveness of human sin, but the triumph of God’s reign of love over that of evil and the Domination System that threatens the righteousness of humans.

How exactly was Jesus resurrected from the dead? It was the “vivifying power” of the Holy Spirit which raised Jesus from the grave. The Holy Spirit is indeed the “creator and giver of life”<sup>26</sup> and “nothing less than the mystery of God’s personal engagement with the world in its history of love and disaster; nothing less than God’s empowering presence dialectically active within the world in the beginning, throughout history and to the end, calling forth the praxis of life and freedom.”<sup>27</sup> Under the impression that the Spirit guided Jesus from the depths of sin and death to rebirth, an example is set that the Holy Spirit is with each and every one of us, through success and hardship. Not only can Jesus’ resurrection be used as an example of such a connection between the Holy Trinity and humans, but the event also represents Jesus, as the embodiment of God and the Spirit, as a medium, connecting the Spirit to humans. Proof of this connection resides in the evidence of the disciples obtaining similar miraculous powers to those of Jesus’ ministry days after the Holy Spirit made its presence at the Pentecost. Jesus gave the Spirit to his disciples so that they could share in the new life where sin, death and hell could not be binding. And by sharing the Spirit with his disciples, Jesus indirectly connected the Holy Spirit with the whole world, in that his disciples spread the Word of Christ and the Spirit as they ministered.

So Jesus’ resurrection means forgiveness of our sins and victory over the Domination System, and resurrection through

the Holy Spirit. Overall, life, death, and resurrection are important and interconnected. Life is God’s gift to the human race. Death allows for us to fully live, as well as connecting us to the opportunity of a new life, through resurrection. And resurrection, being reborn in the image of Jesus’ suffering, is God’s way of allowing us to be free from sin, death, and pain, in a new life.

- 1 Douglas John Hall, “The Church and the Cross,” in *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 148.
- 2 Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Luminous Web: Essays on Science and Religion* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cowley Publications, 2000), 3.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 6.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 *Ibid.*, 17.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 33.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 *Ibid.*, 66.
- 9 Hall, *The Cross in Our Context*, 212.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 148.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 *Ibid.*, 145-146.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 146.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 150.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 148.
- 16 Barbara Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, a Member of the Perseus Books Group, 2004), 82.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 *Ibid.*, 85.
- 19 Hall, *The Cross in Our Context*, 148.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 214.
- 21 Alan Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 49.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 81.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 45.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 80-81.
- 25 Walter Wink, *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York: Galilee, Doubleday, 1998), 11.
- 26 Elizabeth A Johnson, “Spirit-Sophia,” in *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 124.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 131.

## Living Humbly in a Broken World: Finding Community in Chaos

By Mallory Boenig Grau (TLU class of 2008)

I discovered at a very early age the true meaning of *chaos*. What was normal for my family had very little resemblance to normalcy in the outside world. As if being a middle child were not enough of a handicap, my mother and father were struggling to be parents to my half-sister, sister, and me. My father drowned his troubles with alcohol, and lots of it, while my mother's anger and violence made every day in our house unpredictable. My life, like the eggshells I walked on, was broken.

After my parents' divorce, we began attending a Lutheran church sporadically to keep up our outward appearances. There, I had found an outlet. I yearned to stay within those walls because it was there I felt invincible. Surely God would not let anything happen to me there.

We continued to attend on Sunday mornings, and I loved being there, not necessarily because I liked sitting through the twenty-minute sermons or eating cardboard during communion, but because the church was a refuge for me. Still living in a hellish chaos at home, the message of love, of grace, and of salvation that I continuously heard began to mean more and more to me. Though I was unlovable, someone thought enough of me to have died for my sins, and that was something.

After creating relationships among the members of the church, I began confiding in a pastor, telling her how my life was at home. She was deeply affected by my story, and she invested herself into helping me. After many late night or early morning phone calls and school visits, secret of course because my mother could not know, she took further action and contacted others. With immense effort from that pastor and other members of my church, I escaped my mother's house and moved in with my father. Suddenly, I was free. The verse that we had been slammed with in Bible study started to make more sense to me: "For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it" (Ephesians 2:8-9, TEV). Not only had I been given the gift of grace from God, but members of my church had given me another chance at life. They had heard my story and felt for me, and they worked to help me. Truly this was Paul's idea of the Body of Christ: "And there is no division in the body, but all its different parts have the same concern for one another. If one part suffers, all the other parts suffer with it; if one part is praised, all the other parts share its happiness" (1 Corinthians 12:25-26, TEV).

Though my life's story may be different from many of yours, I am sure that they all echo the same sentiments. It exemplifies

the chaotic, broken world in which we live. We all have endured hardships and struggles, and we all have experienced hatred and cruelty. We live in a world where equality is not equal, where the rich are out buying their umpteenth luxury car while the poor die of starvation or easily treatable diseases. While my community came together to rescue me, it is clear that such unity, empathy, and initiative is scarce. We are members of a Body of Christ that is not always functioning as it should be. We are a broken people living in a broken world. Yet, in spite of this brokenness, we are granted the gift of life, of wholeness, through grace by faith in Christ. "For I am certain that nothing can separate us from his love: neither death nor life, neither angels nor heavenly rulers or powers, neither the present nor the future, neither the world above or the world below – there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39, TEV).

Though we are saved through this grace through our faith, we are still left in this world of chaos and destruction. We have been redeemed from our brokenness, have taken refuge in the church and in the Word, and have heard the message of love and salvation, but we ourselves have not lived out that message. As Lutherans we cling to the promise of life by grace through faith and faith alone, but it is evident that we have not examined exactly what this means, nor have we realized the full implications of receiving that grace. "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8, NIV). We have been saved by grace through faith, but we have yet to fulfill our calling to our community and to the fellow members of the Body of Christ. Truly, God has required more of us. To understand what this means for us, however, requires that we examine the state of our relationship with God and our own capabilities and limitations. To know what our calling is and how we are to "act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly" within our community, we first must understand our own Lutheran theology, recognizing the differences between the power that is God's and God's alone, and that which is given to us through the operations of the Holy Spirit. Lutheran theology is a gracious theology, centered on grace and faith alone, but it is the thesis of this paper that our Lutheran theology is also one that requires action among the members of the Body of Christ.

### The Need for Justification

Our ultimate need for salvation – for justification – stems from our inability to live as God would have us live: a wholly sinless, good, and righteous life. From the beginning, all humans have been fated to live in this way. Since Adam and Eve's catastrophe of letting sin into the world thousands of years ago, each person born thereafter (excluding Jesus) has been marked with original sin: this innate "evil lust and inclination"

which we cannot overcome.<sup>1</sup> We, by ourselves, are not righteous and never could be. Thus, we need an outside party, and a pretty powerful one at that, to make us so. *Enter Jesus*. Seeing the world in total discord, God graciously sends God's Son to live a sinless, perfect life, suffer tremendously while on earth, and die a selfless and unjust death, all to remove our marks of sin. "For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life" (John 3:16, TEV). We need only cling to this and believe in the saving power of God through Jesus Christ to be set free and have life everlasting with God.

### The Role of Sacraments

The sacraments of baptism and communion, though having distinct and very important roles in faith life and the community of believers, have no direct effect on one's justification, in the Lutheran understanding, but they impact the Body of Christ in great ways. Baptism is taught as being God's way of claiming us, as "grace is offered through it."<sup>2</sup> Because God is the only one working in this act, baptizing young children is supported in the Lutheran tradition, as they do not have to contribute to or even understand what is going on for it to work. Though baptism is not necessary for justification, as it requires faith and faith alone, the sacrament is a way for God to reach us, even before we can fully comprehend the world around us and perhaps act out on our sinful dispositions. Through baptism we are not only claimed by God, but also by the community into which we are baptized. In this act we become a part of the larger community, the body of Christ.

Communion, too, is a way in which we receive grace, but we are aware and cognizant of what Jesus has done (and is doing) and what we are taking part in as we join others in the feast. This sacrament "requires faith and without faith is used in vain."<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that if one is doubting or struggling with faith that he or she cannot partake in communion or that it will not be effective, since Jesus has promised to be there in the bread and wine. Luther writes that communion is "not only offered to and received by upright Christians, but also by evil ones,"<sup>4</sup> and rightfully so, as Jesus chose the lowliest of people (those who were sick, poor, and who sinned often) to eat with, talk to, and surround himself with. Rather, it means that faith is required to understand what one is partaking in, the significance of the act and the great sacrifice for which it stands. It is in the Eucharist that we are united with Christ, as He promised to be present. However, we are to be aware that we are in communion not *just* with Christ, but with all believers, for all who are members of the Body of Christ are welcome to receive the body and blood of Jesus. In this, those who are in communion are made equal, united with Christ and each other, and also made aware of the sacrifice that was made for them. Communion is supposed to "awaken our faith and comfort our consciences" and also validates that we are "promised grace and

forgiveness of sin by Christ."<sup>5</sup> If we have no faith, then, this sacrament is not really beneficial to us, for it is through these acts that God comes to us and strengthens our faith by this confirmation of his love and grace.

### The Role of Good Works

Luther writes that we are justified only by faith: "It is clear and certain that this faith alone justifies us, as St. Paul says in Romans 3[:28, 26]: 'For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law'; and also, 'that God alone is righteous and justifies the one who has faith in Jesus'."<sup>6</sup> Works, then, have no part in our being saved. As Lutherans, we must know that we have control over things below us, that is, earthly things such as what we do each day, where we go, etc., but we do not have control over things above us, specifically, how God is active in our lives. Having free will of things below us, the choices we make every day "can to some extent produce civil righteousness,"<sup>7</sup> as good works can be performed in some capacity by electing to refrain from the most evil of actions. However, we know that, although God requires this civil, earthly righteousness, it has no bearing on our spiritual righteousness, which is much more essential. Even such an action as obeying the law of God is not possible without the Holy Spirit,<sup>8</sup> because, though our hands may do the good deeds, they follow from the Spirit and are "a testimony of [God's] presence and indwelling,"<sup>9</sup> "for what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit" (Galatians 5:17). Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:14 (NIV), "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." Our spiritual righteousness is "ascribed to the operation of the Holy Spirit"<sup>10</sup> as, without the Spirit, we are unable to accomplish anything of significance. Because we are not able to understand God or even believe in God on our own, as "it is impossible for the ungodly,"<sup>11</sup> we cannot, then, have power to influence such things. Understanding and truly acknowledging God as the sole worker in our salvation requires that we also take our own inventory, for we, as egocentric and proud as we may be, are helpless in this endeavor. It is in this vulnerable state, though, that we find ourselves humbled and most ready to carry out God's will in a manner that is beneficial to all members of the Body of Christ. For if our works are calculated towards earning this gift of grace, it makes it easy for us in some ways. We do not have to be so grateful for Jesus laying his life down for our sins, as we are contributing to and working for it as well. This belief and way of thinking, though, takes away the magnitude of the sacrifice that was made for us. "If a person is put right with God through the Law, it means that Christ died for nothing!" (Galatians 2:21, TEV). "Therefore, the blasphemy of attributing the honor of Christ to our works must not be tolerated."<sup>12</sup> Not only would this belief dishonor the suffering and death of Christ, but also would, in turn, place a lot

of pressure on us. When would we know when we had done (or if we even could do) enough to earn our own salvation? If even our best deed is done with some self-centered motivation or thought behind it, then would anything ever count toward our being saved? “For Paul (at the top of his voice, as the saying goes) cries out in Romans 3[:24] that ‘they are now justified by his grace as a gift,’ and in 4[:16] that ‘for this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be firm.’ That is, if the promise depended on our works, it would not be firm.”<sup>13</sup>

We, therefore, cannot be given control over whether or not we are saved because a) it has already been done for us through the life and death of Jesus the Christ, and b) even if our works were evaluated and counted toward it, they would not amount to anything. We must admit to our own powerlessness and rely on God’s redeeming power alone to save us.

Luther writes about two kinds of righteousness: *active*, that is the part which does the work, as God granting us grace through our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and *passive*, which is how we are then changed by the initial “active righteousness.” In this passivity “we work nothing, render nothing to God; we only receive and permit someone else to work in us, namely, God.”<sup>14</sup> It is here that good works fit in. Because of the sacrifice and gift of grace offered to us, we are overcome with gratitude and appreciation and love, and we know no other way to express it than to live it out and act on it toward others. “Since faith is a new life, it necessarily produces new impulses and new works.”<sup>15</sup> Faith, then, is not a product of good works, but, rather, the opposite. We are not justified by the good works we do. Instead, we are enabled to do good works, with the Holy Spirit working in and around us, because we have been justified through Christ.

### **Living Humbly in a Broken World**

Understanding now the mechanics of our theology, the details and implications of our beliefs, we can move forward to see how they apply to our lives and relationships within the Body of Christ. We believe that we are baptized into the Body of Christ with whom we commune and are saved by grace through faith. We believe that we are powerless in saving ourselves, and that our good works mean nothing. So, many may be wondering, what is the point of following the Law and behaving in a “godly” manner if nothing comes of it? Why should we treat others fairly as fellow members in the Body of Christ? The answer is simple: *Because it is how God would have us live.* God has given us power to help those around us in hopes that we would do so. We can see that we are called to a life beyond faith alone – a life that requires us to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly in this broken world. We are called, then, to rise up from our brokenness as a community of believers, the Body of Christ in its fullness, to live a gracious life as Jesus modeled for us. We are called to examine the life and death of Jesus,

realizing that, though divine, He was made human and suffered as a human. He befriended those who were unlovable – the lepers, prostitutes, and even the tax collectors – and broke down barriers between classes. He was an advocate for those without power or a voice, and suffered and died so that we all might live. We are meant to realize the immense selfless love in this action, to empathize and truly feel not *for* Him, but *with* Him, for we believe it is because of us that He died. We are to recognize that we are helpless in that we cannot save ourselves or others, and we are to be humbled. It is only then that we can move forward in living a grace-filled life.

When we feel guilty, torn-down and utterly ashamed, we are to look to the promise of life everlasting found in the Word. “By God’s grace you have been saved through faith... .” This faith comes from a full understanding of the sacrifice that was made for each of us. “Wake up sleeper, and rise from death, and Christ will shine on you” (Ephesians 5:14, TEV). This is the point where God picks us up and dusts us off and sends us on our way. We are lifted from our brokenness – our oppression, our hate-filled world, and our dysfunctional relationships – so that we may live life in a new way, for, truly, this new-found faith sets us free to live as God would have us live. Through receiving the gift of grace, we are called into a lifetime membership in the Body of Christ, an all-inclusive club with no annual fees or strings attached. Though we need only have faith to remain a part of this community, we are called by God and by our own individual consciences to live with purpose. Truly, if we really understand the incredible gift that has been freely offered to each of us, we must receive it and act on it. This is not an overemphasis on justification, as some have claimed of Luther, but knowledge of the gift of life, so that, if we have really understood the merciful love and grace given to us through the life and death of Jesus, we can do nothing else but live in appreciation.

Though my story is one with a happy ending, there are far more without such happiness. To live as members of the Body of Christ means that we be aware that we are only a part of a whole. We have each been equipped with unique gifts and talents that we are called to use “in accordance with the grace that God has given us” (Romans 12:6, TEV). In this, we have the power to make positive change in our world through God the Holy Spirit who works through us for the good of all. Through the use of our God-given talents, we must work together with other members of the Body to promote love, kindness, and justice. We must recognize our place in the body and our reliance and need for the other parts, resulting in interdependence between the members and great respect and humility among them. We must understand that every part of the body is essential to the overall functionality and efficiency of the unit. As a community we have tremendous power to carry out God’s will, with the purpose to “build up the body of Christ” and to “grow up in every way to Christ...so when each separate

part works as it should, the whole body grows and builds itself up though love" (Ephesians 4:12, 15-16, TEV).

Because the Body of Christ is not a sole entity, apart from the rest of the world, we must concern ourselves not only with how the members interact with each other, but also with how the Body as a whole relates to the world around it. In a pluralistic world filled with chaos and violence, it seems evident that what is needed is love and respect among groups of people. While this Lutheran doctrine governs our lives, we must be aware that it has no authority for many others across the globe. Yet, despite our differences, "humanity forms but one community."<sup>16</sup> While we hold tightly to our Christian convictions, we are yet of the very same essence as those who cling just as tightly to other religions. As the Eucharist reminds us, we are in communion with both Christ and humanity, though perhaps in separate ways. We, as members of this Body of Christ, are called to love as Jesus has loved us, even to those without our same faith. God did not limit our capacity for benevolence to only those within the community of believers, for that is not what was shown by God through Jesus. Rather, we are to recognize our similarities and work for those same qualities that we wish for within the Body – love, equality, and kindness – in the outside world.

As Lutherans in a broken world, we are no strangers to pain, grief, and oppression, both in our own communities and in those around the world. We have been given this gift of grace, this gift of life everlasting so that we may live it out in communion with God and with our neighbors. Realizing that we are powerless in terms of salvation is important, but perhaps more important is the knowledge of the power we *do* have to affect those around us. As members of the Body of Christ, we are called to live as Jesus lived, and, more specifically, to love as Jesus loved. Working together, we can find community in chaos, moving forward together with "one thought, one purpose" (1 Corinthians 1:10, TEV), and we fight the injustices our broken world holds. We must suffer with those who are in pain and rejoice with those who are joyful. Though we are saved by grace through faith alone, we must turn our faith into action, and love each other as we were first loved. I believe this is God's will. This is life for us, the Body of Christ.

1 Augsburg Confession II.2 in *The Book of Concord*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 38. (Hereafter cited as AC.)

2 AC IX.1-2.

3 AC XXIV.30, 70.

4 The Smalcald Articles VI.1 in *The Book of Concord*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 320. (Hereafter cited as SA.)

5 AC XXIV.30, 70.

6 SA II.4, 301.

7 Apology to the Augsburg Confession XVIII.4 in *The Book of Concord*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 233. (Hereafter cited as Ap.)

8 Ap XVIII.10, 235.

9 Epitome IV.15, The Formula of Concord, in *The Book of Concord*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 499.

10 Ap XVIII.9, 234.

11 Ap XVIII.8, 234.

12 Ap. XX.4, 235.

13 Ap XX.10, 236.

14 Martin Luther, "Lectures on Galatians," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 2nd edition, eds. Timothy F. Lull and William R. Russell (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 19.

15 Ap IV.250, 159.

16 "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," 2, available from <http://www.urbandharma.org/pdf/NostraAetate.pdf>; Internet, accessed 14 April 2008.

## Johann von Staupitz's Help and Influence on the Reformer Martin Luther

By Amanda Hall (TLU class of 2010)

Johann von Staupitz was a great contributor to the Protestant Reformation. Though he never participated in the actual reformation, choosing rather to watch from the sidelines, he nonetheless was a great influence. He is actually called by many the "godfather of the Reformation" due to his influence on Martin Luther, who was his student and close friend.<sup>1</sup> Staupitz offered Luther emotional support and guidance when Luther was in great need of it. He introduced Luther to ideas that were new to Luther and that Luther himself later preached. Staupitz showed Luther that sins are actually necessary, God is loving and not harsh and judgmental, the Bible is what one should look to for answers, and the Church's asking for indulgences was wrong and corrupt. Without this knowledge and support, Luther would never have become the great and influential man who started the Reformation. Though some of Staupitz's ideas are different from Luther's, and their years after the Reformation were spent mostly apart, Staupitz was still a great help starting Luther on the road to the Reformation.

Johann von Staupitz was born around 1460 in the small town of Motterwitz to a noble family. He studied at the universities of Cologne and Leipzig and joined the Augustinian Order soon afterward. He became a Doctor of Theology in 1500 and in 1502 helped Prince Frederick of Saxony open the University of Wittenberg, where Staupitz himself taught as the

first dean of theology for ten years. By 1503, Staupitz had risen to the prestigious position of Vicar General in the Augustinian Order. This position allowed him control over the German Congregation of the Observants, including Martin Luther's monastery in Erfurt.

It was during one of Staupitz's regular visits to the monastery at Erfurt that he first met Luther. Luther was suffering from "spirit alienation from God" at the time.<sup>2</sup> He was a troubled and frightened monk who was so confused about the false teachings of the time that he had truly lost his way. Luther was distressed that he was not righteous enough for God, that no matter what he did, he could never be saved.<sup>3</sup> Luther was so preoccupied with how sinful and unworthy he was that he had forgotten about Jesus' love and sacrifice and the promise of God's mercy. He constantly worried, to the point of literally making himself sick, that he was too great a sinner and that "Christ the Judge" would never forgive him.<sup>4</sup> Luther later stated that if Staupitz had not come along at that time, he would have "sunk in hell."<sup>5</sup>

Staupitz befriended Luther at a very crucial time in Luther's life. Staupitz had gone through similar feelings of doubt when he was younger, having felt the same despair Luther was then feeling. Because of this experience, Staupitz was able to comfort and support Luther better than anyone.<sup>6</sup> Luther stated that "[t]hrough Staupitz, the Lord Jesus repeatedly uplifted and strengthened me in the most wonderful way."<sup>7</sup>

Staupitz instantly took a liking to the troubled monk and, as his abbot, listened to Luther's troubles. Luther found it easy to confide in Staupitz, and was greatly comforted by Staupitz's advice and support. Luther was constantly going to Staupitz to confess his sins, sometimes spending as much as six hours at a time because he was afraid to leave even the smallest wrongdoing out. Most of the "sins" Luther confessed were "weak excuses and play sins" and Staupitz quickly saw that Luther needed guidance on this subject.<sup>8</sup> He said to Luther, "Look here, if you expect Christ to forgive you, come in with something to forgive – parricide, blasphemy, adultery – instead of all these peccadilloes."<sup>9</sup> Staupitz told Luther that he needed to have real sins every once in a while, for without sin, there is no need for the grace of God, and therefore no salvation.<sup>10</sup> Staupitz told Luther that "Jesus Christ is the Saviour of those even who are *real* and *great sinners*, and deserving of utter condemnation."<sup>11</sup>

Luther himself later teaches about the importance of sin that Staupitz introduces. He believed that one sin "is needed as medicine to cure another. An unblemished record engenders the worst of all sins, pride. Hence a failure now and then is conducive to humility."<sup>12</sup> Sin, though it is bad, is actually necessary. Christ dwells in sinners, so for a person to have Christ, they must be a sinner. Without sin, there is no need for anyone to depend on God. Contrary to many people's view at the time, God does not despise and refuse people because of their sins.

Staupitz helped Luther realize that God was not judgmental and harsh, but loving and caring, wanting to help Luther and forgive him of his sins. Luther was terrified of whom he called "Christ the Judge."<sup>13</sup> But Staupitz said that " 'Christ does not terrify; he ever comforts' " and that Jesus is not a judge but a sufferer, a sufferer who is able to identify with sinners.<sup>14</sup> Christ's wounds are proof that He was sent by God to show that God loves us.<sup>15</sup> This view of a loving and caring Christ also helped Luther with his fear of not being elected into heaven. Luther did not think he deserved salvation, but with this knowledge of a suffering Christ who could identify with Luther as a sinner and grant him God's grace, Luther was put at ease. Staupitz, with his kind words and support, "led Luther from 'utter despair' to the knowledge that he had a gracious Savior."<sup>16</sup>

Staupitz's theology, coming mostly from mysticism, supports this idea. Mystics believed that salvation comes not from good deeds that are done, but from complete faith in the love of God.<sup>17</sup> Staupitz even had a motto that went along with this idea of salvation, which was, " 'I am thine, save me' (Ps. 119:94)."<sup>18</sup>

One of Luther's biggest differences from the Catholic Church and something he preached about often was this idea of salvation. Many people believed that just doing good deeds would be enough to grant a passage to heaven. But Luther was taught by Staupitz that there was something more important and much more understandable than just good deeds. Luther believed that the only way for a person to become righteous, and therefore able to go to heaven, was if they had faith in God. All that was necessary was to believe in the love and forgiveness of God, and one would receive the grace that God had already given them through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Luther actually saw later on in his life that performing good deeds could be misleading, for when someone carried out the deeds, they believed that they were being righteous and that they no longer needed to depend on God for their righteousness. As soon as they thought that, they were doomed. Good deeds alone would save no one.<sup>19</sup>

With Staupitz's support and guidance, Luther's despair was starting to lift, but not as much as Staupitz would have liked. Staupitz decided that the only way to help Luther was to get him so busy he would not have time to think about anything else. In 1507, Staupitz convinced Luther to take up preaching in an Augustinian monastery and to teach at the University of Wittenberg. He also convinced Luther to study for the Doctorate of Divinity at the University.<sup>20</sup> Or rather, instead of convincing, he practically forced Luther to do it. Luther was against the idea of doing any more work than he was already doing. He was still suffering from physical ailments and did not think his body could handle any more stress. When he told Staupitz of this concern, Staupitz merely laughed, saying that if Luther did die from the stress, God could always use a good advisor like Luther. Luther finally agreed to do it, refusing just short of breaking his monastic vows.<sup>21</sup>

Staupitz believed that if Luther assumed more responsibility, it would distract Luther from his troubles. He thought that if Luther preached to others, it would force Luther to read and understand the Bible better. Staupitz basically took up the philosophy: “Physician, cure thyself by curing others.”<sup>22</sup> He thought that if Luther had to teach and preach to others, he would obtain a better understanding of God’s teachings. Needless to say, it worked. Luther benefited greatly from teaching at the University of Wittenberg. He became an expert on the Bible, which later became his chief source of information, along with the works of St. Augustine.<sup>23</sup> Luther believed in going back to the sources, and the Bible was the ultimate source for theologians.

It was, in fact, Staupitz who first told Luther that it was the Bible that held all the answers. Staupitz had told Luther to “ [l]et the study of the Scriptures...be your favourite occupation.”<sup>24</sup> The Bible was what held the truths, not the other writings that Luther was reading while still a monk at Erfurt. Since Luther was having a difficult time understanding God, Staupitz felt this confusion would be best cured with studying the Bible.

Staupitz was also the first to get Luther involved with the issue of indulgences. Staupitz himself greatly opposed the idea of indulgences, speaking openly against them.<sup>25</sup> This dislike for indulgences led Luther to write the Ninety-Five Theses in 1517, which was a complaint against the Catholic Church’s sale of indulgences. The Theses are generally considered the starting point of the Reformation.

Luther learned much from Staupitz. Luther considered him as something of a father-figure, and even called him “*in Christo suavissimo Patri*,” meaning “most beloved father in Christ.”<sup>26</sup> Staupitz showed Luther that his sufferings were not in vain, but were given to him by God to strengthen him. These words comforted Luther, and gave him courage to continue.<sup>27</sup>

Luther and Staupitz shared a happy and very close friendship for many years. But it unfortunately did not last. After Luther posted the Ninety-Five Theses, he began getting enormous pressure from the papacy to recant his radical views. Around the time of the Diet of Worms in 1521, Staupitz also began feeling the pressure. Everyone knew that Staupitz was close to Luther, and they pushed Staupitz to convince Luther to recant. At first, Staupitz resisted, saying that he was not equal to Luther in intellect or knowledge, and that it was the pope’s job, and not his, to make Luther recant. However, Staupitz continued to feel pressured from the papacy.<sup>28</sup>

The pressure became so great that, for both his and Luther’s sake, Staupitz released Luther of his monastic vows. Staupitz did not want the responsibility of forcing Luther, and he wanted to protect Luther from any punishment he might receive as a member of the order.<sup>29</sup> He probably also did it in order to protect the Augustinian Order from having to take responsibility for Luther’s actions.<sup>30</sup>

Even though Staupitz no doubt meant well, Luther saw this as an act of betrayal. He felt rejected and disowned. Having recently been excommunicated by the pope, and now abandoned by his closest friend and advisor, Luther felt utter despair. Staupitz had been Luther’s anchor, the one who encouraged and supported him. Luther was now “ ‘utterly alone.’ ”<sup>31</sup> Luther even experienced a dream, which he later recounted to Staupitz in a letter, in which Staupitz was abandoning him.<sup>32</sup> This shows just how heavily Staupitz’s rejection affected Luther.

Their friendship was never the same after that. Staupitz began to drift further and further away from Luther. He was only “lukewarm to the Reformation” in the first place, and did not want to get any more involved.<sup>33</sup> He had no desire to “go beyond the sphere of action which he thought assigned to him,” and, as the Reformation went further and further, he grew more and more opposed to it.<sup>34</sup> He saw it as radical, and “not the true reclamation of the gospel.”<sup>35</sup> Staupitz even wrote an open letter to the pope just before the Diet of Worms in 1521 in which he said it was the Pope’s leadership and judgment he would follow. It was meant only as a compromise to ease the tension, but many people interpreted it as though Staupitz was renouncing Luther’s reforming work.<sup>36</sup> This put further pressure on their friendship.

Luther became more and more disappointed in Staupitz. He wrote to Staupitz several times, receiving no answers. In one letter he wrote that Staupitz seemed to “ ‘hesitate between Christ and the pope’ ”<sup>37</sup> and reminded Staupitz that the pope was denying everything about God’s mercy that Staupitz himself had once taught Luther.<sup>38</sup> In Luther’s eyes, Staupitz was abandoning not only Luther, but God, by choosing to remain silent.

Luther tried to turn Staupitz’s thoughts around and get Staupitz to join him in his fight against the Catholic Church. He rebuked Staupitz for his cowardly behavior, saying that the time had come where he should not shrink away in fear, but stand up for the sake of Christ.<sup>39</sup> But Staupitz did shrink away, leaving the much-involved Augustinian order in April 1522 and joining the Benedictine order, which was more disconnected from the conflict. Luther was very disappointed in him and expressed his disappointment openly.<sup>40</sup>

As time passed, however, Luther’s anger diminished a little. In 1523, Luther wrote a letter to Staupitz, saying, “ ‘[E]ven if you are no longer pleased with me, it is not fitting that I should forget you, who first made the light of the gospel shine in my heart.’ ”<sup>41</sup> Luther still felt he owed Staupitz everything. He was willing to acknowledge that without Staupitz, he would not have emerged from his depression and become such an influential person.

Staupitz’s reply, too, showed that he was willing to talk to Luther again. In his letter, he tried to excuse his lack of support by saying that, “ ‘on the account of the slowness of my mind, I do not grasp all your ideas and so keep silent about them.’ ” But

he did manage to agree, if just a little, with what Luther was doing by saying that “ [w]e owe you much, Martin’.”<sup>42</sup>

This reply was the last letter Staupitz would ever send Luther. He died less than a year later, on December 28, 1524. Luther was devastated by Staupitz's passing. It is said that Luther, after Staupitz's death, did not speak of him for seven years.<sup>43</sup> Though Staupitz did not agree with and support Luther in his later years, he was nonetheless a very valuable friend to Luther. His help was never forgotten.

There are some historians, however, who believe that Staupitz does not deserve as much credit as he receives. They do not believe that Staupitz influenced and helped Luther as much as is generally acknowledged. Martin Brecht is one who has this view. In his opinion, Staupitz's view of Christ was somewhat different than Luther's. Staupitz's view was nothing more than an altered view of the medieval Christ, and had little similarity with Luther's "reformed" Christ. Luther's reformed view did not occur until he had left Erfurt, at which time he was not in close contact with Staupitz.<sup>44</sup> Preserved Smith believes that Staupitz was not as influential as everyone thinks, mentioning the fact that "even Staupitz did not rightly understand [Luther]." Smith's thinking was that if Staupitz was unable to understand Luther, it is unlikely that he influenced Luther's thinking as much as is believed.<sup>45</sup>

Heiko A. Oberman pointed out a few of their dissimilarities, mainly their view on the Devil. Luther, of course, saw the Devil as a constant and ever-threatening menace for Christians, waiting to pounce and trick them into sinning. He felt that the Devil was all around, threatening the world. But Staupitz saw the Devil as not much of a threat, at least not as much as Luther did. He saw the Devil as only a slight temptation, to where "the 'just' are only 'temporarily' exposed to enemies." The Devil's territory was not the whole world, as Luther believed, but rather was restricted by God to something very small. Staupitz also did not believe that the Devil was about to attack full-force, and therefore bring about the Last Days, something Luther believed and dreaded most of his life.<sup>46</sup>

The two friends' ideas on joyful exchange, in which Jesus takes in our sins and gives us His righteousness, were also different. Staupitz thought that once the joyful exchange has happened, the faithful are free from their burdens and can find peace from the Devil. The righteousness that they received through Jesus can be fully experienced then. But Luther felt that the Devil was always around, waiting to tempt people. Just because someone received the joyful exchange did not mean they were immune to the Devil's tempting. If anything, a person who has received this gift has a greater chance of being swayed because the Devil, feeling challenged, attacks those the hardest. Luther did not believe there was ever a lapse from the battle with the Devil.<sup>47</sup>

Even though there are many differences between Staupitz and Luther, not only in their theology but also in their character,

there can be no denying that Staupitz influenced Luther greatly. Staupitz's support and teaching was the starting point for Luther to make his own discoveries. By showing Luther how important sins are, how God is loving and not harsh, how the Bible is the ultimate source, and how corrupt indulgences are, Staupitz gave Luther courage to develop his own ideas. Without Staupitz as Luther's starting point, it would be hard to imagine a Reformation with Luther in it.

- 1 Walter G. Tillmanns, *The World and Men around Luther* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959), 317.
- 2 Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), 54.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1985), 75.
- 5 Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 53.
- 6 Stephen Strehle, *The Catholic Roots of the Protestant Reformation: Encounter Between the Middle Ages and the Reformation* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1995), 20.
- 7 Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1911), 180.
- 8 Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 69.
- 9 Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 54.
- 10 Ibid., 226.
- 11 J. H. d'Aubigné, *History of the Great Reformation of the Sixteenth Century in Germany, Switzerland, etc.* (Philadelphia: James M. Campbell & Co., 1844), 48.
- 12 Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 226.
- 13 Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 75.
- 14 d'Aubigné, *History of the Great Reformation of the Sixteenth Century in Germany, Switzerland, etc.*, 50.
- 15 Oberman, *Luther*, 182.
- 16 Tillmanns, *The World and Men around Luther*, 317.
- 17 Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 56-57.
- 18 Oberman, *Luther*, 182.
- 19 Luther, Scholia on Psalm 5: On Hope, in *Luther's Spirituality*, ed. Philip D. W. Krey and Peter D. S. Krey (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), 59-68.
- 20 John L. Hoh, Jr., "Johann von Staupitz." 7 January 2003, <<http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/lutheranism/97859/1>> (29 February 2008).
- 21 Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 125-126.
- 22 Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 60.
- 23 d'Aubigné, *History of the Great Reformation of the Sixteenth Century in Germany, Switzerland, etc.*, 49.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 188.
- 26 Oberman, *Luther*, 101.
- 27 d'Aubigné, *History of the Great Reformation of the Sixteenth Century in Germany, Switzerland, etc.*, 48.

- 28 Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 257.
- 29 Preserved Smith, *The Life and Letters of Martin Luther* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 51.
- 30 Hoh, "Johann von Staupitz." <<http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/lutheranism/97859/1>>
- 31 Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 336.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Hoh, "Johann von Staupitz." <<http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/lutheranism/97859/1>>
- 34 d'Aubigné, *History of the Great Reformation of the Sixteenth Century in Germany, Switzerland, etc.*, 47.
- 35 Hoh, "Johann von Staupitz," <<http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/lutheranism/97859/1>>.
- 36 Smith, *The Life and Letters of Martin Luther*, 107-108.
- 37 Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 174.
- 38 Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 428.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Oberman, *Luther*, 183.
- 41 Smith, *The Life and Letters of Martin Luther*, 183.
- 42 Tillmanns, *The World and Men around Luther*, 319.
- 43 Oberman, *Luther*, 101-102.
- 44 Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 79.
- 45 Smith, *The Life and Letters of Martin Luther*, 14.
- 46 Oberman, *Luther*, 184.
- 47 Ibid.

## A Case Study in Culture – II Kings 5

By Harry G. Foster, III

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This paper presents an analysis of the dynamics of social relationships among selected segments of the social strata of 9<sup>th</sup> BCE Israel. In II Kings 5, we read a story of the interactions of the political, military and religious elites of that period as well as insights and actions of their supporters. The original intent of the final compiler of this portion of the Deuteronomistic History most likely was to enhance the legitimacy of Elisha's prophetic office. However in accomplishing that, the editor has also provided us with an unexpected glimpse into the social order of the day. As one commentator writes: "The story links up with the preceding narratives in its emphasis on the role of 'servants' and on Elisha's power over the lives of others. It widens the perspective of the legend sequence by depicting the prophet using his powers on behalf of a Gentile enemy."<sup>1</sup>

My analysis of the characters presented examines: 1) their faith in God as demonstrated by what they say and do and 2) the cultural appropriateness of their behaviors as measured by the responses to their words and actions.

There are eight characters presented in the story. They may be clustered in four groups according to their social position and interactions with others. First are Elisha and Naaman. Second are the unnamed kings of Syria and Israel. A third group is represented as the supporting cast of various servants. The fourth is Gehazi who, though a servant, stands in a category by himself. While God is mentioned, note that any "presence of God" remains basically in the background.

### ANALYSIS

#### Elisha and Naaman

##### Faith in God

Elisha, identified in verse 8 (all biblical references are from the RSV) as a "man of God," speaks five times. He instructs the King of Israel to send Naaman to him so that Elisha may demonstrate that a prophet of God indeed resides in Israel (vs. 8). This reflects a measure of Elisha's self awareness, faith and confidence of God's activity in his life and ministry. We also note a measure of boldness as Elisha tells his king what to do. Elisha indirectly tells Naaman to bathe (vs. 10) with no biblical disclosure that this is at God's direction. All of Elisha's actions reinforce the confidence of the man's self awareness, faith and confidence in God's willingness to act through him. At the close of this story, Elisha avoids any implication that his powers are other than a gift of divine providence by declining Naaman's offer of a reward (vs. 16).

Has Naaman become a believer? Possibly. Naaman declares faith in Israel's God but this only occurs after his successful healing (vs. 15). Naaman requests Israelite soil for his use in making offerings and sacrifices on his return to Syria. But, he apparently also has the responsibility of accompanying the king of Syria to Rimmon worship. Naaman asks Elisha, "In this matter may the LORD pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon, leaning on my arm, and I bow myself (underlining mine) in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon your servant in this matter (vs. 18)." His statement reflects widespread views of that time that gods are seen as national gods of particular lands (vs. 15).

Elisha ends their encounter with a blessing of peace (vs.19) even as Naaman acknowledges that he will continue to worship the Syrian god, Rimmon. "Elisha expresses understanding for the compromises Naaman has to make."<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the most we may conclude about Naaman is that he is a man of faith, i.e. aware of divine action or intervention in the lives of humans; but, that his YHWH faith is not sufficiently strong to permit him to exclusively worship God revealed in Israel. Naaman's awareness of temporal political realities, combined with his own exalted status, will not permit him to act fully on any potential new faith in the LORD.

### Appropriate Human Behavior

Elisha's behavior is appropriate as he accepts and acts as God's prophet. However, in not personally greeting Naaman (vs. 10), Elisha does not demonstrate the expected social and cultural deference to a man of Naaman's power and position.<sup>3</sup> This may explain Naaman's anger (vs. 12) on being instructed to bathe in Israelite waters.

Naaman was socially and politically correct in going first to his king for permission (vs. 4) and then to Israel's king (vs. 5b) who Naaman would assume was the proper person to see in Israel. As one who understands political power, Naaman sees this as correct human behavior. That Naaman felt slighted by Elisha's sending a mere servant further illustrates Naaman's sense of social status and of his own sense of superiority vis-à-vis Elisha (vs. 11). For Naaman, commanders and kings are greater than men of God, regardless of whose god may be involved.

### **The Two Kings**

#### Faith in God

Neither king displays faith in any god though we have Naaman's report of accompanying the Syrian king to Rimmon worship. The measure or sincerity of the Syrian king's worship is not disclosed. It could range from sincere devotion to Rimmon to a prudent mixing of religious and state relations.

### Appropriate Human Behavior

The two kings operate within appropriate human behaviors consistent with their social and political status. The Syrian king, in sending an emissary into another king's territory, does so with a letter of introduction (vs. 5), much as today's ambassadors might present. The letter would most likely indicate who the envoy is and the nature of his business.<sup>4</sup> The king of Israel quickly reacts with suspicion and fear which gives us insight as to the relative balance of power between the two kingdoms. Also interesting is the absence of any report of the Israelite king seeking any court advice and counsel. Rather, the Israelite king assumes that he is to do the healing.<sup>5</sup> He quickly concludes that this is but some pretext to war (vs. 7). Neither king plays any role in the healing.

### **The Supporting Characters**

#### Faith in God

By referring Naaman to Elisha, the "little maid" may be showing faith toward her God and her homeland even as an unwilling prisoner (vs. 2) in a distant land. However, her behavior could also be viewed differently. She might just be accepting her present captive status and is merely seeking to be a good and faithful servant. In the story, she serves the useful role in starting the process which brings Naaman and Elisha together.

Both Elisha and Naaman interact through their respective servants with two exceptions: Naaman's direct offer of a gift to Elisha (vs. 15) and their discussion of Israelite soil. None of the servants, the "little maid" excepted, express even an implied faith in any god, Syrian or Israelite. The advice from Naaman's servant to follow Elisha's bathing instructions is not an act of faith. The servant seems only to urge that his master follow the bathing instructions since his master has been long plagued by his disease (vs. 13).

### Appropriate Human Behavior

The servants of both Elisha and Naaman act as loyal servants. Gehazi is the exception; more on him below. Both men's servants act as instructed and with the best interests of their particular master in mind. They act as "good, loyal troops" toward their social superiors.

### **Gehazi**

Enter the opportunist! From the viewpoint of the II Kings editors, Gehazi shows neither faith in God nor appropriate human behavior toward either God or man. As Elisha's servant, it is reasonable to assume that Gehazi must have been aware of the God of Israel. He would have witnessed interactions between God and Elisha. Yet, the temptation for gain was more than he could resist. And, why not? Naaman initiated the offer of a gift. Why would anyone refuse such an offer, especially from a foreigner? Gehazi shows no expression of a faith role or responsibility toward God. He seems to accept his place as a servant and yet is more than willing to improve his lot (vs. 20). Nor does he seem overly greedy in asking for one talent, nor in accepting two talents, an act of generosity on Naaman's part. Gehazi's consciousness of having done wrong is realized only in his later conversation with Elisha when Gehazi denies having gone anywhere, an almost child-like response of denial (vs. 25). His ensuing punishment, from the viewpoint of the biblical authors, is well within biblical traditions, cf: the Golden Calf, Exodus 32, and Aachen in Joshua 7, or perhaps even from a New Testament consideration, Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5.

The theological message of the II Kings author is that Gehazi's actions are not appropriate human behavior. "Once again, the point is made that no one can trifle with a prophet with impunity."<sup>6</sup> The biblical writer, while perhaps being realistic in identifying self-seeking human behavior, declares such behavior ethically unacceptable for the LORD'S followers.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

This II Kings story gives us insights to the social order of the age. Those disclosures reveal the value judgments of the writers regarding appropriate actions by those of differing social location. The compiler may also be revealing a viewpoint that things may turn out well for a variety of unintended and unexpected reasons often because of the actions of life's "little

people.”

War between Syria and Israel does not occur over this event. (Syria does move militarily against Samaria in II Kings 6:24. However, the Bible does not indicate who the military commander may have been in that campaign.)

Naaman is healed in spite of, at best, a tangential recognition of God.

Elisha's faith is confirmed that he is indeed and in fact a prophet of God.

Gehazi walks about as an example that our decisions do have consequences.

The other supporting characters, as well as the “little maid” are lost to history, if one chooses to view this as an historical story.

Although this event is set some 3,000 years ago, we see many of the same cultural values presented as normative for our day and time. Deference is both expected and given to society's elites. Failure to act as expected may still bring reproach. Supporters continue to act in behalf of their sponsors. People continue to both honor and ignore God. There are also those who continue to view God as a national deity as both secular and sacred symbols appear together in both worship services and political rallies.

1 R.E. Brown, J.A. Fitzmyer, and R.E. Murphy, eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), 176.

2 Ibid.

3 John Gray, *I & II Kings*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 506.

4 Ibid., 505.

5 Ibid.

6 Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 176.

## Welcome to Exile

By Lucas Land (TLU class of 2001)

*Sermon preached at the Chapel of the  
Abiding Presence on Sept. 26, 2008*

If you were born in Iraq there is a good chance that today you are a refugee. Over 2 million people within Iraq have been displaced from their homes. Many more have fled the country into Jordan and Syria. In 2007 there were 16 million refugees worldwide from conflicts in places such as Darfur, Somalia, and Colombia. It's hard for us to imagine being uprooted and forcibly removed from our homes. The life of refugees is a distant thought for us. Yet it is reality for millions of people today who live in makeshift camps for years with no idea of when they can return and rebuild. Everything they know, everything familiar to them, is far away or worse, destroyed. They live a transitory existence wondering how they will survive. They are forced to ask questions about who they are as nations, as people of faith. They cry out with the Psalmist, “How can we sing our song in a foreign land?” They sit down on the shore. With their heads in their hands they weep for what is lost.

### **Welcome to Exile.**

We don't like to sing songs of lament. In fact they make us uncomfortable. We would rather leave out the last two verses of Psalm 137. Here, the Psalmist gives us the most disturbing expression of emotion in the Bible. “Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rocks.” This is not a prescription for how we should treat our enemies. Rather it is a description of what it means to experience exile. This is the raw emotion of the feelings that come from injustice, oppression and exile. Let us confess that most of us cannot comprehend what it means to be a refugee. If we could we might cry out with the same sentiments as the Psalmist. At the same time we know these emotions. We too experience loss. We share the sense of frustration at the brokenness of the world around us. We feel helplessness at the overwhelming injustice and evil that surrounds us.

### **Welcome to Exile.**

This is a bleak picture. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was conquered and Judah thought they would be spared from such a fate because they were not like them. But Jerusalem fell to Babylon in 587 BCE and it was as if the world ended. The people were forced into exile. They became refugees in a foreign land. The Temple, the very heart and center of what it meant to be related to God, was gone. How could they continue to be the people of God in exile? They had trusted in the strength of Israel, their kings, their military might and, most of all, their corner on the one true religion. If their God was the one true God, how could they ever fail? Israel was YHWH's chosen people. How could YHWH abandon them?

**Welcome to Exile.**

In the midst of this darkness the prophet Jeremiah writes a shocking letter to the exiles.

Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there and do not decrease. But seek the *shalom* of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its *shalom* you will find your *shalom*.

Jeremiah does not make false promises to the exiles as the false prophets and politicians do. He tells them in v. 10 that they will not be restored for seventy years, more than a generation. In other words, not in your lifetime so don't get your hopes up.

Jeremiah's advice is shocking. "Do what you would if you were not in exile. You're not going anywhere. So build houses, because you need a place to stay. Plant gardens, because you will be around for many harvests to come. Marry and have children. Create a life for yourself here, because it is the *only* one you are getting." These activities, building, planting, marrying and having children symbolized the blessing associated with living in the land God had given them. It is astonishing that Jeremiah is drawing a picture of this kind of life, not in the Promised Land, but precisely in exile in Babylon.

The final piece of advice is the most shocking. "But seek the *shalom* of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its *shalom* you will find your *shalom*." The Hebrew word "*shalom*" is rich with meaning. Our English translations range from "peace", "welfare", "well-being" to "safety" and "prosperity". It is the term used to signify the wholeness, fullness and perfection of life. Many commentators see a connection between this command to "seek the *shalom* of the city" and the prayer for the peace of Jerusalem in Psalm 122. The substitution of Babylon for Jerusalem, here, seems to be a blasphemous move. How can the exiles pray for good things, "*shalom*", for their captors?

**Welcome to Exile.**

Right now I am in my final semester of seminary. To be honest, figuring out what to do with three and a half years of seminary is not so easy these days. This summer as my wife and I wrestled with where God was leading us, I was reminded of Jeremiah's letter to the exiles. I realized that I was looking for a way out of my current situation. Let me be honest. I'm a committed pacifist who lives next door to the world's largest military installation. This is often times an uncomfortable position to be in. I can never fully be who I am, because I live in a community that rejects some of my core beliefs. Surely God does not want me to pray for the *shalom* of this place. There must be somewhere else where I can better serve God. You see, just as we are constantly looking to the next President to solve all of our problems, we are also looking to the next job, the next school, the next church or the next person to finally make our

lives complete. Jeremiah breaks through this hazy fog of wishful thinking and says, "Build and plant."

**I am in Exile.**

David Smith in his book *Mission after Christendom*, points to the exile as a potential metaphor for understanding our Post-Christendom world. "We too face a point at which God appears to be terminating our known world and inviting us to a new world in which the true nature of the church and its mission can be recovered." To be sure the United States continues to be a deeply religious nation, avoiding the rampant secularization of Europe. Perhaps we need to recognize that the things we have trusted in, democracy, military strength, politics and power, now appear both foolish and dangerous. The Religious Right wed power politics and Christianity in a way that has now disillusioned many members of that movement. Now that many Democrats have "found religion" let us not be caught in that same trap. We no longer call the shots. The pope no longer crowns kings. And we should disabuse ourselves of the nostalgic notion that this is an era that we should seek to reclaim. Every time the church has gotten into bed with the Powers it has been a mess with deadly and disastrous consequences. We must recognize that in some ways true followers of Jesus must always remain on the margins, in exile from the ways of Empire and the Powers. This is the way that God has always worked, through Tamar, Rahab, Gideon, David, a rag tag bunch of fishermen, and most profoundly in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

**You are in Exile.****We are in Exile.**

Christopher Wright concludes concerning these words of Jeremiah (29:5-7) that "the exiles had a task—a mission no less—even in the midst of the city of their enemies... they were not only to be the *beneficiaries* of God's promise to Abraham, they were also to be the *agents* of God's promise to Abraham...Such teaching, conveyed by Jeremiah's letter, turned victims into visionaries. Israel not only had a hope for the future (in the famous words of vv. 11-14) they also had a mission in the present." Our God turns victims into visionaries. In the midst of exile, God brings renewal. In the midst of injustice, God brings hope. In the midst of violence God brings new creation. In the midst of death and destruction, God brings Resurrection. May it be so among us.

## Between Two Worlds – A Personal Experience

By Maria D. Avalos

(Associate Dean of Student Life and Learning at TLU)

*Sermon preached at the Chapel of the Abiding Presence on  
Oct. 17, 2008 in conjunction with the annual Krost Symposium*

*Wind tugging at my sleeve*

*Feet sinking into the sand*

*I stand at the edge where*

*Earth touches ocean...*

*Where the two overlap*

*A gentle coming together*

*And other time and places*

*A violent crash*

- Gloria Anzaldua

I have often found myself in situations where I wanted so badly to express my feelings, my experiences. Yet I was unable to find the words to adequately do so. I would try to explain what I felt; only my words would diminish the experience. Imagine my excitement, when I read Gloria Anzaldua's words. I found that she not only had the perfect words to explain my existence, but understood my experience.

I am Mexican American, Latina, Chicana, and I was raised with the values of the culture and heritage my grandmother brought with her from Mexico. On her brother's shoulders, they crossed the Rio Grande River to America. She would tell us the story of her brother setting her on the American side of the river, kissing her good-bye, and crying as she watched him and her other siblings swim back to the other side of the river, to another world of less hope. Knowing that she might never see them again, she vowed to give her family the life that only America could give.

I used every opportunity given to me by my family, my grandparents and ancestors to become what I was meant to be; to gain the education and life that my family wanted me to have. I worked hard in school, even when it meant no one at home could help me with my homework. I stayed involved in school and worked hard to see myself as equal to others, never using my heritage or skin color as a crutch or excuse to be excluded.

I remember my dad, a freight driver, taking me to deliver freight throughout Seguin. I remember going to the then Texas Lutheran College campus, which seemed so big and almost mystical to me back then. Each time we came to campus, my dad would say, "Mija, you are going to go to a school like this." My dad said I would stare at him with big eyes and nod, "Yes,

Daddy, this is my school."

I did go to a school like TLU, and I became all that my parents and grandparents hoped I would become, the whole time remembering all that my ancestors had given so that I could have the opportunities to achieve. I am the first doctor in the family. I am self sufficient, have my own home, and am a strong, single Latina. I am happy I could achieve these things for my family, but I was also completely unaware that I would have to leave, disengage and often compromise my culture to achieve these things.

As I travel to work each day, I tell myself that I am crossing the borderland, the border into a life that is different than that of my home life, my culture, and from the life I grew up knowing. This new life is not better or worse, simply different. Yet each time I cross the borderland, I find myself looking behind me to see my home and my heritage becoming more distant and foreign to me, and I often feel lost.

Let me find the words to explain. Like in my youth, I still do not use my heritage or skin color as a crutch, but it is a foreign experience to walk into a classroom, meeting, or lecture hall and be painfully aware that there is no one else in the room that looks like me. Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum, author of *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*, writes "How one's racial identity is experienced is mediated by the dimensions of the world around them: Who does the world say I am? Who do my peers say I am? How am I represented in the cultural images around me? Or am I missing from the picture altogether?" What does it mean to me if I walk into a room and I am the only one who looks like me? Am I welcomed, lucky to be there, or appreciated for the difference I bring to the table? Does anyone else even notice?

I love Texas Lutheran University! I feel blessed everyday to do the work God has called me to do with the most amazing people I could imagine. I believe in the mission of this institution, the call to vocation, and do not believe I could care for young people the way I do the students who come to TLU, "My school." On any given day, I am happy to get up in the morning and feel blessed to have the opportunity to work in an environment that values the educated individual, to work with people who put in long, hard hours to support and serve those around them, and to have the chance to better myself as an educator.

My family and friends who share my heritage often ask why I do not work at a place where there are more people like me. They have no idea of the mission of this university, the quality of people who work here, and of course, the amazing students who I work with on a daily basis. I cannot imagine adoring students as much as I do the ones who go to TLU, the school that has been a part of my community for as long as I can remember.

Yet, it can be a lonely place, when there are very few others who can understand your existence and how your home life

collides with your vocational life. I do find myself drawn to the individuals in the cafeteria and maintenance staff when I want to talk about my life in a way that I would not have to explain myself. With them, I can speak of *Ojo, curan de susto*, or simply honor my elders by hugging them, without creating an uncomfortable situation for others who might not understand. Still, even with these precious individuals, my education creates a border between us that can also lead to misunderstandings.

I have also been questioned by students and peers as to why I would stay in this small town where there is nothing to do. My culture is such that my family is cherished over any individual goal or accomplishment. Why would I leave them to be alone in a big city when my heritage tells me I would be nothing without them? Any accomplishment made is made with the family in mind. I remember the day I defended my dissertation. My committee dismissed me so that they could discuss my status. After what felt like eternity, the group invited me back into the room and congratulated me on my overcoming this huge hurdle. I tried my best, through tears, to explain to them what this meant; that this accomplishment was not about me, but about my family and my ancestors who came before me. I tried to explain that each day I was in class my family was with me, my ancestors behind me, all a part of this adventure and success.

Yet, even as I cherish my immediate family, my extended family of 24 aunts and uncles, 87 first cousins, and as you can imagine countless numbers of relatives beyond that, I often feel out of place at home with them. As a first generation college student, I have experienced higher education, a place where very few of my family have been blessed to achieve. Is it because I am smarter than them? No. It is because of circumstance and opportunity. Because I am one of the few, it is hard to talk about this experience because they do not understand. They are incredibly proud of me, but my education has also created a barrier between me, my family, and often my culture.

How can I possibly learn about the wonderful world and not be changed? How could I examine theories, humanity, religions, and faith without it changing who I am, the way I behave, the way I think? How can I possibly go back to the place of unknowing? I cannot close my eyes. My family is so proud of me, but they do not understand the questions I ask, why I think so much, or wonder about the world and things I do not have control over. They tell me, "Oh, so that's what they teach you in college; to be arrogant and ask questions about all that we have learned and hold true about faith, culture, and what is important to us?"

I remember one evening my Tia Rosie called me to tell me she had a pain in her back that hurt when she moved just like so. She asked me what I thought was happening and what I thought she should do. When I finally was able to explain to her that I was not *THAT* kind of doctor, she voiced her displeasure as to why someone would go to that much school and not be more useful. "Well, Mariquita, what did you go to school for?"

It is difficult for my family to understand how someone could spend so much time in school and not be "rich." Why would someone want to learn just to learn?

So I stand with one foot on either side of this border, firmly planted, but not truly belonging to either side. One foot with my family, cherishing the values and heritage I have grown up with; whether it be crawling on our knees through the house to adore the baby Jesus on his birthday, rubbing an egg over our bodies to rid ourselves of fever, or touching everyone we see so that our admiration of God's love showing through them does not make them sick. And one foot on my educated side. The side that has taught me to be egocentric, individualistic, and critical minded of some of the things my own heritage has taught me. One foot on either side, not truly belonging to either world, I exist within the borderland.

At times, this border can be lonely and frustrating, but as I've grown older and live within this borderland, I continue to be able to see the wonder and gifts that exist with living within these two worlds. I can have the best of both. I have my heritage and my education, my dedication to my family, and my quest to know more. I have the opportunity to keep all I love about my childhood as well as learn more about people from around the world. My aunt says, "Ay, you know her. She thinks she needs to go to see the world," while they are content to be close to home and with each other. Still, they let me go. As confused as they are, they let me go, but not before praying over me and sending me on my way with a rosary and a statue of St. Christopher to protect me on my travels.

I have found that my borderland can be a wonderful place, a place that I have learned to negotiate as necessary, using my time as I travel between the two worlds to transform who I am within each of those contexts. I am sure that everyone experiences these types of borderlands, whether it is because of faith, culture, gender, or ethnicity.

The saddest part of this experience is when people on campus tell me they are color-blind. I have been told, "Maria, I guess I didn't even pay attention to the fact that you are Hispanic." This brings me tremendous sadness because that tells me that they truly do not see me, my experience, or the differences that I have to offer our students, campus, and community.

I believe we can learn through stories. My grandmother told me about our family in Mexico and shared our heritage through stories. The stories of the *Llorona* frightened me to tears and those of the Blessed Mother brought me peace. I pray that sharing my story will help others realize that our experiences are different, even when it might not appear so at first glance.

Though different, one experience is not better than the other, simply different. It is the validation of these experiences that brings us to the recognition of the plenty and blessings we each have to offer each other, our community, and this world.

*Wind tugging at my sleeve*  
*Feet sinking into the sand*  
*I stand at the edge where*  
*Earth touches ocean...*  
*Where the two overlap*  
*A gentle coming together*  
*And other time and places*  
*A violent crash*  
 - Gloria Anzaldua

## Worship and Doubt

By Mark Allan Powell (TLU class of 1975)

*Sermon preached at the Chapel of the Abiding Presence on  
April 24, 2009 in conjunction with the Hein-Fry Lecture*

Text: Matthew 28:1-9, 16-20

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.<sup>2</sup> And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.<sup>3</sup> His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.<sup>4</sup> For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men.<sup>5</sup> But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.<sup>6</sup> He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.<sup>7</sup> Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.”<sup>8</sup> So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples . . .<sup>16</sup> Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.<sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.<sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,<sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

It is Easter morning. A group of women gather at the tomb and hear the good news that Jesus is risen, just as he said. They run to tell the disciples, overcome with what the Gospel of Matthew calls *fear and great joy*. The disciples respond to this invitation, coming to Jesus in Galilee where they *worship and doubt*. Do you understand what the Bible is talking about – with all these references to emotions and states of consciousness – fear, doubt, worship, great joy? Do you understand them

personally? Have you ever felt *fear* and *great joy* – both at the same time? Have you ever worshiped and doubted – both *at the same time*?

Let’s concentrate on that last one. The Bible text I read is a famous one. It comes at the very end of Matthew’s Gospel and includes the words that give this chapel its name: “Lo, I am with you always to the end of the age.” Unless somebody’s changed it, those words are chiseled in stone on the wall outside this building. When I was a student here, I would leave Knutson Hall and walk past this building on my way to class, and every morning I would stop and read those words – they made me feel better about my day. The only thing was, it says “Lo, I am with you *always*” – not always but always – no “s” – and I always wondered whether the stonecutter had made a mistake.

Well, here is the story: A little while after Easter – right about now, I guess – the disciples of Jesus went to Galilee and there they saw him, risen from the dead. *When* they saw him, the Bible says, “they worshiped him; but some doubted” (Matthew 28:16-17). And then Jesus responds with words that are commonly called the Great Commission, sending these worshipping, doubting disciples out to make disciples of all nations and promising to be with them always to the end of the age (Matthew 28: 18-20).

*They worshiped him; but some doubted.* That’s what it says in our English Bible. Actually, though, the word *some* is not found in the Greek. Why is it there in the English?

The Greek New Testament, which I learned how to read right here at Texas Lutheran University says simply, “They worshiped him, but doubted.” But the English New Revised Standard Versions says, “They worshiped him but *some* doubted.” The idea, I guess, is that there was a division in the ranks – some disciples worshiped Jesus, others doubted him. It makes us think of another story somewhere else in the Bible – the one about “Doubting Thomas.”

But that’s not what it actually says. What the Bible actually says is simply, “They worshiped him, but doubted.” That’s what it says. Why would anybody change that?

Well, I got a chance to find out. A few years ago, I met the person who did this Bible translation and I showed him the Greek and the English and asked, “Where do you get the word *some*?” He said, “It’s implied.” But why is it implied? He said, “Otherwise, the verse wouldn’t make any sense. No one can worship and doubt at the same time.” I invited this fellow to visit a Lutheran church. We do it all the time.

We have all sorts of doubts, don’t we?

- Some people may wonder about the teaching of the church . . . the Christian church has done so many awful and stupid things over the years, how can we know that it ever got anything right?
- Some people may wonder about the Bible – does it hold up to modern science?

Those kinds of doubts are popular with college students – they arise fairly naturally from classes and textbooks – if you're troubled by such things, let me assure you, it isn't going to get any better. Not if you are intellectually honest – and curious.

But those are actually “minor league doubts.” The big ones – the really significant ones – come when you quit looking in the books and look deep inside yourself.

When we look deep within and see ourselves for who we are . . . then we wonder: why are we here? Will we ever accomplish anything meaningful with our lives? Are we capable of *love* – really loving someone more than we love ourselves? And perhaps most important – does anyone really love us? Or *would* they love us if they knew who we really were? If they knew everything about us – saw us for who we truly are – would anybody love us *then*?

Those are major league doubts – and they don't go away either.

The good news is that we can worship and doubt at the same time – indeed, the good news is that having a wonderful relationship with God – or, for that matter, just having a fantastic life, filled with joy and purpose and meaningful relationships does not depend on our resolving all these intellectual and psychological crises. In fact, it doesn't depend on us at all.

Jesus had a pet name for his disciples – he called them “the people of little faith.” “O, ye of little faith,” he kept saying to them, over and over, because they were apparently major league doubters. But then he told them that being a person of little faith is really not so bad. You don't need a lot of faith. A tiny “mustard seed” of faith – that's all you need. A mustard seed – about the size of a grain of salt or a grain of sand. A speck. That's all you need, Jesus says – and God will use that. It doesn't depend on you. God will take that little speck of faith and use it . . . you can have a vibrant, satisfying relationship with God . . . you can love and be loved . . . and you can have a meaningful life as someone who truly makes a difference in this world. All you need is a mustard seed – a little speck of faith.

So someone will ask, “How much is *that*? I have a lot of doubt – of the major and minor varieties. How much faith is a speck? How much is a mustard seed?”

And the lesson I read earlier answers that: enough to worship. That's all. Not to worship without doubt . . . just enough to worship. After Easter, the followers of Jesus become a community of worshipping doubters – and they receive his Great Commission and the promise of abiding presence, the promise for which this chapel is named.

There may people be in the world who only doubt and never worship.

There may be people in the world who only worship and never doubt.

But the commission and the promise are for those who do both – who doubt and worship – both at the same time. They are people who know what it is to like to feel *fear* and *great joy* – both *at the same time*.

Congratulations! The fact that you are here means you qualify. You have enough faith to worship . . . and that is all God needs. You are at *least* a person of little faith . . . one of the ones to whom Jesus speaks these words: “I will be with you . . . always.”

## Revelation 21-22

By Kyle Zunker (TLU class of 2012)

One slid down the amber glass, another down a tender cheek,  
One fell from a jagged edge, the other rained onto bare feet  
With toes curled under and her arms wrapped around  
Her mother's leg not braced against the door and ground.

Her father pounded on their thin wooden shield,  
Her mother sobbed and begged, she let go of the leg and  
kneeled.

The dark wooden walls peeled away and the room was  
flooded with light,  
A pearl figure took her by the hand and she escaped her  
plight.

The light faded into one of twelve great gates,  
Opened broad to a road made of solid gold slates  
That shone more intensely the further she paced,  
Until she reached the tree of life and the river it laced.

She ate of the fruit and wiped her tears with the leaves,  
Then stuffed a few in her pockets to heal other grieves.  
On hands and knees she drank from the river until she  
was full,  
Her mother and father smiled together with her in the  
river's reflection pool.

On the banks of this crystal river she followed its bends  
And found its source, where all creation began and ends.  
The throne of the Lord sat at the river's base,  
And illuminated all of the heavens with the Lord's grace.

The bottle was still in his hand when he woke,  
His head was split, the bathroom door nearly broke.  
He found it unlocked, they had left when he crashed  
And in his shirt pocket a note had been stashed.

'Dear Daddy' he read.

'I wish you loved mommy and me so we could be three,  
When you're mean it's just two and you miss out on me.  
I'm getting so big, I even lost two teeth.'  
One fell onto the note shaped like a leaf.