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People often ask me if I enjoy being a seminary dean. “Most days” I usually respond, wanting to keep my response both honest and brief. There is much to enjoy in this wonderful vocation, and the pages of this Seminary Journal bear witness to the remarkable array of interesting individuals, groups, and challenges that fill our day-to-day life here at VTS. But as with any job, and within any community, some days are marked by tragedy or loss.

Within these pages you will find articles, sermons, and photographs that capture the cyclical rhythms of exciting new beginnings and bittersweet endings—some planned and some unplanned—that have marked our life as a community during the past few months.

In December we bade farewell to Bill Stafford, beloved Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, professor of church history, advisor and mentor to a generation of seminarians at VTS, and to his wife Barbara, as they embarked on a new adventure at the School of Theology at the University of the South, where Bill now serves as Dean. In January we welcomed the Reverend Dr. Michael Battle as our new Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and gave thanks that Dr. Amy Gearey Dyer has agreed to serve as Associate Dean for Academic Management, within the Office of Academic Affairs.

Two esteemed graduates of the Seminary also joined us in January: the Reverend Joseph Constant of the class of 2002, who is working with Marge McNaughton-Ayers in the office of Admissions and Community Life, and the Reverend Canon Rosemari Sullivan of the class of 1985, our new Director of Alumni Affairs and Special Events. Other new staff members joined the Office of Institutional Advancement, the Business Office, and the staff that maintains our beautiful physical plant. We are grateful for their presence and for the enthusiasm and energy they have brought to their new jobs.

The fall semester was marked by the inauguration of several exciting new programs and projects: a new track within our Doctor of Ministry degree program for leaders in ministry in the network of Episcopal Schools; the receipt of a generous grant from the Lilly Endowment to support a continuing education and research project directed at mid-career clergy in small congregations; and an initiative designed to help increase the racial and ethnic diversity of this seminary and the Episcopal Church. Each of these new efforts targets specific needs and directs resources towards the support and strengthening of critical ministries within our church.

Our life as a seminary community is continually enriched by the presence of visiting preachers, scholars, and church leaders. During the fall we welcomed the Most Reverend Njongonkulu Winston Hugh Ndungane, Primate of the Province of Southern Africa, to our campus as a Woods Fellow. His visit coincided with the release of the Windsor Report and provided an opportunity for him to share his thoughts and reflections on the report from the perspective of the church in Africa. The Right Reverend Kenneth Cragg, a long-time friend of the Seminary, returned to deliver a
superb lecture on the relationship of Islam and Christianity (see page 67). The Fall Alumni Convocation brought the Reverend Peter Gomes from Harvard and the Reverend Thomas Long from the Candler School of Theology at Emory for lively conversations and lectures on the challenges of preaching the New Testament in our contemporary culture. The class of 1954 celebrated its 50th reunion with the publication of a new biography of classmate John Walker, Bishop of Washington from 1977 until 1989. The Honorable Patricia Ticer, former mayor of Alexandria, now a representative to the General Assembly of Virginia, joined us for a Faith, Work, and Vocation presentation, as did Jim Moore, founder and CEO of AmeriTrade International, former assistant secretary of Commerce for Trade Development, and author of One Nation Under God.

As visitors came into the community, many of our members went out, as well, heeding the great missionary challenge over the altar in our Chapel. This Journal includes a report “from the field,” written by a VTS alumna serving in Kenya. You will also find a list of students who have participated in cross-cultural programs for the past two years, along with the sites they visited.

Tragedy struck our community with the untimely death of Adam Goren, a twenty-seven year old senior from the Diocese of Texas. He was a bright light in our community: an engaging and outgoing young man who loved his family and friends and lived life to the fullest. Students helped to plan and lead a memorial service in the Seminary chapel, which was followed by Adam’s funeral and burial from Christ Church Cathedral in Houston.

Virginia Seminary is no ivory tower, isolated from the cares and concerns of the world. As a new term began, we grieved not only the death of Adam, but also the death of more than 150,000 innocent victims of the tsunami in the Indian Ocean and the death of so many citizens and soldiers killed in wars in Iraq, Israel, Palestine, and throughout our world. This year, as we enter the season of Lent, we do so with a powerful awareness that in the midst of life we are in death. At the same time we look forward in hope to Easter, knowing that in this life God has the last word, and the word God speaks is the word of life. May God be with each of you in your own Lenten journey.

The Very Reverend Martha J. Horne
Dean and President
February 2005
Bill and Barbara Stafford Leave the Holy Hill for the Mountain

Bill and Barbara Stafford left Virginia Seminary in December and moved to Sewanee, Tennessee, where Dr. Stafford is the new Dean of the School of Theology at the University of the South.

The Staffords came to Virginia Seminary in 1976. Bill’s first position was Assistant Professor of Church History, and in 1990 he was appointed the David J. Ely Professor of Church History. He became Vice President and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in 1997. Barbara Stafford taught Sacred Studies at St. Stephen’s and St. Agnes Episcopal School in Alexandria for many years. She was also the coordinator for various summer programs at VTS, including Elderhostel and the annual Institute for Diocesan Treasurers and Administrators.

On December 12 the Seminary community said farewell to the Staffords at a dinner in the refectory. Following are the remarks of Elizabeth Kryder-Reid, dear friend and mother of the Staffords’ goddaughter, Emily, and the Rev. Lloyd A. Lewis, New Testament professor and one of Bill and Barbara’s closest friends.

Left to right: Elizabeth Kryder-Reid, Bill Stafford, Dean Martha Horne, Barbara Stafford, and Michael Stafford.
It is a great honor to be asked to offer some remarks this evening, and it has been a great joy, in preparing, to think back over the ways our lives have intertwined – to replay the tape, as it were, and to reflect on how much I have learned from Bill and Barbara, and particularly what I have learned from them about love.

The first lesson was a love of learning. As a high school student I took Bill’s Lay School course, and I still remember his talk on God as logos – an image that resonates at the core of my faith. I remember it not only because of the vivid way he made this abstract concept come to life, but also because of the passion of his words. Sometimes that passion for learning was less understandable. I recall visiting the family in Durham during their sabbatical and while we dried dishes after supper Bill told me about a three-day conference he had attended on Cuthbert. Three days of Cuthbert and he was still glowing!

And I could go on about so many things I learned at Barbara’s side—the graceful balance of work, family, and faith, the art of French cooking (literally—she presented me with my first copy of Julia Child’s great work and told me how she had carried her own copy to a book signing and, when she reached Julia, pulled it out and confessed it had changed her life). I saw the warmth that can emanate from a home where kindness and ideas and respect abound. I also learned from Barbara the effectiveness of discipline tempered with compassion and a little pragmatism. I recall Bill repeatedly telling Libby, who wanted a cookie for each hand, that she couldn’t have a second one. Long after we all welcomed Michael to the ranks of the faculty brat pack that ran the campus (or so we thought). Memories of their growing up on this hill resonate still. I have fond memories of Michael dressing up as “Daddy” for Halloween. Images of Libby with her ever-present yellow bear, and even from the earliest age exhibiting a sense of self and a determination combined with a capacity for empathy that foreshadowed her social work career. And then there was Jenny, whose remarkable insight continued to astonish. I recall watching an animated version of “The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe” with her when she couldn’t have been more than four. As the credits rolled she turned to me, her face alight with discovery, and exclaimed, “Why, Aslan is just like Jesus!” And Bill and Barbara’s love of children extended beyond their own remarkable brood – they have given the incredible gift of love to the many children under their foster care.

Their lesson of love extends to each other. Bill not only did us the great honor of officiating at our wedding (including conducting a rehearsal in which the ordained outnumbered the lay, and it was more like herding clergy than practicing the liturgy). He also gave us a tremendous gift in his pre-marital counseling of articulating what I had seen but not fully recognized in their marriage. He taught us that a marriage vow is secondary to a baptismal vow—that in marriage we first honor each other as a child of God with all that means. I will never forget another conversation, over that same dish rack in Durham, in which Bill described to me a tragic time in their lives and said that they got through it by the grace of God and by taking turns holding each other up.

The final lesson I want to share this evening is what they have taught me about the love of God. At the end of one of their sabbaticals in England, Bill’s briefcase was stolen from a train station in London. He later confessed that his greatest regret wasn’t losing all his original research notes, but the loss of his ordination Bible. Their love of God has been passed along to the kids. I treasure the memories of Michael tooling around on his tricycle with the license plate, “God is my Co-pilot.” One of my favorite Jenny stories is during a babysitting stint early on, when she was asking about my
biology homework. We discussed kingdoms and phyla and species, and I asked her if she knew what kind of animals we humans are, and she replied, “We are sheep, God’s sheep.”

Barbara gave our daughter Emily, who is also her goddaughter, a beautiful framed needlework piece that hangs over Emily’s bed. It reads, “My sheep hear my voice, I know them and they follow me.” Perhaps the greatest gift to me and I think to this Seminary community is the example of two people who hear that voice and who exemplify what it means to live a life following it. 

Liz Kryder-Reid, Emily Kryder-Reid, and Barbara Stafford. Barbara is Emily’s godmother.

The Rev. Andrew Merrow, VTS ’81, left, spoke of his long friendship with the Staffords. Dr. Allan Parrent, right, who formerly held Dr. Stafford’s post at VTS, sang “The Very Model of a Modern Church Historian” (with apologies to Gilbert & Sullivan) in Bill’s honor.
It all began at a table in the apartment of a fellow graduate student in New Haven on a December evening 29 years ago—one of those survival parties, which had an additional lure given by my schoolmate who said, “Look, there are some people coming to this party that you just have to meet!” And there they were: the Staffords.

There was never a time when I knew the Staffords as anything other than the Staffords: Bill and Barbara, together with Jenny at that time and with Libby on the way. It was a fun party, and it became even more fun when I learned that the Staffords, then living in Rhode Island, were members of Saint Stephen’s Church in Providence, well known to many as a more ultramontane ecclesiastical foundation. Further, I found that Bill knew the words and tunes of certain hymns that a Dominican friend and I were singing, which were definitely not of the Protestant persuasion. It was not long afterward that I received a telephone call from my former Church History professor, a person staunchly planted in the soil of the Virginia Tradition, inquiring as to what I knew about a Yalite named Stafford and whether or not I thought he might “fit” in a place like Virginia. Suddenly the prospect, if I were to teach here, of not being alone in certain church matters strangely warmed my heart. “Oh,” I said, “he would fit in just fine,” hoping and praying that someday Bill and Barbara and I would see one another again. Thankfully, since 1978 we have, and the rest is history.

We have continued as friends now for almost 30 years. As it turned out we became neighbors: I in House 27, which has the wonderful ante bellum name of Maywood, and they with their three children at first in House 26, which they named Plywood. It was their table that became central to that friendship. When I arrived at Virginia Seminary I believe the first meal I had in a faculty home was with the Staffords. It was not the last. I learned quickly that their table was an example of multi-tasking, long before that term became common parlance.

Their table is a place of prayer. It was every day at breakfast when Bill and Barbara and their children, as they were growing up, read the psalms and prayed for the needs of family, friends, and the world. They were all there: Bill and Barbara and whoever was at table with them; and Jenny (now the French professor), whose pronunciation of the Latin titles of the psalms at age 4, still sticks with me; and Libby (now the social worker), who was then accompanied by a much-loved stuffed animal, re-sewn, re-stuffed, and resurrected many times, known only as “Bear;” and Michael (now a teacher), who by chance was born on the same day of the year as my mother was. Sometimes, too, that table was graced with the Bread and Wine of the Eucharist, celebrated in times of joy or in times of need, but always with the care of others.

The Stafford table is a place of feasting. Over the years the feasting has been wonderful. Early on Barbara took the impending plight of single men and women here on campus in hand by teaching a course in survival cooking and nutrition, called “Cooking for One.” Some of the fare was pretty basic, but far better than many single folks had ever seen. Some of it was more spectacular. I can tell you that there are men and women out there in the church who know how to fix Hollandaise sauce over an open flame, and the only way that they know how to do it is because Barbara taught them how to and Bill taught them what to do if it fell apart.

And, yes, their table is a place of extraordinary welcome. Children and students and family and colleagues: all of us who have been with them, whether in their home or when they have been in Europe during sabbatical time or when they spread a table at a seminary community picnic, know that to be with...
Bill and Barbara is never to feel like a stranger. These two people do “friend” well! Such a welcome they give! Such a place to laugh they provide! Such a place to appreciate Bill’s knowledge of history, Barbara’s of literature. Both of them are superb teachers: Bill here, Barbara for years at St. Stephen’s and St. Agnes School, where, along with teaching religion, she helped young people to gain a sense of social responsibility and care for those in need in this city and around the world. It is no wonder that to this day when their former students return to Alexandria, they seek out both of them because of the great influence they had on their lives.

So now they exchange living on this Hill for living on that Mountain. I will miss my good friends and neighbors. I envy Sewanee for gaining these two good people, who have made life here at Virginia so rich over the years. But with whatever loss those of us here feel, I am comforted by the fact that in that moving van they take with them that table of welcome and of worship, where for so many and in so many ways at this place they have been much given to hospitality, and where they will do the same for so many more in the years to come!

A few of the many guests at the Staffords’ farewell dinner included, top row: Bill Burk, ’96, talking with Sam Faeth, ’96; Vince Harris, ’79. Center row: former faculty members’ wives Helen Reid and Mary Vandevelder. Bottom row: Allan Johnson-Taylor, ’93, with his son; and Fr. John Crossin, Director of the Washington Theological Consortium.
Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword.

Hebrews 4:12

Convocation 2004
The Reinicker Lectures

Introduction by
The Very Rev. Martha J. Horne
Dean and President

The Reinicker Lectures were established in 1894 through the generosity of George A. Reinicker of Baltimore, Maryland. Over the past century they have brought to this campus a number of distinguished scholars, teachers, and preachers.

This year we are pleased to welcome two speakers for the Reinicker Lectures, each of whom combines extraordinary gifts for preaching, teaching, scholarly research, and publication. Because preaching is the topic for these lectures, we are especially pleased that Thomas Long and Peter Gomes have agreed not only to present a formal lecture each but also to preach in our seminary chapel. They also will participate in an informal conversation with each other and with you about the unique challenges and
opportunities involved in preaching the Gospel in our day and time.

A prolific writer, Dr. Long is the author of more than a dozen books on preaching and worship as well as several dozen articles and essays. He earned his M.Div at Erskine Seminary and received his Ph.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1980. Since that time he has taught at three seminaries. After five years as Professor of Preaching and Worship at Columbia Theological Seminary in Georgia, he moved to Princeton Theological Seminary where he taught for 17 years. In 2000, he returned to Georgia, this time to join the faculty of Candler.

Professor Long’s primary interests are in biblical preaching and homiletical theory, as well as the relationship between worship and Christian practices. Firmly grounded in the academy, having served as president and a long time member of the Academy of Homiletics, he also speaks directly to the challenges of Christians sitting in the pews. For those of us who live and work in seminaries, where talking about God is part of our daily routine, it is easy to forget that our fellow Christians often have a tougher time. In his most recent book, Testimony: Talking Ourselves into Being Christian, Professor Long has tackled one of the most delicate and difficult challenges Christians face in our world: How to talk about our faith and about God when we are not in church.

“Talking about God outside of church is a potentially uncomfortable topic,” he writes, “because it places many Christians in a bind. On the one hand, we know that our faith touches everything about life. It affects our relationships, our politics, the ways in which we spend our money and spend our time. How strange if our faith does not show up in everyday talk! On the other hand, everybody knows that God and religion, like sex and money, are touchy matters. And speaking about our faith in public always creates the risk of offense or even social rejection.”

I was reminded of that when I read this morning a column in the Washington Post about how to avoid chatty seat mates on airplanes. The first anecdote was about a woman who sat down and found that her seat mate immediately began to grill her about her faith. That continued for a long time, until she finally put a blanket over her face and turned the other way. As Dr. Long observes, few people want to wear their religion on their sleeves or their tee shirts and run the risk of sounding like a Jesus freak or committing a social faux pas. As The New Yorker magazine observed, if you mention God more than one time at a fashionable dinner party in this town, you probably won’t be asked back.

Preacher, teacher, scholar, pastor, our first lecturer moves easily among these important but different tasks.
It is customary to say that one is honored to be a part of an occasion like this, and indeed I am. But I am really more than honored today. I am absolutely thrilled to be here. For a long time, I have admired this school, its faculty, and the graduates I have known, and I am thrilled to be in your midst and to meet some of the current students. I am thrilled to be on the same program with Peter Gomes, someone I consider to be among the finest preachers at work today. And I have been overwhelmed by your hospitality. You have met a stranger and already brought him into your midst. Thank you for having me as a part of this event.

There is a story the old timers around Princeton, New Jersey, absolutely love to tell. It is a story about a day in the early 1940s when a fashionable New York society matron drove down to Princeton in her touring car and pulled up to the entrance of the Princeton Inn (which was in those days the most fashionable inn in town). She got out of her car, fished around in her purse, pulled out a quarter, and pressed it into the hand of the little man there at the door of the hotel. “Take my luggage in immediately,” she said, and she breezed regally into the lobby… leaving the little man at the door of the hotel, who just happened to be Albert Einstein on his way to the lab, looking quizzically at the quarter. Finally, as the story goes, he shrugged his shoulders, picked up the luggage, and took it into the hotel.

It was just a case of misjudged appearances, mistaken identity, it could happen to anyone, I suppose. She took one look at the little man and assumed he was the bellhop, rather than the most brilliant scientist of our time. What concerns me this afternoon, though, is another case of mistaken appearances, mistaken identity. But it is not the kind that takes place in front of a hotel. It is the kind that takes place in thousands of pulpits all across this land every Sunday morning. I refer to the fact that preachers so often mistake the identity and misjudge the appearance of the biblical text.

Preaching involves taking a passage of scripture and getting down into the marrow of it — to seek to know it deeply, to anguish over it, and to struggle with it to the point that it blesses us — and then standing up in the pulpit and telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help us God, about what it has said. But we ministers are human, and we are busy. We have committee meetings and hospital visits. So what we often do is to take one quick look at the text and assume, “I know what that’s about,” tip it a quarter, and say, “Take my sermon into the church.”

Despite our theology of scripture, we often treat scripture as if it were a senile dinner companion who tells the same old stories over and over again. So, if there is going to be any creativity at all in what we preach, it is going to have to come from us. But what I want to suggest this afternoon is that nothing invigorates good preaching more than having something to say — something urgent, something pertinent, something exciting. And having something to say, to make a second move, is a consequence of a deep encounter with the biblical text. We have been sent there by our congregations on their behalf, and our job is to dwell with that text until it has a word for our people.

I know that it is not really our mandate to preach the Bible. It is our mandate to preach the gospel. But our access to the gospel is through a profound encounter with biblical texts, and this takes time and energy. Engaging biblical texts on the way to preaching is labor intensive. I am not as unrealistic as the old preacher and homiletician who coined the familiar saw, “It takes one hour in the study for every minute in the pulpit.” I don’t
Thomas Long
know who said that, but I’m sure he was beloved by both of his members. I well know that the work of preaching needs to be manageable and woven into the fabric of a busy pastor’s week. But there is simply no way around the fact that preaching is hard work done under pressure, and it takes time.

(Let me pause to say that even as I add to the preacher’s burden in one way, in terms of the need for serious encounter with the text, I want to lessen our burden in another way, in terms of sermonic achievement. The saddest congregations in America are those with enough clout or money to obtain a golden-toned orator who takes the congregation to the mountaintop every Sunday, because that is a damned lie about the Christian faith. My own sermons, and probably yours, too, are sometimes up and sometimes down and mostly in the middle, and that variation in quality is itself a witness to the up and down character of the Christian life.)

Biblical exegesis for preaching is hard work because it is not simply squeezing a text through a step-by-step process. It is more like getting to know a person, and that demands from us our full attention. It takes lots of time and lots of conversation, because exegesis for faithful biblical preaching is much like developing a profound relationship with another person. Just as in getting to know another person, when we spend time with a text and give it our close attention, when we get to know a text deeply and are open to its mysteries, it surprises us by revealing something that we did not previously know.

II

If I were to put a fancier label on what I am advocating, I would say that I want preachers to engage in a form of reader-response criticism of biblical texts. I want preachers not to think of texts as static containers of ideas but as living and dynamic fields of energy able to generate impact upon and meaning for those who read them. Treating biblical texts this way may help us to overcome some deceptive practices, some misleading habits that threaten genuine biblical preaching.

I’ll name three of them:

The first deceptive practice is avoiding the text altogether. One of my students recently got up to preach in class, and began by saying, “Before I preach my sermon, I’d like to say a word about the text.” The implication, though unintentional, was obvious: the text was making its first and last appearance in the prologue to the sermon. Indeed, one way preachers avoid the text is by simply keeping silent about it. Read it, but never mention it again. Perhaps a more frequent way of avoiding the text, however, takes the form of appearing to engage the text but actually using the text to speak only about vague and generalized religious themes. This kind of talk about the text is the equivalent of social chit chat — talking but saying nothing that might offend or convey real meaning. Preachers can go on for paragraphs about a passage from the Bible but never expose the sharp particularities of the text. The text is used, then, as a pretext for gaseous religious fluff. The preacher’s current spirituality speaks to the congregation’s current spirituality, and the text adds nothing. What gets lost is the text’s capacity to disrupt, to ground in specificity, and to transform what is already out there.

The second deceptive practice about biblical preaching is merely to say the obvious about the text, to yield to our clichéd understanding of the text without encountering it afresh.
“We have just discovered that our minister has been stealing his sermons off the internet and publishing them as his own,” this member wrote. “What do you think about this ethically?” Randy Cohen made all the requisite noises about not deceiving a congregation, not pretending that somebody else’s work is your own. But then he went on to say that the ministry is a very difficult and demanding job, that some ministers don’t have the gift for preaching, and perhaps it would serve everyone better if such ministers would honestly and openly preach the sermons of others rather than their own.

At first, Cohen’s response irritated me very much, but then I began to wonder, why does it irritate me? Augustine had advocated a similar practice. So, why does the idea of a pastor saying, “Friends, this morning I am going to give you a sermon first preached by Harry Emerson Fosdick” bother me? Upon reflection, I decided I am opposed to this practice because I do not define preaching as the delivering of a literary essay but as an act of biblical interpretation. What we owe our congregations is to bring the congregational life at this moment into the energy field, the dangerous energy field of a biblical text, and then to report what happens when they come together. In other words we owe them an act of hermeneutics.

In his book, The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology, David Kelsey argues that what we mean by biblical inspiration is not any intrinsic quality in the Bible, but the way the Bible functions in the community of faith. In other words, biblical authority is not what the Bible is; it is what it does. It has been the experience of the church, when it comes in openness and attentiveness to the Scripture, it finds its life shaped after the pattern of Jesus Christ.

The third deceptive practice of preaching involves what might be called playing parlor games with texts in sermons. For example, here is the kind of sermon introduction I often hear (and I know I’m in for it when I do). “Today is the third Sunday in Lent and we find in all of the readings appointed for this day the common

“BIBLICAL AUTHORITY IS NOT WHAT THE BIBLE IS; IT IS WHAT IT DOES.”

theme of repentance. This theme is an important one in this season and indeed reverberates throughout the whole of Lent and the whole of the Scripture”... blah, blah, blah. Notice that this introduction merely skates along the surface, sounding profoundly biblical and theological, but managing to avoid any caloric content. It simply describes obvious features of the liturgical and biblical occasion without either any depth or any reverberations into the contemporary experience. It is “seminary speak.” It sounds knowledgeable and engaged, but it is really a way of keeping what one is talking about at arm’s length.

So, deceptive practices set aside, what kind of biblical encounter and process of homiletical interpretation am I calling for? What is its goal of biblical interpretation for preaching, and how does one achieve it?

I do not want to reduce the process to a technique. Biblical interpretation done in the context of a community of faith is wild and unpredictable. It has no well-beaten path, no pattern that always works. I do, however, want to be at least somewhat practical here, so I will risk stating my view that the basic goal for the preacher’s exegesis (and this is a controversial move in hermeneutics, so I want you to feel free to challenge it and move in a different direction), is to seek to discover the next generation of the original acoustical impact of this text.

Now what in the world do I mean by that? First, I am intentionally blurring the distinction that used to be made between literacy and orality in biblical materials. I am now persuaded that in almost one hundred percent of the cases, biblical materials were intended to be read aloud and, therefore, to be heard. Texts are written, to be sure, but they bear all the marks of materials that are to be read aloud and whose primary impact is in the ear. That is why it worries me a little bit we ask congregations to read along with us from pew Bibles. Texts, if they are read well, will usually have a much more profound impact if they are heard than if everyone in the congregation is reading a text.

At the end of Philippians, Paul says, “I urge Euodia and Syntyche to agree in the Lord.” This was not a private note, this was read out loud in worship, and as one commentator said, “When that was read out loud, two women sank a little lower in their
situations in a different pattern. The text to ripple over our own social contexts. All of which means that good exegesis may end up blast hits our particular social and happens when that second concussive original impact but to report what happens when that second concussive blast hits our particular social and congregational context. All of which means that good exegesis may end up not simply repeating the thrust of the text but, as a matter of fact, allowing the text to ripple over our own social situation in a different pattern.

For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus encourages his hearers to do some things about fasting, prayer, and giving alms. When you fast, don’t do it like that, do it like this. When you pray, don’t do it like that, do it in another way. When you give alms, don’t be like the hypocrites, instead give alms this way. The traditional way for the preacher to approach this section of Jesus’ sermon was to try to figure out if it is pertinent for us today. Not many contemporary American Christians fast, the preacher could say, but should we? Maybe we should, or maybe our form of fasting is to engage in another form of sensory deprivation by retreating from the non-stop images that inundate us each day in the media. And so on.

This would perhaps be a good sermon, but it is governed by a different form of interpretation than I am advocating today, by a two-phase “what it meant vs. what it means” process. But what if, instead of trying to figure out whether we ought to require our congregations to fast or not, we looked instead at the acoustical impact of this text when it was read aloud to Matthew’s congregation. As a Christian community drawn from Judaism, their religious life was organized around praying, fasting, and giving alms. In other words, they were already praying, fasting, and giving alms, and here comes this text flooding like a tidal surge right over these practices, washing away assumptions and reorganizing them in the name of the kingdom. The goal of the preacher-interpreter is to feel the next wave of that surge, allowing it to ripple out over the religious practices of the contemporary congregation, whatever they might be.

To do this kind of exegesis, we also need to reconsider our understanding of the relationship between text and meaning. Texts do not contain meanings, they generate them. A.K.M. Adam, a New Testament scholar, said, “Meaning is what we make of texts, not an ingredient in texts.” Let me rephrase that a bit. Meaning is what we make of what happens to us as a result of encountering biblical texts. The reason I rephrased it is to put a tad more emphasis on the force of the text itself over against our subjectivity. The point, though, is clear: something happens to us as a result of our encounter with texts, and then we make meaning out of that which has happened to us.

The Book of Hebrews begins this way in the NRSV: “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets.” That is a fine translation but only in the original Greek one can feel the full effect: polymeros kaipolytropos palai. Can you hear the beat? Ba-boom, ba-boom, ba-boom. The rhythm is like the sound of the beating of the human heart. It is like “Fourscore and seven years ago,” Ba-boom, ba-boom, ba-boom. It evokes something in the hearer. It is not simply a report: “A long time ago God talked to us in a lot of different ways.” There is a rhythm to this, pointing to the truth that there has been a cadence to the speech of God. The acoustical event is significant; it evokes an experience in the hearer.

Or consider Luke 17:26-30. I’ve never preached on it and you probably haven’t either:

“Just as it was in the days of Noah, so too will it be in the days of the son of man. They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage until the day Noah entered the Ark and the flood came and destroyed all of them. Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot, they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and
building, but on the day that Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and sulfur from heaven and destroyed all of them.”

A flat-footed interpretation of this text, created by putting on the sterile gloves and reaching into the barrel to find the theological nugget, is, “The day of the Lord is going to be a very bad day, and I can give you two Old Testament examples: Noah and Lot.” New Testament scholar Robert Tannehill, however, has exposed the deeper rhetorical and poetic power of this text. It ought to sound in our ears something like this:

> "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so too will it be in the days of the son of man. They were ea-a-a-ting and dri-i-iinking and m-a-a-a-aarrying and being gi-i-i-ven in marriage."

Now why did I exaggerate those words like that? Because this exaggeration replicates the sound in the ear when we speak the text it in its original Greek. Here are the Greek verbs: esthion, epinon, egamoun. Notice that these words rhyme, so the text sounds in the ear like, “What were these people doing? Yada, yada, yada…” And in the middle of the ordinary rhythms of everyday boring life, the crisis happens. Likewise, just like it was in the days of Lot, they were ea-a-a-ting and dri-i-i-inking. We have heard this list before, we know what happens at the end of it. The crisis. But there’s more…buying, selling, planting, building. Oh my gosh, the
list is getting longer. I know it’s going to end but I don’t know when. Notice the posture of anticipation evoked by the text. We lean forward into the ordinary rhythms of life, knowing a crisis is coming but never knowing when to expect it. The text summons us, indeed our whole body, to watchfulness, looking always for the crisis of the entry of God into the middle of life’s routine.

Implied in all this is the claim that we need to overcome a preacher’s tendency to objectify biblical texts. The training we get in seminary, and most of the classical commentaries as well, aim us to look at texts as objects. Mark Allen Powell, who teaches New Testament at Trinity Lutheran Seminary, in his delightful book *Chasing the Eastern Star, Adventures in Reader Response Criticism*, tried an experiment that revealed the biases of clergy toward objectifying texts. He asked a room full of clergy and laity to read the third chapter of Luke (the story of John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus). After they read it, Powell asked them to write in a sentence or two what the text means.

Here is a sample of what the clergy said: “Luke reports..., the main point is..., Luke’s intent seems to be..., the meaning of this text is.” Here’s a sample of what the laity reported: “I’m confused by this..., I find this intimidating..., I’m humbled by this..., it warns us....” Notice that the laity, some in naïve ways to be sure, actually read this text seeking and finding some impact on their current experience, while the clergy tended to objectify the text, seeking points, ideas, and themes. There is a balance here, I realize. One doesn’t want to be dragged around by personalized and subjective readings of texts, but I think clergy need to shift the balance toward the way laity read texts. We need to ask, what is this text doing? What is this text doing to me?

In his book, Powell reports that his wife bought a taped copy of the movie *E.T.*. The Powells have four children, therefore they have seen *E.T.* many times. Every time Powell and his wife see this movie, they get to the place where E.T. apparently dies, and Powell’s wife tears up. Powell says, “I look at her and I wonder, you’ve seen this movie dozens of times, you know E.T. is not dead. But I don’t say anything about it because I realize my wife does know that E.T. is not dead. She has seen this movie and she has not forgotten it, but she has suspended that attitude in order to let the movie do what it wishes to do.” I think preachers ought to suspend their own disbeliefs, their own tendencies toward objectification, and realize that biblical texts have some very specific things they are trying to do.

IV

Meir Sternberg in his book, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, claimed that biblical literature is extremely unusual, maybe even unique, in the sense that it is at one and the same time *ideological* (that is to say, it wants to teach us something), *chronological* (it wants to chronicle events as they have happened), and *aesthetic* (it wants to delight us and open our imagination). What makes this unusual, according to Sternberg, is that these three qualities are like literary angelfish. Normally mortal enemies, they try to eat each other alive. If a piece of literature is ideological, it is propaganda and it does not want to delight us. If it is chronological, it wants the straight facts and not the ideological interpretation. If it is aesthetic, it wants to inflame our imagination, forget the ideology and the chronology.

But biblical materials somehow manage to hold these intentionalitys in tension; they are chronological, ideological, and aesthetic all at once. These three modes of the text actually conform, by the way, to the three main movements in biblical interpretation that have washed over us the last several hundred years: the historical, the theological, and the poetic.

First, let us look at the historical, or chronological, interpretation of texts. We have known for a long time that biblical texts grew up out of concrete historical, and preachers should look at texts from the historical angle of vision:

For example, in the Gospel of Matthew Jesus tells his disciples, “Do not call yourselves rabbi.” Rabbi is a curse word in Matthew—a perfectly good word in other Gospels, but not in Matthew. Why? Because historically, the congregation to which Matthew wrote is just minutes away from a painful split with the synagogue. And, as Matthew specialist Jack Dean Kingsbury pictures it, Matthew’s church is just across the street from a powerful synagogue, and the little congregation is threatened and terrified. Matthew’s Jesus doesn’t like the word “rabbi” because that’s what the leadership across the street is called.

For reasons I don’t fully understand, the word *friend* is also a curse word in Matthew. It is always used in a negative sense. You remember the parable of the laborers in the vineyards: The guy who worked all day and who only got a denarius, the same amount as those who only worked a single hour, grumbles about it to the vineyard owner. What does the vineyard owner say? “Friend, didn’t you agree to work for a denarius?” Remember Matthew’s version of the
parable of the wedding banquet: There’s a guy who is at the wedding without a wedding garment on. He’s standing back at the hors d’oeuvre table with a handful of sugared pecans and lime sherbet around his lips, and what does the host say? “Friend, how’d you get in here without a wedding garment?” (When you preach on Matthew, do not sing, “What a friend we have in Jesus.” It’s not a good hymn.) But these two forbidden words, “rabbi” and “friend” collide in Matthew’s betrayal scene. Judas rattles up to Jesus and what does he say? “Greetings, rabbi.” To which Jesus responds, “Hello, friend.”

Now that impacts congregations today in a different way than it did Matthew’s first readers. Most of us are not in congregations that are split-offs from a synagogue across the street, and in fact the power dynamics between synagogue and church have reversed, about which we need to be careful. Taking Matthew’s anti-synagogue rhetoric and bringing it straight into our context is tantamount to anti-Semitism. However, taking this element in Matthew in a more dynamic way can point toward the truth that not calling yourselves the term that your enemy calls you is an empowering word in many congregations. I had the privilege of preaching in an African-American church in New York not long ago. The Sunday I was there, a postal clerk who had been out for six weeks because of a serious illness was present in worship for the first time since his illness. The congregation took forty-five minutes to honor that man. Forty-five minutes to celebrate his return to the congregation. Forty-five minutes to name him a child of God. In other words, out at the post office, you may be called a lot of names, some of them lowly, perhaps some of them derogatory. But in here, don’t you call yourself “only a postal clerk,” don’t call yourselves “too sick to be of any good any more.” In here, call yourself “a child of God.” Call yourself “royalty.” You are chosen by and precious to the Most High God.

Second, let us look at ideological, or theological exegesis of biblical texts. This angle of vision seeks to discover how the text wishes to form convictions in the hearers, shape us by theological claims. For example, Matthew and John have different theological ideas about time. Matthew’s understanding about time is that the reign of God is in the future and we live in a Good Friday world. We are moving toward that great time of the reign of God, experiencing some of its blessings now, but anticipating its fullness only in the future. “Blessed are you who hunger and thirst for righteousness,” Jesus says in Matthew. “You will be (future tense) filled.” With John, however, it is almost as if he reaches out and takes Matthew’s future and pulls it like a canopy over ordinary time. In Matthew, the kingdom is ahead of us, in the future. In John, the reign of God is above us, and like a sowing machine, God’s eternal time keeps penetrating into ordinary time and creating signs. Remember the Lazarus story in John? Lazarus is dead and Jesus is late to the funeral. As a matter of fact, he is in a holding pattern outside of Bethany and he won’t come in. Finally one of Lazarus’ sisters, Martha, goes out to him and says, “If you had been here our brother would not have died.” To which Jesus responds, “Your brother will rise again.” To which Martha responds, “I know, I know he will rise again at the last day.” To which Jesus says, “No, no, Martha, that’s the Gospel of Matthew. We’re in the Gospel of John here. I am the resurrection and the life.” Present tense.

I’m thankful for both of those theological perspectives. Matthew’s sense of time helps me read the newspaper. We do live in a Good Friday world. But John’s sense of time helps me understand ecstasy. One can be in line at Wal-Mart on an ordinary Thursday, and something the cashier says can cause the veil to part, and there, for a moment at least, is the kingdom in all its fullness.

Third, let us explore aesthetic criticism of biblical texts, which explores the rhetorical and poetic aspects of the Bible. As an example, in the Gospel of Luke, when the crucifixion was being described, the writer says, “All [Jesus’] acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things,” that is to say, watching the crucifixion, from afar. The Greek term for “at a distance” is macron. Now, why does Luke tell us that the followers of Jesus were standing a long way from the cross? Historically speaking, do we really care how far away these people were? Does it really
make any difference if they were five feet, 50 yards, five miles from the cross? Apparently it is important to Luke, and he wants to say the women and the others who followed Jesus watched these things macron.

This all gets to be quite interesting when we ask if Luke ever used that word in any other context. In Luke 15, the Prodigal says, “I will arise and go to my father and say that I am not worthy to be treated as a son, treat me as a slave,” but while he was still macron, his father ran to him. In another parable, this time in Luke 18, it is reported that two men went up to the temple to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other a Publican. The Pharisee stood and said, “O God, I thank thee that I am not like other people, I’m not an extortioner or a blasphemer, and I’m not even like that shmuck over there.” But the other man stood “macron,” saying, “O God be merciful to me, a sinner.” The term “macron” is not a tape measure; it is a poetic symbol of how far we stand from the grace of God. Luke also wrote Acts, as you know, and Peter’s Pentecost sermon ends, “This good news is for you and for your children and for everyone who stands ‘macron.’”

V

Since the exegetical task of preachers is to look for the original acoustical event in texts, another thing that preachers ought to think about is, what would the first readers of this text have known? What array of knowledge did the first readers bring to the text? We cannot know that in exact detail, of course, but we can make some learned judgments about it. Mark Allan Powell, for example, says that Matthew begins the second chapter by telling us that some magi came to Jerusalem, but Matthew does not tell us what “magi” are. We have to assume that the original readers knew a little bit about what magi were, but what? Powell warns that contemporary interpreters can easily go to a theological library and find a wonderful encyclopedia article about magi, one that covers the territory from Advent calendars to Zoroastrian astrology. But the original readers of Matthew probably did not know anything about that. For them, the “Texts do not contain meanings; they generate them.”

magi were simply weird Gentiles, ultimate Gentiles, maximum goyim, who have somehow arrived at Jerusalem right at the birth of the messiah, fulfilling the promise of Isaiah that all nations will stream to Mt. Zion. In other words, interpreters have to guard against knowing too much, knowing more than the first readers.

On the other hand, sometimes interpreters know too little. For example, take a look at Mark 6:30-44. I’m going to read a portion of this text, and as I do I want you to listen for what might be called the “speed bump” in this text, that is to say, the element in the text that disrupts our reading, that warns, “Slow down and pay attention to this.”

“The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, ‘Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.’ For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, ‘This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.’ But he answered them, ‘You give them something to eat.’ They said to him, ‘Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?’ And he said to them, ‘How many loaves have you? Go and see.’ When they had found out, they said, ‘Five, and two fish.’ Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass...”

Wait a minute, green grass? Where are we? Three times we have been told we are in a desert. Now it is possible in Palestine for a desert to turn green, but it is theologically and literally very interesting when suddenly the desert has turned from brown to green. As a matter of fact, Mark rarely talks this way. He never says things like, “Jesus was wearing brown sandals with a matching brown robe as he stood under the azure sky.” He’s an “immediately Jesus did this...immediately Jesus did that” kind of writer. But suddenly, his prose has
At the 2004 Alumni Convocation, honorary degrees were conferred upon Thomas Grier Long, Bandy Professor of Preaching, Candler School of Theology; Robert Kwasi Aboagye-Mensah, Presiding Bishop, The Methodist Church Ghana; Peter John Gomes, Plummer Professor of Christian Morals and Pusey Minister in the Memorial Church, Harvard; Gary R. Lillibridge, Bishop Coadjutor, Diocese of West Texas; and Timothy Bernard Cogan, School Minister Emeritus, Brooks School, North Andover, Massachusetts.
The original readers of Mark knew the Old Testament probably better than you and I do, and when someone who knows the Old Testament hears that the desert has suddenly turned green, where do their minds go? They go to Isaiah: “The desert will blossom.” When? When God is about to redeem the people of Israel. When the long-expected Servant of God acts to save. When the Messiah comes. Not only that, look at this. “He ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups.” In others words, he made them sit down in groups, he maketh them lie down on green grass. We have echoes of Psalm 23, “The Lord is my shepherd…he makes me to lie down in green pastures.” Now, look back at Mark 6:34: “He had compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.” And he maketh them to lie down in green pastures. With a single word Mark has galvanized for competent readers of the Old Testament two powerful images, servant-messiah and shepherd.

In addition to paying attention to what the first readers would have known, preachers can also fruitfully explore the process by which the text generates its impact. Take a look, for example, at Exodus 22:26-27. This is a casuistic law, a law that spells out what is obliged to be done in a specific case:

“If you take your neighbor’s coat or cloak in pawn, you shall restore it before the sun goes down, what’s the point of that? That destroys the whole principle of collateral.

“For it may be your neighbor’s only clothing to use as cover.” Well, I understand that, but, once again, isn’t that the whole point? Holding something of real value is the power that underlies the idea of collateral.

“But in what else shall that person sleep?” Well, that’s not my problem. He’s the one that entered into the deal. It’s not my problem if he sleeps in the cold.

“But if your neighbor cries out to me,” God says, “I will make it my problem, for I am compassionate.”

Did you notice that? Did you see how the little linked phases of this casuistic law brought us step-by-step out of the arena of everyday commerce and into a theophany, into an encounter with the very nature of the living God? What began in the pawn shop ended up in the presence of the compassionate God of Israel.

For another example of textual process, let us look at Matthew 6:25-34:

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”

At first glance, this text dies the death of a thousand qualifications. Look at the birds, they don’t worry. Look at the lilies, they don’t worry. Yeah, they don’t have mortgages and tuitions, either. Textual scholars, such as Robert Tannehill, have pointed out, however, that verbs in this text are very strong. The text does not merely say “Consider
the lilies of the field.” The text screams, “Look… really look at the lilies and the birds.”

Have you seen the play “The Cotton Patch Gospels”? It is the Gospel of Matthew set in South Georgia. I went to see it in Atlanta one night. It was the last performance of the run, and Tom Key was playing the part of Jesus. He got to this passage about the birds and the lilies in the Sermon on the Mount, and he walked forward on the stage, looked at the audience, pointed to the side wall of the auditorium and said, “Look at the birds of the air.” And then he stopped, as if he couldn’t remember the next line. He started over. “Look at the birds of the air.” He started again. The rest of the cast was getting nervous, you could feel it. He started again, “Look at the birds of the air.” Finally he turned around to the rest of the cast and said, “I can’t get these people to look.” Well, the next time he said, “Look at the birds of the air,” you can be sure the whole audience looked!

So if we look, really look, what do we see? If we really look at the birds and the flowers, we move into a world of carefree providence. At first, we retreat. “Yeah, yeah, yeah,” we say. “That’s nice, but I don’t live over there.” But look, look again, really look! And so we go back and look again, but we return saying, “Well, it’s beautiful, but I can’t live like…” Look again, really look. And finally, if we look long enough and hard enough, a shift occurs in our imaginations. We enter imaginatively and deeply into the world of carefree providence. For a moment at least, we have lived there, and when we come back, as we must, into the world of anxiety and care, we begin to wonder which world is real—providence or anxiety? Suddenly our anxious lives have been relativized by the intense process of the text.

Here is one final example of the power of textual process, this time a familiar text from the eighteenth chapter of Matthew:

“At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ He called a child whom he put among them, and said, ‘Truly, I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name, welcomes me.’”

Once again, a flat-footed interpretation of this text (which I have done many times in sermons), simply reaches into the barrel of this passage and pulls out a theological and ethical nugget, namely, “be humble.” That’s it, the whole point: be humble, be humble like children are humble.

But when we explore the process of the text, a much more complex and interesting reality emerges. What happens here is that the disciples come to Jesus. Jesus stands at the epicenter of the reign of God, and the disciples dare to enter that circle and ask, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

By the way, we should not misunderstand the question the disciples ask. In Matthew, this is a good question. In Luke and Mark, when the disciples are discussing “who is the greatest,” it’s a bad thing, a sign of vanity and a grab for power. But in Matthew it is different. The question is about who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And that is a good question. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that those who keep the commandments are “great in the kingdom of heaven” (5:19), and now the disciples want to know who will be called great in the kingdom sense. Also, positioned as it is at the beginning of Matthew 18, a chapter on church life and discipline, the disciples’ question is really a question about church leadership. Matthew’s first readers would have heard it as a question about who is qualified to be a leader in the church? Who’s great in the community that embodies the reign of God? Who’s entitled to be a leader in this place? Jesus reaches out and takes a child, which, in the first century sense, is not a Gerber Baby. A child in Jesus’ day was a person of low social status. So Jesus puts a lowly child in the middle of the circle. Now notice the spatial aspect of this. Jesus and the disciples are standing in the circle of the kingdom, and now a new element has entered that space: a child. Who’s in the circle? Jesus, the disciples, and the child.

Then Jesus says, “Unless you humble yourselves like this child, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Watch what happens to the space. The disciples have suddenly been thrust out. Only Jesus and the child are in the circle now.

The next move comes when Jesus says, “Whoever humbles himself or herself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom.” Now, spatially the disciples move back into the circle, but this time with a different status, the status of the lowly child.

But there is yet one more move, which comes when Jesus says, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name,”—now the child is out again and the disciples are in but with a new identity, they’re welcoming the child—“welcomes me.” Interestingly, Jesus is now outside the circle, in other words outside the church, and he enters into the circle through the disciples welcoming of the child.
When we track the spatial moves of this text, it becomes full of energy and interest. But what does all of this movement mean? What does it generate for a hearer? The effect of the text is to create the realization that a true leader in the church, someone who is great in the kingdom sense, is not simply someone who can give a humble pie speech (“I am so honored that you have elected me to the vestry, and I will with the best of my ability and your prayers do my service”) but instead one who has the experience of being out, of experiencing the lowly status of an outsider, and who knows that entry into the circle of God’s light is strictly a matter of grace. These people know that they do not deserve to be in, so they come in with the humility of a child. When they do, the kind of leadership they exercise to the community takes the form of hospitality to the least and the lowly. The best news of the text is that when leaders exercise leadership marked by hospitality to the least, Jesus himself enters the life of the church.

There are many more things to say about how preachers can engage biblical texts and experience their power, but you couldn’t bear them all. I will close by saying that the question asked every Sunday in many African American churches, “Is there a word from the Lord?” is a question I hope all of us, as we stand in the pulpit on Sunday morning, can answer in the affirmative.

Thank you for listening.

Following the Reinicker lectures, Dr. Long and Dr. Peter Gomes, right, participated in an informal dialogue and discussion with members of the audience. The discussion was moderated by the Rev. Ruthanna Hooke, Assistant Professor of Homiletics.
I welcome you all to this second Reinicker Lecture. It is a great honor to introduce to you the Reverend Professor Peter J. Gomes who is the Plummer Professor of Christian Morals and Pusey Minister in the Memorial Church of Harvard University.

Professor Gomes was educated in the schools of Plymouth, Massachusetts, that community which has lived so many lives around that old outcropping of craggy Christian faith in its harbor. He graduated from Bates College and Harvard Divinity School and was ordained to the Christian Ministry by the First Baptist Church of Plymouth. The people who surround and who enter the Memorial Church at Harvard know that that act by God’s people was not in vain. His present pastoral ministry at The Memorial Church is profound, yet his voice is heard far beyond those walls and well beyond the University itself. He is welcomed in venues that do not expect these days to be speaking with Christian ministers, from the Public Broadcasting Service to House Beautiful Magazine.

Peter Gomes distinguishes every pulpit he enters as a guest. His lectures are heard and his books read internationally. Boston is a city founded in expectation that the proclamation of God’s Word should encounter the whole of life, and in the minister of the Memorial Church, it does.

Professor Gomes, we welcome you, sir, to a seminary that cares passionately about preaching. We think hard about it, we teach it, we appoint professors to work with it, we practice it, we struggle with it. Our graduates assembled here and this local community of teachers and learnings from which they have come are on the front lines of the ministry of preaching. This is a group who knows that it matters. Your own scholarship, teaching, writing, and practice have in the strongest meaning of the word encouraged us. We bid you welcome to this school of prophets, our almost newest alums, and to this lectern as one of us.

Dr. Stafford leads the procession, for the last time, for the Academic Convocation in October 2004.
My first word is one of thanks and gratitude to this school for the honor done me both today and yesterday, and my appreciation and gratitude for being accepted into the life of this remarkable institution. Receiving and accepting an honorary degree is a bit like circumcision; it cannot be undone, and so we are bound to one another forever, and for me that is a very happy circumstance.

Before I proceed further into the substance of my remarks, and they are concerned with preaching, preachers, and the work of preaching, perhaps I ought to confess the obvious. People think I am an Episcopalian, and what has happened this week will make it even more difficult to correct that misapprehension. I think they think I’m an Episcopalian because I can read, but I am not – just as good a friend as you have, and you have been something of my hobby for all of my life. Some people collect stamps, some are interested in astrology, but I have been interested in the Episcopal Church and have looked in warmly from afar, with my nose pressed to the glass, because I have been fascinated by what you do and appreciative of it: your liturgical inheritance, your Prayer Book, your music, I regard as great treasures of the west and feel I have some modest claim on them, however imperfectly. The imperfect part is what I want to speak of in these introductory remarks.

Many years ago I was invited to take a service in a little Episcopal colony, North Haven, an island off the coast of Maine familiar to some of you. I looked forward to it, the great and the good were there, for Bostonians who never go to church in the winter are absolutely faithful in their devotions on Sundays in the summer in North Haven. I was reassured that it was Morning Prayer and that I was the preacher, so after a punishing round of cocktail parties on Saturday night I was delivered safe and sound to the place in which I was to stay, which was the organist’s house right next to the little church. After a final drink I said casually to her, “Who’s reading the service tomorrow?” She said, “Well, you are;” which was absolute news. I had been invited to preach, and assumed there would be someone there who would read Morning Prayer, which I had never read in my life. The island was full of Episcopal clergymen on holiday, and retired Episcopal priests, and so on, and here I was to do this. She said, “It’s very simple, it’s all in the book.”

So, I took myself over to the church at about ten-thirty at night, took up the Book of Common Prayer, opened it to Morning Prayer, and walked through it exactly as it said to.

I tried to imagine how my great hero, Theodore Parker Ferris, in Trinity Church, would read Morning Prayer – which I had seen many times but had never done. I got it down pat, thinking that to add that burden to the preparations of a sermon, especially unexpected, seemed more than was right.

The morning came, the little church was filled to the doors, I was directed to the right place, I put on the right vestments, I came in, and I read Morning Prayer, and preached as God enabled me to do. As far as I was concerned it was seamless, there was no mistake, no slip up, nothing; thank God for the Book of Common Prayer. At the door I greeted all and sundry, and some lady said, “Well, we could certainly tell that you’re not an Episcopalian.” I said, “Whatever do you mean by that? Where did I slip up? What was the clue that let you know that I was not one of you?” She said, “We have only two commandments and you added eight others.” It was then that I discovered that it all may be in the book, but that is only the beginning of the work.

I cherish liturgical worship and I love to watch liturgical people try to follow their own rubrics. That was a cheap shot, but I couldn’t resist it. Another thing brought to me in fond remembrance is a story that my
old friend and mentor Charles Price used to tell. We were gathering yesterday for photographs in Meade Hall, and I remembered that he loved to tell the story of a preacher here somewhere in Virginia who was preaching on the law of the Medes and the Persians, and a lady came up to him afterward and said, “Rector, that was a marvelous sermon; my mother was a Meade.” This is the only place on earth I could tell that story, and I have dispatched my responsibility.

Preaching gatherings are by nature difficult and problematic because we all take them seriously, we all want to do well by them, and we all suffer from gross feelings of inadequacy. I don’t know of any preacher, and certainly any collection of preachers, with a sense of self-satisfaction and achievement and accomplishment, which is why conferences like this will always be subscribed and people like Tom and I will always go. I think there is a sense that we want to speak to what is regarded as a potent and pressing issue, but one which doesn’t seem to admit of self-confidence. Self-confidence implies pride, and there will be something that will destroy us in the wake of that, and the efforts to improve on our own — to wit all the self-help books and tapes on preaching — in many respects seem for naught, or at least frustrating.

I want to speak directly to that sense of anxiety and concern, and thus I have titled the topic that I’ve chosen “Opportunities and Adversaries: The Dangers of Preaching Today.” I think that all preachers, and certainly all new preachers, ought to be reminded that preaching is a dangerous enterprise. It is volatile, and you don’t even have to be good at it for it to be dangerous and volatile. If you are good at it, however, you become even more aware of the dangers and volatility. I speak out of no abstract theory here, but out of more than 30 years of plying this craft in one shop, and, one hopes, learning from it every day, and graduating one’s mistakes. The great thing about preaching in a university is that the congregation, by and large, turns over every four years, and every six years you can rehabilitate some of your earlier thoughts in the hope that you might get it right. Just as an aside, in terms of the homiletical barrel that you may have heard of and some of you may yearn to cultivate, let me tell you my own experience: I have never found a sermon that was worth preaching again, not because it was necessarily bad, but I think in some respects because I am never in the same place I was when I did what I did. Believe me, I’ve tried! I’ve pulled out an old Easter sermon to see if I could crank it up, but it simply was not worth the trouble to try to recapture what worked then, and it was much better to start with a fresh piece of paper and a fresh hope. So, the barrel is not all that it is cracked up to be, and it’s the old computer slogan: garbage in, garbage out. In most cases you’re better off starting from scratch.

Preaching is not only dangerous, it is also risky, and I give you an example of that, the account of our Lord’s first sermon. I like to use this text when I’m given a chance, Luke 4:28, at ordinations of candidates for the ministry, or at installations of new ministers. Remember, Jesus is rejected at Nazareth. First he is hailed as the bright local boy made good, he is invited up to the bema, he is given the scroll of the prophet Isaiah which he doubtless reads flawlessly, he hands the scroll back, and then it becomes interesting. First he sits down, and that is to remind us that the teaching authority is exercised from a chair, which is why professors have chairs, which is why bishops have chairs, and if I had more authority I would give this lecture seated, as I would in the Eastern Church. So, when he sits down it becomes clear that more than mere reading is going to take place. As they say in the black church, he “ceased to preach and commenced to meddle.” He began to tell them that this prophecy was being fulfilled in their hearing, and he began to do an exegetical number on the bit he had just read from Isaiah. The long and the short of it is that it didn’t go very well, and in fact went so badly that they chased him out of town and threw him over a cliff. Now, we know that that’s not where it ends, because there are many more chapters than the fourth chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke, but it sets up the beginning of the risk of speaking the word of God to the people of God. The two do not necessarily go together when you want to put them together, and so you become aware of the dangers of preaching, and you also become aware that preaching is one of the most extraordinary opportunities given to those of us who are called to take it up.

At this point I’m going to do something of which Tom probably won’t approve; I’m going to take a text and read a little passage, most of which is entirely irrelevant, and you’ll see what I want to do when I get to it. I’m going to read from I Corinthians 16, beginning at the fifth verse. The set-up for this is a bit of housekeeping on Paul’s part, messages on the refrigerator door, a little snippet from his Palm Pilot, nothing significant here but there’s a point to it. He says:

“After I go through Macedonia
I will come to you, for I will be going through Macedonia. Perhaps I will stay with you awhile, or even spend
Professor Gomes and Dean Martha Horne.
the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go. I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you if the Lord permits, but I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me and there are many who oppose me.”

I’m interested only in those last two verses:

“I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me and there are many who oppose me.”

Other translations read: “A great door for effectual work has opened to me and there are many adversaries.” The interesting thing both in the English and in the Greek is that the connective is not the expected “but” but the disturbing “and.” You can hear Paul say, “A great door for effective work has opened to me, but there are problems, or opponents, or adversaries;” but the connective is not “but” but “and”; “...a great door for effective work has opened to me and there are...” troubles, oppositions, adversaries, difficulties. The small but useful point to be made here is that opportunities and difficulties are not mutually exclusive. They go together. If you have an opportunity, be certain that a difficulty will find you, and meet you at the door of your opportunity. Those of you who have been called to the parishes of your choice, if you have not already discovered this you very shortly will, that through that door there await adversaries, oppositions, difficulties, things that you haven’t contemplated or the very things that you have contemplated, but in more virulent, or perhaps subtle, forms.

Obviously, what I want to suggest in the time given to me this morning, is that preaching is that great opportunity, that wide door opened for effectual work. There’s a wonderful prayer, a collect, I think you would call it, that talks about “Those who speak where many listen” – the extraordinary responsibility that those of us who have a voice and an opportunity to use it have in the face of those who are willing to listen to us. It still amazes me, after 30 years in one pulpit and 36 years in the ordained ministry, that there are people who freely and of their own choice willingly come to church, sit in the pews, and give at least the appearance of being willing to listen to what I, or somebody else, might have to say to them. I come out of a tradition that might be called “sermon-centric,” which you used to have, called “Morning Prayer,” and the sermon was understood to be the centerpiece of the operation, the old high Protestant tradition of the sermon as a sacrament, the “outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.” Preaching was a vocation that addressed that sacrament. There is an incredible opportunity given preachers to help formulate the faith for people, to help express the inexpressible, to meet the great expectations of a congregation. I have never gone to a congregation anywhere where I didn’t encounter within the first few minutes of the sermon at least, a sense of great expectation, a sense that they actually expected something to happen in this exchange between myself and them, and it’s a daunting sort of moment. If you go into a pulpit and you look at a congregation and they’re sitting there with their arms folded as if to say, “Okay, let’s hear what you’ve got to say; let’s hear what this ‘babble’ has to say” – as they said in Athens of Paul – it puts you on your mettle, there’s a kind of antagonism; and I find that in teaching as well as in lecturing to my undergraduates there’s a sort of challenge: they say, “You’ve got nothing to tell us,” and I say, “Oh yes, I have,” and we go at it. There’s a sort of engaging quality there.

In preaching it’s almost disarming. You look out at a congregation of otherwise very intelligent people who look up at you with the expectation that something worthwhile is about to happen, and your great challenge is to fulfill that expectation, or, if you’re going to disappoint them, to do so as quickly as possible. I must say, it is daunting to mount up into a pulpit and look out at people who, as described in Milton’s great line in Lycidas, are “hungry sheep looking to be fed,” and the great curse that you give them stones for bread. The prayer that I utter privately on my knees before I enter the pulpit to say the public prayer is that great aphorism from the Medical School, “Lord, let me do no harm.” I don’t ask for eloquence, I don’t ask for greatness, I don’t ask to remember what I’ve written, I ask that I do no harm, for the people have put themselves into our care, they have thrust themselves with all of their vulnerability into that moment where something is expected. This is, in my view, the “wide door for effective work.” It is open, and great are the opportunities that await us.

Some people ask, “Wouldn’t you have been happier preaching in an earlier day, when the churches were filled and the people more informed, and there was a kind of shared cultural discourse?” which was true of almost every generation before the one in which we find ourselves. I have to confess, however, that while there is an enormously great and wide spiritual, not to mention theological,
illiteracy out there – it’s amazing what people don’t know – for me that is a rather gratifying opportunity, because in the days when everybody knew everything, preaching was much more difficult and much more demanding. They had all heard the parable of the Prodigal Son a thousand times, they knew all the tricks, all the avenues, all the directions and dimensions down which you go, but I preach to people for whom this is all new and novel and interesting. It’s very much like the story of the Greek examination attributed to Oscar Wilde. He was set a passage from the New Testament Greek, to see what he could do with it, and it happened to be the parable of the Prodigal Son, and he translated it by sight . . . and by memory. When he was a third of the way through it, the examiner said, “Very good, Mr. Wilde, that’s fine; no need to proceed any further.” Oscar Wilde responded, “Oh, can’t I see how it turns out?”

I preach to a congregation of very bright, very able, intelligent people who know a great deal more about many things than I know, but the one thing they know very little about is the Christian faith, and so in one sense the great opportunity is in telling the story for the first time to bright and clever people who may have heard about it but have never heard it, and who come expecting it. So, there’s a great illiteracy to be addressed, and we have a responsibility to address it. That’s a wide opportunity.

There’s a great need. The congregation with which I work and the places that I visit have in one sense a palpable need for what people hope is a good word, the gospel, that will actually make a difference in their experience. We have to take seriously the needs that people present to us, and I think very much that that too is a wide door for effectual work. I think preaching, and there’s no point in being subtle about it, is a great and glorious vocation. I am not ashamed to be defined as a preacher. In the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century that was a synonym for pastor, minister, or priest, while nowadays preachers tend to be described as people who only preach.

“The prayer that I utter privately on my knees before I enter the pulpit to say the public prayer is that great aphorism from the Medical School, ‘Lord, let me do no harm.’”

or who are on the fringes of the profession, or at the center of a profession with which we don’t want to associate ourselves. “There goes the preacher!” We would rather be ministers, priests, and the like. I do not mind being defined as a preacher, because when all is said and done, that is what I do. I try to proclaim the good news to people eager to hear it, and thus I think preaching is a glorious vocation, and I use the word ”vocation” in the sense that Fred Buechner described it so marvelously.

Fred Buechner has given us that wonderful definition of vocation: “Where your great joy meets the world’s great need.” I love that as a definition of vocation, to put your joy at the disposal of the world’s needs.

The joy part is very important – the view from up here is not all that joyful – for preaching is serious work, hard work, seminary is a difficult place, the church is in a tough time, and there’s not an abundance of joy in the faces of the clergy or those preparing for it, but the trick of the notion of vocation is that we’re doing this not because we’re good at it, or even because it needs to be done, but because it gives us joy to do it, and joy is contagious. If you have joy in what you’re doing others will have joy in what they’re doing.

One of my great experiences at Harvard was being a young man on the faculty when Yo-Yo Ma was an undergraduate and we were just discovering, or the world was just discovering and recognizing, his prodigious talent. One of the joyous things about watching Yo-Yo Ma play the cello is that he takes such joy in it, he doesn’t pretend that he is not having a terrific time, and his joy is contagious, and that, together with an extraordinary technique, makes his music-making an extraordinary experience for everybody. It seems to me that at its best, preaching ought to be a joyful enterprise. That doesn’t mean it has to be all “Hallelujah Harry;” I’m not a “Hallelujah Harry” kind of guy, as you may have discerned, but joy is not necessarily communicated exclusively in Pentecostal discourse and style; joy comes in many forms and styles, but it comes from within and is communicated beyond the self. It can be done in a wide variety of ways, and the sermon is one of those ways.

So, I call preaching a glorious vocation, where our great joy meets the
world’s great needs. I would also argue, even though I fancy myself a decent historian, that there never has been a better time to be a preacher or to put the gospel forward than now. I do not want to have lived in the time of the apostles – I don’t think I would have enjoyed that at all – and I have no desire to return to the high Middle Ages. I think I would have found the Reformation an incredibly dangerous and tedious season in which to be, and I doubtless would have been on the wrong side of whatever the debate was, and heaven spare me seventeenth, eighteenth, or nineteenth century America. There’s not a moment back there that I would care to repeat. I’m glad to be here, right now, I think this is an exciting and compelling time to have the word of God on our lips and the opportunity and responsibility to dispense it as best we can to people who are expectant. So, those are the opportunities that I think we have; that is the “wide door for effectual work,” of which St. Paul speaks, but what about the adversaries? What about those persons or circumstances in opposition to these opportunities, because they are there and need to be addressed. I have a number of adversaries or oppositions that I wish to speak to, however briefly.

For example, that same hunger that generates those great expectations might also yield unrealistic expectations. If everybody expects every preacher to be Chrysostom, if every sermon is meant to be the high point of one’s spiritual and theological and intellectual career, if every encounter between preacher and people is meant to be a mega-moment, that is an exhausting set of expectations on everyone’s part, and someone, sooner or later, is sure to be disappointed. The people are readily and easily disappointed: “That was a bummer!” We know when they do not like what they have heard. “What was the sermon like?” “What was the sermon like?” “Terrible, this morning.” No one says, “The celebration of the Eucharist was sloppy today; I noticed that the servers were out of step.” Churches are evaluated on, “Was the sermon any good?” That is so for most mainline Protestants, and probably is the case for most of your churches. Nobody will say that, but when you go out on sniffing expeditions, when you’ve been wined and dined by the vestry, you’ve filled out questionnaires, your references have been checked and your criminal history researched, sooner or later somebody is going to ask the search committee, “Well, can she preach?” or, “Did you hear any sermons?” or “What’s he going to be like?” and the sermon becomes a kind of touchstone in the enterprise, whether it should be or not. Great expectations often yield even greater disappointments.

In divinity school many years ago I had a professor of preaching who used to caution us, “Be careful not to try to say everything you know in your first sermon, for you might succeed.” A very wise caution. I can remember wondering, after preaching my first Easter sermon in the Memorial Church, “Well, what else is there to say? What will I do? He died, he was buried, he rose, we’re all surprised: Praise the Lord!” What else does one say after that? How many themes and variations can you work after this first? Well, lots, and there will be yet another one this coming Easter. You too will find that this is true. It is the same story, but you and I change. The great hope is that we will be able to meet those expectations, but one of the adversaries is the curse of unmet or unrealistic expectations in a sermon. You just might not be able to get it right and you know that. My saddest Sundays are those when I know that by whatever standard I set for myself I really did not cut the mustard that morning. I know it; I am my own best critic, and I stand at the door and shake the hands of all the perjurers who pass by saying, “Wonderful sermon!” They are like wounds in the heart, nails in the hands, stigmata, and part of me wants to react with violence: “How would you know if it was a good or bad sermon?” but you can’t do that, and you shouldn’t. If you are blessed with a partner or a spouse who goes to church and listens and will take the responsibility of being honest, you are truly blessed, because somebody somewhere has to affirm your judgment that what you did was lousy. I tell my students not to believe what they hear at the door of the church, and, if they could get away with it, not to go to the door at all, but you can’t get away with that either.

In the Memorial Church, when Charles Price was preacher, we never went to the door, we always stood at the front, and if anybody wanted to come speak to us they could. That was the old Harvard custom, and the president of the University sat in the front pew, and greeted the preacher and left, and others who wished to be greeted or to say a word came forward, so you didn’t place this imposition upon the people as they exited. You can almost see people’s minds turning around as they approach you: “I’m three away, what am I going to say? What bit of pithy exchange can I have without making a commitment of any sort?” My great worry in those days when I was assistant was what would happen if I had a renowned visiting preacher, and I would be standing with him at the foot of the chancel steps, and nobody would come forward? That would be an unambiguous referendum on the sermon. Well, it happened, and with a
very distinguished visitor who had bored for England for about 45 minutes in the sermon, and I knew it was a deadly sermon, and I knew that my congregation was incredibly candid and honest. So, we had the last hymn, we had the blessing, the choir sang “Amen,” we descended the steps and we stood at the foot of the chancel steps, and the congregation left in droves. The backs of the people fled up the center aisle, and I was trying to figure out how to explain this to Dr. Meek, for that was his incongruous name, what had happened. Dr. Meek, older and wiser than I, turned to me and said, “Well, Peter, they may not like it, but it’s the gospel,” and I thought that if it wasn’t bothering him it shouldn’t bother me. That crisis of unmet expectations on our own part and on their part is one of the adversaries in our enterprise.

Another adversary, particularly applicable in a place like this, is that the more we know and the more we learn, the harder it becomes to unpack it. We spend three years in seminary filling your heads with the very best of scholarship, cutting-edge and historical review; we provide you with the best in languages, the best in analytical skills, all of the tricks of the trade, the wide reading that should sustain you for the rest of your life. We know we do this, and you know that you have received it, so how does one explain the phenomenon that within two years in the pulpit you are preaching, by and large, the kinds of sermons you might have preached had you never set foot in a seminary at all?
In fact, you are proud of the fact that “none of that stuff from Virginia has affected the way I preach the gospel to my people; it’s pure and simple and uncomplicated, they wouldn’t care about J, D, E, and P, they don’t want to know about the documentary hypothesis, they’re not interested in whether this is yellow or red or green colored in the coding of whether Jesus said it or might have said it or somebody said Jesus said it, let’s just give them the pure, simple, undiluted gospel. Let’s not worry about theologies of this or theologies of that;” and by the time you have been in the ministry ten years your seminary experience has virtually become a private thing. You come back, go to the library, read all the things you haven’t read, and then never communicate any of it to your people.

How else can you explain the incredible theological sophistication on the part of graduates of our seminaries, and the incredible increasing illiteracy of our congregations? There has to be a connection. If you are taking it all in, where are you putting it all out? It clearly is not happening in the pews of our churches. It may well be that the more we know the harder it is to communicate it, and therefore we revert to what we think will be the most adequate representation, if not the one we’re most confident to give. So, one of those oppositions or difficulties is that the more we know the harder it is to unpack it, and therefore the solution seems to be that the less you know the better off you’ll be. If you can revert to the level of a lay-stump preacher, you’ll fill your church. That is a problem.

The third opposition or adversary to the opportunities of preaching is the fact that we live in a world where we no longer have a monopoly on speech or on people who will listen to us. We have talking heads, we have talk shows, we have panelists, we have editorialists, we have columnists. We have a whole punditry out there of people who do what we once did, which is that they preach, they harangue, they clamor for the attention of their people. I don’t just mean television and radio evangelists of the type you seem to grow here in Virginia; I mean people like Bill O’Reilly and the Fox Network, and television talk show people like Conan O’Brian or Letterman, or radio talk show people: we have to yell to be heard in the clamor of competing public discourse, and that means our job is nowhere nearly as easy as it might have been when the preacher’s was the only voice in town and his the only show going, and he had in some sense a hold on the listening audience. That can be an opposition or adversary that is almost impossible to overcome.

A fourth element that complicates our enterprise as preachers is the perception we have of our people as having a kind of unwillingness to be instructed. Nobody any longer likes experts. Nobody trusts experts. If you say, “I know more about this subject than you do,” that is an immediate turn-off, and the next comment might be, “Says who?” or, “Who died and made you God?” rather than, “Tell me about it.” There’s that sort of thing, a hostility to expertise, and we preachers by definition are meant to have expertise in explicating and communicating the things that matter, the things of the spirit, the things of religion. We have to be able to use our expertise without demonstrating the fact that we are experts; we don’t want to exercise our authority, whether ordained, intellectual, or biblical. We do not wish to be seen as high priests. We may dress up as high priests, but we don’t want anybody to think of us as having this kind of high and lifted-up specialty, and as a result we don’t discourse under authority, as the lesson gave us last night in the gospel. We just want to say, “Well, my view is more or less the same as yours, I hope you’ll give me a fair hearing. I happen to be standing ten feet above contradiction and wearing funny clothes, but my opinion is really no different from yours, and let’s talk about it.” In certain cases we’ve actually communicated that so well that people say, “You’re right; who are you to discourse on this, that, or the other? What you know about I’m not interested in, and in what I know that you know about, my opinion is as good as yours.” So, we face a certain difficulty in trying to get out our message, the responsibility of our
The fifth danger is the danger of taking positions, which is why preaching so often comes across as anodyne, the “bland-leading-the-bland,” a certain kind of white sound that has a religious-speak. There are certain ontological sounds to that that make us feel good, but there’s nothing there that would commit us to anything that anyone cares about. You can argue that the furniture in heaven is over-stuffed and not vinyl, but who cares whether that is really the case or not? Or you can argue about some abstract point in early church theology or ancient church history, and nobody really cares; but at the point where you might take a position in which somebody has a stake, there is a high risk in doing so. For example, one of the great fears that I know of myself and from others in our trade, is that one of the dangers in taking a position is that we might get it wrong. It might be the wrong position, we might have the wrong spin on it, we might have the wrong point of view, and we would then be doing damage to our listeners and to our own credibility. We’re not expert enough in this field, so let’s not venture there. Another danger in taking a position is that we might get it right, but then we’ll suffer for it. Somebody won’t like the fact that we got it right and we’ll hear about it, we’ll be alienating, estranging people. Another danger is that we will feel guilty in knowing that is right and not acting upon it – we won’t dare risk it – and therefore we feel guilty. This is a set of dilemmas that inhibits our preaching and represent as vivid oppositions and adversaries as any that Paul might have contemplated when he was writing in I Corinthians. I set them up in this way because they come out of my own experience, and I suspect that I am not alone in looking both at the glorious opportunity and at the high risk involved.

At this point I want to appeal to some contested advice, and I say “contested advice” because not everybody buys it, and you’ll see why in a moment. I don’t know how many of you know Karl Barth’s little book on homiletics – the homiletics lectures of 1932-1933 — which has been prepared and published, with a preface by our colleague David Buttrick. Is this a book known to many or any of you? What a relief! So few of you know anything about it that I can say anything I want. I’m not a Barthian, although I read him, he’s interesting, like looking at the Alps, but I am interested in how Barth grabs on to the function of preaching. He understands unambiguously that preaching is exposition of scripture. It is not about scripture, it is from scripture, and so a discourse on the errors of our policies in Iraq, even though it might be bracketed with bits and pieces from scripture, is not a sermon, as our policy in Iraq, despite the views of some, is not holy writ, and therefore the sermon is defined as the exposition from scripture. This is what he says:

“Our task is simply to follow the distinctive movement of thought in the text, to stay with this and not with a plan that arises out of it.”

That runs contrary, perhaps, to every normal instinct of every normal American preacher. He is horrified, and would be horrified, I suspect, by our syllogism of text and context as pretext for what we wish to say, and in that context he offers three famous warnings about preaching:

One: Beware of illustrations. “Especially unhelpful is the method of seasoning a sermon with all kinds of illustrations. In no circumstances should we hunt around for these.” That would put a whole segment of the publishing industry out of business. How many of us have been tempted by one hundred and one sermon illustrations, or illustrations from life applied to biblical text, or biblical text amplified by illustrations from personal experience? There are people who have illustrations for hire, and there are many of us who are living impoverished enough lives that we are prepared to hire those illustrations. How many of us can have mountaintop, illustrative moments? How many of us have that woman who came into our study last week and said, “Pastor…” Most of us do not live such interesting lives, but somebody does, and writes them down, and we buy them for fear that the gospel itself or our own exposition of it will not stand the test. I’ll come back to the problem of illustrations in a moment.

Two: The second thing Barth is upset about is pet causes. He says, “Caution is needed in relation to our pet ideas; we do not always have to bring in the latest or most sensational events.” Then he illustrates his point about not having illustrations by the experience he had in 1912 when the Titanic went down. He said he preached several times on the Titanic sinking and felt guilty about it, feeling that the gospel had been hijacked by the Titanic. As if that wasn’t bad enough, two years later he had World War I to preach about, and he said he preached for weeks about the outbreak of the Great War until a lady came to him and said, “We read this in the papers and hear it everywhere, can’t we have some relief in church?” He understood at that point the error of his ways, and decided that he was going to preach the gospel and not the newspapers.

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Three: The third is closely related to the second, what Barth called the dangers of relevance. “I had disgracefully forgotten the importance of submission to the text. All honor to relevance, but pastors should be good marksmen who aim their guns beyond the hills of relevance.” Interesting military metaphor there.

Well, these three things, illustrations, pet causes, and relevance I say are probably good for Barth but not necessarily good for us. Barth is dead, and we are here. There are some cautions to be exercised: in my preaching course, when students desperately reach out for illustrations, thinking that they will humanize the sermon, I say to them, “Illustration must arise naturally, like gestures.” People ask, “What gestures should we use?” and my counsel is, “When you begin to preach, clasp both sides of the pulpit and do not move, and then a gesture will come quite naturally and it will be fine.” If you have in your margins, “Gesture now,” that really doesn’t cut it. As is true of gestures, in my opinion, is also true of illustrations: they will come if they are the right illustrations at the right time for the right thing. You can think about them in advance, but to construct them is to make an arbitrary use, and that is where Barth is absolutely correct. Illustrations will come to you; don’t go after them.

His second thing, about pet causes, is a wise thing. We have to ask permission – to use a very old-fashioned notion – of the text, and that is hard to do. It has little to do with whether there’s a “there there” or not; it is to say, given this text, what am I allowed to say about it? Am I allowed to say, ‘This text is a nasty piece of work?’ Yes, you are because, by and large, that’s what most people are going to think about some of the difficult parables, and that’s how you get into it. “This is a nasty little bit of work. Why? Why do we dislike it so? Why is it so against-the-grain?” and that is a way of getting into it instead of avoiding it or evading it, which many will try to do, or domesticating it, trying to make it nice and pretty. Most of the parables are not nice and they’re not pretty; most have an edge, and they’re as edgy now as they were then. The great question is, why are they edgy?

Tom spoke of the use of the widow’s mite for Stewardship Sunday, and I want you to know, having preached 30 stewardship sermons, that I have never preached stewardship on the widow’s mite. I’m perfectly aware of it, and even more so now, but I have never preached on it for stewardship. I have preached on Ananias and Sapphira on stewardship – which has a punch on Stewardship Sunday – “The feet of those who carried your husband out are here to take you” … “the ushers will now wait upon you for the morning offering.” Now, what is there about the story of Ananias and Sapphira that we don’t like? Well, it’s violent, it’s irrational, God is implacable, and the apostles are absolutely ruthless. There is no “We have a project, we need everybody to help just a little bit; you do what you can and we’ll do what we can and together we can do great things.” No! Not at all. Now, that’s stewardship, and it’s also risky, and I would say that you can preach on Ananias and Sapphira on Stewardship Sunday maybe once, and it’ll have either one or two effects: either things will work out as they should, or you will be looking for a new job. There is something about asking the text what it allows you to say, and you can dissent from it if you wish. If you’re having trouble with it, you have to explicate why. Is my trouble with it the same trouble that they had? Is it the same trouble the listeners will have? In many ways, difficult texts are wonderful ways into what the gospel is supposed to be about.

The relevance issue is very hard for most of us, because most of us believe that our preaching must be connected in some way to what is most connected in the minds of our listeners, and Barth seems to be completely out to lunch on the subject. I remember a colleague saying that Barth took his own advice and therefore found it very difficult to contemplate World War II, which I suppose is a reasonably fair critique. There is something to be said about relevance, but it’s not about relevance to the immediate moment. The text and the sermon must be relevant to the gospel, the overwhelming agenda of the gospel, and not to tomorrow’s newspaper unless tomorrow’s newspaper is relevant to the gospel. My very distinguished predecessor, George Arthur Buttrick, David Buttrick’s late father, was fond of saying, after he had explicated a text with the surgical skill that was characteristic of him, “Now, where’s the good news? Where’s the good news in this?” He didn’t mean “Where’s the happy ending,” he meant, “Where are the demands of the gospel to be found in all of this?” If that is the basic question, that is the only relevant question, and it will keep us on the right path, and on our toes as well.

We preach not in a vacuum but in a very clearly defined context, and that context today is unfortunately what is called the loss of our common language. Have you ever heard people, in a moment of great candor, who regularly go to church, ask, “What are they” – we – “talking about?” We have a church-speak, a church-tone, a church-language that is no longer current. You know, our semi-literate
ancestors actually knew what “propitiation” meant, and didn’t have to have it explained. Those seventeenth and eighteenth century Prayer Bookers actually had some notion of what they were reading, which is eluding us daily. We’ve lost the common discourse both of our poetry and of our theological language, and so we have to understand that that’s the context in which we’re working. The English literary critic, Jane Helen Gardner, has a word about this having to do with the problem of thoughtful poetry in the twentieth century, which applies to theology as well. Dame Helen, writing of T.S. Eliot, says:

“It is not the poet’s business to make us believe what he believes, but to make us believe that he believes he must convince us that what he believes genuinely interprets—makes sense of—experiences which we recognize as our own. Although we may not accept his interpretation we must feel that it is a real interpretation.”

So far, so good, but then there’s a big “but”:

“But in an age like ours, with no accepted system of belief, in which the traditional system is not so much actively disbelieved as ignored, such an interpretation can only convince if the poet forgoes what earlier Christian writers loved to employ—the language of the Bible, the common prayers of the church. The problem of interpretation for a religious poet in an age in which his religious beliefs are not widely held is a special aspect of the general problem of communication for the poet in the modern world.”

Now substitute the word “theologian” for the word “poet,” and in a common conversation in Dunkin’ Donuts or Starbucks, if you say, “You know, we really have a problem with the relevant theology of the atonement these days,” most people will wonder what you are talking about.

The services of the Memorial Church have for many years been broadcast over the student radio, and I think we reach all of three and a half square miles, although nowadays we’re on the Internet and I get letters from people in Fiji who hear our services, although neighbors across the street can’t get them. Many, many years ago, Dr. Buttrick, who was proud of his prowess on the radio, told this story. He went into the Harvard Faculty Club on a Monday and sat down next to a Nobel laureate in physics, and the Nobel laureate leaned across the table and said, “George, I heard your sermon yesterday on the radio.” “Oh yes,” said George, all puffed up. “I didn’t believe a word you said,” said the Nobel laureate. George was deflated but ready to respond, when the Nobel laureate said, “But I suppose you do, and that’s what counts, isn’t it?”

There is something, isn’t there, about not persuading people that our beliefs are their beliefs, but that our beliefs are our beliefs, and that there is something to be said for that.

The opportunities and difficulties in the context of our preaching do not require a doctoral dissertation in communication theory or homiletics to address. I will suggest just three around which you may already have waltzed and from which you may already have been burned, but I’m leaving in an hour and a half and have little to lose now by speaking on these subjects. The first is about the war, not the big wars, not even the War between the States, which may be risky; I’m talking about the war in which we are now engaged. I tried my hand at this before we were actually in the war, in what is called the “run-up” to the war, in October 2002. I had been in the mid-west, in Bob Dole country, giving a series of talks in a Presbyterian church, a large, prosperous, very cautious Presbyterian church. My subject was not the war; I was talking about something perfectly harmless and innocent, and then there were questions. Person after person asked, “Why are we rushing into this war? Is there something that we don’t know? We don’t understand this. My boy is in the National Guard…” Those were October 2002 kinds of questions from good solid middle Americans who trust their government and who helped elect—not the proper word—but who were happy with the result of the last election. These were not whingey, Cambridge, crunchy granola, sandal-wearing types of difficult people; these were people on whom the country depends, and they were asking these questions.

I did my best to answer them, and they provoked a sermon that I gave when back in Cambridge a couple of weeks later, the title coming from the inscription on the statue of Nurse Edith Cavell, in London, beside the National Gallery. Do any of you know of that statue? It says, “Patriotism is Not Enough”; that was the title of my sermon. Nurse Cavell was executed by the Germans at the beginning of World War I; it’s a complicated and sad story, but those were her last words. I preached a sermon under that title and asked if we actually did what Jesus would have us do, if we actually followed the implications those inscriptions and medals that certain kinds of people like to wear—such as WWJD? What Would Jesus Do?—would one of the things he would have us do is go unthinkingly to war? At that point we certainly had suspicions, but we knew a good deal less about the
shabbiness of the enterprise than we know now. I have tenure, so I can afford to preach such sermons and I did, but that does not prevent the kinds of reactions that you might anticipate, including lots of angry letters both from the congregation itself, which had given me an unprecedented standing ovation, and somebody wrote in, saying, “Somebody is speaking to our unexpressed fears. We may have different views, but at least we’re able to talk about them in this setting,” which had not been the case before. The question to be asked then, and even more now, is, what are the claims of the gospel, to which you and I are committed, versus those of the government, to which we’re also committed? Our citizenship is in heaven, we’re told in the New Testament, but is it really? and if it is, what do those claims have on the claims that we exercise as citizens? Those are fair questions; they are not partisan.

People do not necessarily like what they hear, but does that mean that they ought to be spared from hearing it? If we speak on these matters pastorally, prophetically, analytically, or in other ways, do we risk shutting down the entire conversation, or do we invite the possibility of dialogue? Certain subjects are taboo and we know we can’t talk about them because they will shut down rather than expand the conversation, but what effect does that have on preaching? It seems to me that it puts us in a slightly different position of risk-taking and responsibility-exercising. It was a rebuke to me to find from any number of secular editorials speaking with more passionate Christian conviction than either I or many Christian preachers were prepared to, and that is a subject that each preacher must wrestle with in his or her conscience and within his or her community. To do it out of the blue with no preparation and no context and no consequence of further discussion is a high risk enterprise, but not to do it at all seems to me to be a dereliction of duty. So, that’s preaching on the war.

Here in this corner of the world, preaching on race 50 years ago was almost equivalent to preaching on the war today. You would ask, what are the claims of the gospel, but there was always the challenge of the claims of the gospel as received versus the claims of the status quo and conscience, and many a memoir I have read of white, heroic preachers in the south who knew what the right thing was and tried to speak to it and suffered greatly for it, and also the number of memoirs of white preachers in the south who knew what the right thing was and didn’t speak about it, and have felt guilty and obligated ever since. The great challenge always is, “Shall I preach prophetically? and if I am preaching prophetically, is it for my self-gratification, just to tick people off, or is it bringing the word of the Lord as best I can?” The risk of not feeding God’s people is a terrible risk, the millstone round about our necks, and we won’t have to wait for Judgment Day but only for a decade or two to be forced to answer the question, “Where were you on the issue of…in the day when it was a red-hot burning issue? Where were you, and where was your pulpit, at that moment?”

Now all of this leads to the hardest topic of the day, particularly in the diocese of Virginia: I can’t imagine how the Episcopalians became so obsessed with sex. You were once a very dull, tidy, repressed, respectable middle-class people, and that’s what I liked so much about you. There was a kind of rectitude about the Episcopal Church, and one could go into one and not worry about any of those randy issues that concerned the rest of us, but suddenly you became obsessed with sex, like the Presbyterians with predestination. This is something you can’t let go, and it’s not just sex in general--on that you’re still all tied up--but it’s homosexuality, which has become the defining issue of the Episcopal Church. I must confess I find this odd; I mean, you’re not worried about the divinity of Christ, you’re not worried about the Second Coming, you’re not worried about the reality of hell or Satan’s activities or the authority of scripture; churches are rising and falling and bishops are coming and going on the basis of this one issue of homosexuality, on which the scriptures are relatively silent. Not entirely silent, but relatively so, for the scriptures have actually more to say on the subject of money and divorce, two subjects on which the Episcopal Church is remarkably silent. Just in this week’s issue of Time magazine, that you all know about, there’s a very sad tale of two churches, a centerfold, of division in the Episcopal Church, and as I read it carefully the only question that appears to have caused this rupture in the body of Christ is the question of homosexuality. I would argue that, for reasons good or bad, homosexuality has become the race and war issue of our time, but even more virulent because people believe--unlike with the subjects of race and war, which are subject to even the pretense of analysis—that anyone’s opinion on homosexuality is as valid as anyone else’s opinion because it has to deal with something so fundamental as our sexual identity, and thus it is less and less capable of rational discourse because it is so fundamental to who and what we think we are, and a mask to a whole set of other anxieties. If you have problems with sex, in general, you’re certainly going to have problems.
with homosexuality, and since you can’t address the problems of sexuality you can address the problem of homosexuality, and I think that is why everybody’s argument tends to take the shape that it does.

I want to suggest, in a controversial way, that homosexuality is not the defining issue of our time, and ought not to be, but how we deal with it does define how we understand scripture and our relationship to one another, our relationship to our culture, and our relationship to our God. Homosexuality, just like heterosexuality, is not a theological principle. It happens to be a state of being, and there is no more substance to it, in my opinion, than arguing about left-handedness versus right-handedness, and I’ll be happy to debate with people, who must be here, who feel otherwise. That doesn’t mean that because it is both controversial and unpleasant it should be avoided and evaded. It calls every theological principle that we have into play, and that is why, despite the cri de coeur of many of my racial brethren, the race analogy is apt, because the way we debated and discussed and dealt with race is very much the way we’re dealing with this now. Certain issues are off topic, certain consequences are absolute, and the world will fall in if any change in this discourse occurs. The race analogy is apt.

So, the great question for all of us is, on what side of history and judgment do you want to be found in ten years, five years, 20 years, 50 years from now when the subject of homosexuality is resolved, very much like the race issue, in my opinion? When our children look back at this and see churches split and dioceses riven and friendships frayed, people will want to know where you were on that, how you came to the position you held, and is it the same position you are now holding? I think we might call that the “perspicacity of theological doctrine with social issues;” they don’t stay in the same place, and if we don’t move with them we will be left behind.

The paradox of all of this is that preaching has never been more needed than it is today, nor has it ever been more dangerous than it is today. True, people will not be burned at the stake, books will not be thrown in the square to be burned like Savonarola and his volumes, but the dangers of preaching are evident, as I have tried to suggest, and it is a calling to which one goes only if one is called so to do, and only if one has the longest possible view and a clear sense of one’s identity as an agent of the good news of Jesus Christ. Given the chance, people will listen, and the great question is: are we worth hearing? Do we have something to say that will be worth the risk of our listeners’ putting their confidence in whatever it is we are trying to say? Have we thought it through? Have we worked it out? Remember this: it is not about us. It is about the good news God has in store for us and has entrusted to us through the fragile vessel of our ministry and our preaching. If we remember that in good times and in bad times, it seems to me we will be doing the work we have been called to do, and that “wide door for effectual work will be opened unto us”; and even though there are many adversaries, oppositions, and difficulties, we will be able to do that work, for God’s sake. For God’s sake, and ours, I hope that that is true. Thank you.
We are called into being by God, and our vocation is to be God’s in all that we are and do. Faith and vocation are centered in worship, but they are lived out in the work place. Since 1994, Virginia Theological Seminary has offered a series of forums for laypersons living or working in the Washington area, and gathers these persons together with speakers whose insights into Faith, Work, and Vocation may help inform our own lives.

The Rev. Herbert K. Lodder, VTS ‘58, and his wife, Frances E. Pinter Lodder, have graciously set aside funds in their estate plans for an endowment to finance future Faith, Work, and Vocation Forums in memory of their fathers, Clifford Kingsley Lodder and Frank Pinter. The Lodders also will contribute to the Fund in their lifetime, and we welcome gifts by others to help sustain these forums.

When my husband Jack and I were attending the Seminary’s academic convocation in October of 2003, at which his nephew, Angus King, former governor of Maine, received the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, Martha Horne asked me to be a part of this series. Of course I agreed, and it seemed light years away. Then I read the remarks of three of my predecessors and wondered what in the world I had gotten myself into. They were so professional and downright excellent, I knew I could not match them. Ray Suarez of NPR, Vance Wilson of St. Alban’s School, and Fred Hitz, formerly of the CIA, all had fascinating, timely, and relevant comments on the relationship of faith and vocation.

I decided to simply forge ahead with my own story and interpretation of faith, work, and vocation in my own life and count on your forgiveness if I miss the high standard set by those who came before me.

I have been fortunate in my life to have roles which challenge and interest me. Vocation and work intersect—vocation puts meaning into work. Webster defines vocation as a “summons or strong inclination to a particular state or course of action, or an entry into the priesthood or a religious order.” In my opinion, faith informs every role or job each of us takes on.

One of my favorite sayings has always been “Bloom where you are planted.” I believe I first saw it years ago on a greeting card. Harry Truman said, “I found that the men and women who got to the top were those who did the jobs they had in hand, with everything they had of energy, enthusiasm, and hard work.” I would amend that to say energy, enthusiasm, hard work, and service to God. God’s call to us is to serve him through our work by serving and helping others to be the best they can be. The mission for those of us who are laymen may not be as clear as that for clergy in the church, but it is no less important. Sometimes we are called to service as “Martha,” or sometimes as “Mary,” since the appropriate response to different needs can be either busy work or quiet listening and meditating.
Mission for the laity, as defined in the Book of Common Prayer, is to represent Christ and his church; to bear witness to him wherever we may be; and, according to the gifts given us, to carry on Christ’s work of reconciliation in the world; and to take our place in the life, worship, and governance of the church. This ministry of making Christ known and renewing the world is the ministry of all the baptized—an extraordinary calling for ordinary people.

The existential question of “Who am I?” and how to live out that mission starts early with formation of faith, and is a lifelong quest. My quest began in earnest when I joined St. Paul’s Church as a young teenager. My family and I moved to Alexandria after my father returned from World War II. My mother was a Presbyterian and had taken me to Sunday school most of my life. My father was a fallen-away Catholic, since they hadn’t been married in the Catholic Church. Both my parents joined St. Paul’s and we all became very much involved in the life of the church. My father served on the vestry, and my mother was one of the founders of St. Paul’s nursery school. I continued to be challenged by brilliant sermons from all the succeeding rectors as well as Dr. Albert Mollegen, who often was the guest preacher. I was an active member of the Young People’s group, and would define my vocation at that time as being a good friend, a good student, and good church member. It was during these years that I became aware that I was a child of God first and a child of my parents second. I was active in student government in high school, which was the beginning of my lifelong vocation in government and politics. In college I majored in government, which carried me a little further along the path to the future.

It was not a straight path, however. God’s path is circular, and experience from any given segment complements the whole. When I gave Jack all that I was and all that I had in marriage, there was a shift in vocation to that of wife and mother. I tried very hard to bloom where I was planted in that role, which was certainly a gift from God. The family—the opportunity to nurture, heal, educate, and support its members—was a gift of immeasurable proportion, and the skills I used for that job and others were on loan from God.

We are only stewards of any gifts and talents we possess. For years I thought I had no talents because I couldn’t sing, dance, paint, or act. Thank goodness I had help from God and his saints in redefining the word “talent.” I hope I have followed God’s mandate to serve others at every stage of my life. I have also been fortunate to experience God’s love many times through the ministering hands of his servants—in childbirth and in sickness. The weight of responsibility for helping children to become loving members of the larger Christian family was awesome, but truly brought me closer to God as he enabled me to do this particular job at this particular time in history. Sometimes you are blessed to see the fruits of your labor many years later. What a gift of joy that is!

At this time I was also working within the community, doing volunteer work, and trying to fulfill God’s mandate to follow him into the world to serve those in need. That included local organizations such as Alexandria Hospital, ALIVE (an interfaith coalition serving Alexandria’s working poor), the United Way, the city’s Campagna Center, PTA’s, and other volunteer groups. I joined marches and served on committees for civil rights and always spoke out for equality and racial justice.

I John 3:11-18 says, “But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?” The number of people in extreme poverty—that is, subsisting on less than half the income defined as the poverty line—stands at 15.3 million, higher than at any time since the Census Bureau began collecting data 28 years ago. The are 20 million millionaires in the country—yet 20,000 children die every day in poorer parts of the world from preventable causes. Staggering debt is owed to the developed world by developing countries, which guarantees this hunger holocaust will continue. God’s gifts are worthy of protection, and he mandates that we share our gifts, our wealth, and protect the dignity of “all God’s children.”

Patsy and Jack Ticer
I was senior warden of St. Paul’s the year my mother died in 1978. These were two different and important markers in my faith journey, because I experienced God through the loving hands of John von Hemert, our rector, family, friends, and doctor. Another defining time in my development was a bout with breast cancer, when I again experienced God through the loving and healing hands of his servants. I also sold real estate in the 70’s, and my Christian vocation at that time was to treat people kindly and with compassion, because it was a traumatic time for them when they were making the largest, most important investment in their lives.

The background I have described for my journey to elected office is too long, but important. I believe the work I was engaged in prior to my election to city council in 1982 led me naturally to the next step in service to God’s community.

During my 13 years on the Alexandria city council and as mayor and my nine years in the Senate of Virginia, with God’s help I have tried to serve him. I would like to say, however, that I abhor the current trend of wearing one’s faith or religion as a badge of honor—as if I personally were the Deity instead of a grateful beneficiary of God’s grace. The good thing about serving God through serving others is that God forgives you when you fail. The incentive is strong for excellence, but not for the impossible perfection.

Dwight D. Eisenhower said: “This is what I found out about religion: it gives you courage to make the decisions you must make in a crisis, and then the confidence to leave the result to a higher power. Only by trust in God can a man carrying responsibility find repose.”

Even with this good advice, it is an uphill and downhill battle, with constant uncertainty about the motivation behind my decisions and their effects on the fulfillment of God’s purpose. When making the multiple choices thrust upon me as an elected person, sometimes the choice is clear as a bell, but other times it is cloudy. It is as if faith has seeped into my unconscious mind by osmosis,

“There is evidence that one dollar spent on early childhood development saves seven dollars in the many areas of remediation needed after a child has failed.”

informing my decisions, and at other times there seems to be no ready answer to the question, “How am I following Christ’s admonition to serve others in this particular matter? At what point does it make more sense to yield to the prevailing trend? Will my currently unpopular stand endanger my re-election potential and deny me the opportunity to serve many others on a range of important issues? I know my position will not be carried by the majority vote, therefore should I risk speaking out?” The fact that God gave us free will to make choices certainly makes life hard sometimes! I am grateful for God’s forgiveness when my choices are not the right ones.

I do believe that it is important to speak up for human rights for all in whatever venue I find myself. Whether it was marching for civil rights in the 60’s or sponsoring legislation every year of my tenure as a senator to expand hate crimes to include sexual orientation, I have worked for equal rights for all. I know the hate crimes bill will not pass committee, but feel it is important to address the inequity of the current exclusive legislation. I am proud to have had assistance on this issue from the clergy in Richmond, even from the Catholic Diocese. They speak to the value of each individual in God’s eyes and his/her rights to fair treatment.

I speak for and sponsor prevention programs to help people help themselves and find choices for productive lives. This is especially true for those who have paid their debt to society and must have God’s help through loving hands and assistance programs. It is a very small investment for a very large benefit—that of self-sufficiency instead of a return to criminal life. If there are no choices for these individuals, we have no right to expect anything other than recidivism. Surely a bus ticket and $25 would not be considered adequate by Jesus.

It is very difficult to obtain funding for prevention in the General Assembly. Instead the focus seems to be passing more “tough on crime” bills that cost more in the long run and address the problem at the wrong end. It is on issues such as this that my prayers are more fervent to God, asking him to forgive me for judging others and the motivation for their votes.

It is important for me to speak up and sometimes to sponsor legislation to address the fairness of public policy in issues such as welfare, tax policy, health, affordable housing, restitution of rights to those who have paid their debt to society for their mistakes, equal opportunity for quality education, job training, acceptance of
diversity as in policy relating to immigrants, child and senior abuse, mental health, early childhood development, and the protection of the environment. I am saddened by what I view as our injustice on most of these issues, and feel certain that God is disappointed in our unwillingness to serve and care for the least of his servants.

On the environment we hear in Deuteronomy 26:1-11: “He brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.” We are shirking our duty as stewards of this bounty, and are well on the way to killing the proverbial golden goose through overpopulation of much of the land and creation of waste that pollutes the environment. I don’t believe that we have proven to be faithful stewards of God’s bounty and are denying our children and grandchildren the right to enjoy and care for God’s gift of creation. I pray that Jesus will stand by us in this General Assembly in this corner of the globe to inspire legislators to remEDIATE the problems.

As a child of God, I am outraged at the plight of children in Virginia and elsewhere and very concerned about our individual and legislative priorities. I feel compelled to speak out for the needs of children who cannot speak for themselves. There are 211,862 children living in poverty in Virginia. There are 198,000 children who do not have health insurance; 71,700 used alcohol in one month; 49,100 teens used an illicit drug in one month; 42,397 children were reported abused, including 2,049 physical abuse cases, 997 sexual abuse cases, and 4,474 neglect cases (15,000 if the state’s 91,160 two-year-olds have not been immunized); 951 children under 14 died last year and 87 child fatalities have been confirmed as abuse-related since the year 2000. These statistics are from 2001. I am a very strong proponent of the value of quality, early education programs—many studies have shown their effectiveness at leveling the playing field for children at risk and giving them a chance to succeed in school. There is evidence that one dollar spent on early childhood development saves seven dollars in the many areas of
remediation needed after a child has failed. Currently 86,696 of Virginia’s three- and four-year-olds, 47.7%, are not enrolled in nursery school, preschool, or pre-kindergarten education programs. This is a disaster waiting to happen in the future.

Marian Wright Edelman formed The Children’s Defense Fund 30 years ago to act as an effective advocate for children who could not speak for themselves. She speaks to God directly about the plight of children in the following prayer. It speaks volumes:

Lord, we have pushed so many of our children into the tumultuous sea of life in leaky boats without survival gear. Forgive us and help them to forgive us. Help us now to give all our children the anchor of faith, the rudder of hope, the sails of education, and the paddles of family to keep them going when life’s sea gets rough.

O God, forgive our rich nation where small babies die of cold quite legally.

O God, forgive our rich nation where toddlers and school children die from guns sold quite legally.

O God, forgive our rich nation that lets the rich continue to get more at the expense of the poor quite legally.

O God, forgive our rich nation that lets children be the poorest group of citizens quite legally.

O God, forgive our rich nation which thinks security rests in missiles rather than in mothers, and in bombs rather than babies.

O God, forgive our rich nation for not giving You sufficient thanks by giving others their daily bread.

O God, help us never to confuse what is quite legal with what is just and right in Your sight.

The tasks of legislators are to sponsor, support, revise legislation; to respond to constituents; to speak out on public policy issues in ways that educate, support, and challenge our constituencies. Our system has become a participatory democracy, which I firmly support, and it is essential to create an effective partnership with those we serve by listening, debating, challenging, learning, responding, suggesting, and leading. Most legislators are virtuous and hard-working. When there is corruption it is made more public than the corruption in the private sector. This is what causes widespread cynicism and distrust of public servants—an unjustified judgment.

Our mistake is to define leadership as toughness, power, and being first. This theory of tough leadership is evidenced in world politics by unilateral action based on a single nation’s interest. True leadership requires character, vision, persuasive communication, persistence, insightful judgment, wisdom, and mercy, overlaid with generosity and gratitude. Even Napoleon recognized the impotence of force. He said, “Do you know what amazes me more than anything else? The impotence of force to organize anything. There are only two powers in the world—the spirit and the sword; and in the long run the sword will always be conquered by the spirit.”

Steven Spielberg, the Oscar-winning filmmaker, recently received the French Legion of Honor. President Chirac praised him for making films decrying hatred and intolerance and said: “In this difficult time when intolerance, xenophobia, racism, anti-Semitism, and fanaticism are on the rise again, it is essential that cinema, which touches each of us deep inside, recalls the horror of what is unutterable.” In his response Spielberg said: “We have to work very, very hard to make people understand that we have to celebrate people’s differences, not condemn them.”

Jesus is everywhere we are and working beside us to help us strive for justice for all and for actions which respect and promote the dignity of every human being. We are called to serve others together as working parts of Christ’s body in the world. This is our mission. This is our vocation.

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Speakers in the Faith, Work, and Vocation Series, in alphabetical order:

- **James Billington**
  Librarian of Congress

- **Elizabeth Campbell**
  Founder of WETA

- **John Danforth**
  United States Senator

- **Frederick P. Hitz**
  Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University, and Former Inspector General of the CIA

- **James P. Moore, Jr.**
  Author of “One Nation Under God”
  Founder of AmeriTrade International
  Former Assistant Secretary of Commerce

- **Diane Rehm**
  Host of the Diane Rehm Show on National Public Radio

- **Earl O. Strimple, DVM**
  Co-Founder, MacArthur Animal Hospital and People Animals Love

- **Ray Suarez**
  The NewsHour on PBS

- **Patricia Ticer**
  Virginia State Senator and Former Mayor of the City of Alexandria, Virginia

- **Togo West**
  Secretary of the Army

- **Vance Wilson**
  Headmaster, St. Alban’s School, Washington, DC

- **Edgar Woolard**
  Chairman of DuPont
Five weeks ago—it seems a lot longer than that—America went to the polls and voted for our president, vice president, members of Congress, and various other office holders in every state capital across the country. As pollsters have told us, the primary issues on the minds of voters targeted everything from the war on terrorism and the war in Iraq to health care and education. The one hot button topic that seemed to have caught fire, as we have learned, focused on morals and values—never quite defined precisely, but nonetheless a potent concern for a broad group of voters across the political spectrum.

During the campaign and in the postmortems that have followed, most political pundits have described the 2004 election as a particularly divisive one, coming on the heels, as it did, of the 2000 election when the popular vote and the Electoral College vote produced very different results. The depth and passion of those feelings would have us believe that somehow we are part of an historic anomaly, that we are a profoundly divided people in ways we have never known before.

This perception came home to me just three days after the election. I was in New York City and had just walked out of the offices of Doubleday, my publisher, and Random House Audio, which will produce the narration for my book. The head of Random House Audio was kind enough to provide me with a boxed set of President Bill Clinton’s personal reading of his autobiography, with his photograph prominently displayed on the front cover. As I was walking down a side street just off Broadway, a rather wiry, diminutive woman—I suppose in her early 60s—came up from behind me in a jogging outfit. When she saw the tapes, she looked up at me with a big smile and said, “I am so glad to see you have Bill Clinton’s tapes.” Then came
the punch line, “Wasn’t that just an awful election? I mean, wasn’t it just awful that all of those people voted the way they did?” It was at that moment that I decided not to tell her that I had been a senior official in the Reagan administration.

I said nothing but smiled politely, having no desire to get entangled in a midtown Manhattan conversation with a stranger while I was pressed to get to my next appointment. Nevertheless, our eyes did lock on each other as she said in words that were hard to forget, “It’s so sad to realize that we have become two separate people living on the same land mass.” “Yes, but we still are all Americans,” I told her. But the feisty woman just picked up the pace and was soon well beyond me, shaking her head and exclaiming as she faded into the faceless crowd of Times Square, “It really is sad …really so sad.” It was one of those unique New York moments.

In what commentators in various ways have described as the great demographic divide—blue states versus red states—one would think that the collective memory of the United States of America had somehow been completely erased. We forget that partisan detractors once called the War of 1812 “Madison’s dirty little war,” convinced that it was totally unnecessary; or that the bloodiest war in our history visceraally tore apart our north and south; or that even in our more recent past we still hear echoes of a conflict in Southeast Asia that never formally was declared a war but nevertheless was just as devastating and had every bit the effect of dividing our country. We neglect to remember the cultural fissures that have always existed in America—how the Transcendentalists, most notably Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, turned the traditional tenets of Christianity upside down, or how an entire generation of artists, musicians, and writers came to voice their dissension in forming the counterculture of the Sixties. We forget how racial and ethnic conflicts over several centuries have torn apart our communities and fractured even the congregations of our churches.

But in the end we are Americans who share with one another the untold riches of liberty, freedom, and faith. It is a legacy that served us well in the hours following the indescribable horrors of September 11. It is one that follows each of us from home to workplace every day and challenges us with a multitude of never-ending choices in deciding how we conduct our personal and professional lives.

No matter where the road has taken us or will take us, the one constant that has remained a part of who we are and has helped to unify us as a people throughout our history has been the ability to turn to prayer. That is the subject of One Nation Under God: The History of Prayer in America, and it is one that with the release of the book and audio this time next year, and the television miniseries the following spring, will serve as a reminder to all of us of our special roots. To those outside our borders, One Nation Under God will provide greater insight into the American spirituality that foreign observers have described in various ways as some inexplicable, modern-day oddity.

Simply put, American prayer and the spirituality that it evokes are part of America’s DNA. Without prayer the political, cultural, religious, social, and even military annals of our nation would have been radically different from what they are today. And not only that, given the influence that the United States has wielded around the world for so many generations now, even global history would have taken a far different path in the absence of American prayer. This is not conjecture or some elaborate theory that needs any more explanation than taking the time to discover what lies between the covers of One Nation Under God.

Having immersed myself in this subject matter now for over seven years, I could not care less whether my name is on the cover of the book or not. “Anonymous” would do just fine. I have become so genuinely excited by the enormity of this great treasure, chronologically laid out as it is, that I am bursting at the seams to get it out there for everyone to see. This hunt and its consequential find have been as exciting as anything I could have ever imagined.

The genesis of One Nation Under God came in the fall of 1997. I received a call from my brother early on Columbus Day to let me know that our father, who practiced medicine with my brother, had died unexpectedly but peacefully in the middle of the night. My father had a full schedule that week with dozens of patients to see in the hospital and in his office, but it was not to be.

Jumping into the car that morning to make the trip from Washington to my family home in western Pennsylvania, something I soon would do with far greater frequency, my mind began to wander wildly as I thought about my father, how blessed we are as Americans as I crossed the spectacular Appalachian mountains, and the importance of prayer in the life of the country.

I realize today that I was effectively meditating during a particularly intense moment in my life.
It is amazing how in the midst of personal tragedy a person can be drawn so completely to such things.

I thought to myself, if prayer represents the most private, innermost thoughts of individuals, then it must say something about us as a people throughout our history. That introspection led me to consider what part prayer has played for our country over time. I was convinced that all I had to do was comb a few library shelves, if not the local bookstore, to find the answer.

So, as I worked at my investment banking firm during the day, I decided to spend time at the Bishop Payne Library at the Virginia Theological Seminary, a stone’s throw away from my home in Arlington. Even with the invaluable assistance of Head Librarian Dr. Mitzi Budde and her terrific staff, I could find nothing. At the same time, though, I began to find prayers composed by such people as Mary Pickford, Benjamin Franklin, J.C. Penney, Edgar Alan Poe, and Tupac Shakur. I came across the real life stories of how prayer had played such an important part in the lives of individuals like Eleanor Roosevelt, Andrew Jackson, Jack Kerouac, P.T. Barnum, and Babe Ruth.

I soon found that prayer also had become the inspiration behind so many “American firsts”—the first printed book; the first poetry and fiction; the first commercial phonograph record; the first opera and symphonies; the first talking picture; even the first successful self-help program; and more. I also came to appreciate that all American-bred music was but a few degrees removed from prayer, emanating largely from the spirituals of early America—rhythm and blues, country western, blue grass, gospel, jazz, and even hip hop.

You can just imagine how my mind became filled with the possibilities of the contributions of prayer to the American experience and how it became such a transcendent force in the lives of men and women, some famous, some not. What was even more amazing was the fact that nothing like this had ever been written. As I would learn from the Chief of Manuscripts at the Library of Congress, not only could the world’s largest library not find a book written on the subject, they could not even find a thesis or a dissertation on it.

It is rather telling how historians, even religious historians, have neglected to focus on the contribution of prayer to American life. There are lots of books on the history of religion, and even more primers on the nature of prayer and spiritual blueprints on how best to pray; but there has been nothing out there to put prayer in any kind of historical context or to show its efficacy in U.S. history. It’s almost like a page out of Yogi Berra’s book of philosophy: prayer is so obvious, it’s not obvious.

And yet if we are to compare American history, let’s say, to a great musical composition, prayer must be considered an integral musical line throughout the piece—sometimes it’s louder, at other times softer. We might be able to take it out, listen to the music, and get some idea of what the composition is all about. But unless we put that musical line back in, we can never fully capture the depth, breadth, and richness of the work.

Make no mistake: prayer is fundamental to most of our lives every day. Imagine what it was like at the dawn of human reasoning, when men and women looked around them and realized that they were not responsible for what they saw before them. That mystery, that curiosity manifested itself by their trying to reach out to their Creator through prayer. Clearly
prayer far predated organized religion, churches, and the tenets of faith. It has long been a part of who we are as human beings and has served us well as Americans, particularly in times of distress, bringing Muslims, Catholics, and Hindus, Episcopalians, Buddhists, and Jews together at Yankee Stadium or at Washington’s National Cathedral to grieve and to bolster our resolve in the midst of the worst attack ever launched on U.S. soil—perpetrated all in the name of religion.

While some pundits may consider it the height of hubris to put the words “American prayer” together in the same breath, arguing that Americans do not hold a monopoly to prayer, the fact remains that prayer always has and always will leave its unique and indelible imprint on the times in which we live as Americans. Without it we would be a shadow of ourselves today.

Take the case of Martin Luther King, Jr. It was in January of 1956, during the height of the Montgomery bus boycott, that the civil rights leader was stretched to human limit. The Montgomery City commissioners were still reeling from the arrest of Rosa Parks, who had refused to give up her seat on a public bus on the grounds of her skin color and had helped launch an economic standstill in the city. Soon the city council joined forces with the racist White Citizens Council to forge a counterpunch against the nonviolent tactics of the newly-formed Montgomery Improvement Association, headed by Dr. King. Having just turned 27 years old—we forget just how young he was in those days—Martin Luther King also confronted serious internal bickering from within his own ranks. There were those who believed that he had become an obstacle to resolving the impasse between the city and the association with his uncompromising approach. To add insult to injury, he was purposely trapped by the local police, who arrested and incarcerated him for a minor traffic violation. He was at his wit’s end, and then finally it happened.

In the middle of the night, with Coretta Scott King sleeping next to him, the phone rang. Quietly picking up the receiver he heard the voice of a white supremacist telling him to leave Montgomery immediately or he and his wife and their newly-born daughter Yolanda would be killed. After listening to the threat and the slam of the phone on the other end of the line, he calmly got out of bed and walked into the kitchen. Pouring himself some coffee, he stared at the cup and decided right then and there to give up any kind of leadership role in the civil rights movement. Nothing was worth the lives of his family. The only question was how to relinquish his position without appearing to be (in his words) “a coward.”

It was then that he began to pray out loud. Just as the words left his mouth, he experienced “the presence of the Divine as I had never experienced Him before.” He realized that this vocation, this work of his, could not be given up to others. God had chosen him for whatever reason to lead this powerful movement, and in the end it would be God who would help him and his family survive. This extraordinary faith would become crucial when only three days later his home was firebombed, and he and his family escaped without injury.

If it had not been for prayer at this pivotal moment in his life, how different the course of Martin Luther King, Jr. would have been, how different our own history might have been.

There also have been other defining moments when, largely unknown to us, prayer served as catharsis for our leaders. Take the case of the fallout from Watergate and how prayer was invoked in two very different ways. As Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein first revealed in their book, The Final Days, President Nixon had called on Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to join him in the family quarters of the White House the night before his resignation. When he arrived, Nixon was visibly shaken and melancholy as he rehearsed recent events, wondering how history would ultimately regard him. It was not long before he asked Kissinger to get on his knees and pray with him. Pouring his heart out before an astonished Kissinger, the president ended his extemporaneous prayer and reportedly curled up in a ball, crying in sheer anguish as he wondered aloud how things had come down to this.

At that same moment, however, in a modest home in Alexandria, Virginia, Gerald and Betty Ford were down on their knees, too, not so much preoccupied in the past as they were focused on the future. Nixon’s vice president, you see, had just been told that he would become the nation’s 38th president the next day, and as he would later admit he had no choice but to pray, “for guidance and assurance for the responsibilities I was about to assume as president.” Two men were praying to the same God, at the same time, for two very different reasons.

Another compelling tale on the gripping power of prayer involved the approach to business by Conrad Hilton, whose granddaughters seem to be receiving as much attention today
as he did in his day. Growing up as a boy in New Mexico, he was raised by a mother who instilled in him the belief that the single greatest investment he could make in his life was to pray. Other things would always pale in comparison, she told him.

He took that charge so seriously that when he began to acquire hotels, he decided to pray at the outset of each transaction. If, after he prayed, the deal began to come together, he knew that it was meant to be. If things did not seem to be coming together, he would drop the project altogether. Well, you guessed it, he prayed before he bought the Plaza Hotel in New York, and then did so again with the Waldorf-Astoria. He prayed over buying Washington’s Mayflower Hotel, and then it was on to the Palmer House in Chicago, the Copley Plaza in Boston, the St. Francis in San Francisco, and on and on. This spiritual formula of Conrad Hilton’s was not widely known, but in the end he believed that it had provided him with the fortitude to become the largest hotelier in the world.

But for a moment consider the trials of more ordinary figures in their daily struggles, particularly American soldiers on the firing line as they are today in Iraq and Afghanistan and as they have been in past wars. One of the most moving prayers I have ever read was discovered in the pocket of a U.S. infantryman found dead on a battlefield in North Africa during World War II. He wrote it as he faced the realities of his own mortality. It is the one prayer that I would like to read to you this morning in its entirety, one that captures the anxieties of all soldiers in all wars.

You can imagine the background of this young man in 1944. Most probably he had never ventured more than a few miles from his home back in the United States, and here he was stationed in a place he could not have located on a map just a few months earlier. Now it was time for him to put his life in perspective and to acknowledge, finally, in his young life the presence of a greater power.

Look, God, I have never spoken to you, And now I want to say, ‘How do you do?’ And see, God, they told me you did not exist, And I like a fool, believed all this.

Last night, from a shell-hole, I saw your sky, I figured that they told me a lie.

Had I taken time before to see things you had made,

I’d sure have known they weren’t calling a spade a spade.

I wonder, God, if you would shake my poor hand? Somehow I feel you would understand. Strange I had to come to this hellish place Before I had time to see your face.

Well, I guess, there isn’t much more to say, But I’m glad, God, that I met you today. The zero hour will soon be here, But I’m not afraid to know that you’re near.

The signal has come –I shall soon have to go, I like you lots –this I want you to know. I am sure this will be a horrible fight; Who knows? I may come to your house tonight, Though I wasn’t friendly to you before, I wonder, God, if you’d wait at the door? Look, I’m shedding tears –me shedding tears! Oh! I wish I’d known you these long, long years.

Well, I have to go now, dear God. Good-bye, But now that I’ve met you I’m not scared to die.

In sharing with you images of seminal moments in the prayer lives of individuals, there also have been moments in which we have instinctively and collectively turned to God as Americans. Allow me to pass on just one more story, among so many, from One Nation Under God. Also from World War II, it is one I find particularly compelling. In fact, I wrote about it earlier this year in the Washington Post and other newspapers on the 60th anniversary of the D-Day Invasion, as some of you here this morning will remember, and it happened not very far from where we are sitting—in the concourse of Union Station.

For weeks, if not months, rumors had flown across the country that a major assault was being planned by the Allies to begin their final push to Berlin. While no one knew exactly where or when it would be launched, it was clear that the invasion was imminent.

Just as Americans were beginning their day, taking off for school and work on the morning of June 6, 1944, word began to fly that the offensive had begun hours earlier and that initial casualties were high. Charles Wilson, the President and CEO of General Electric, was in town and had driven to Union Station to pick up a business colleague when he heard the same whispers. The news that morning did not come from loudspeakers or from the young newspaper boys who normally cried out the latest headlines of the day. No, it was being passed around from person to person in a railway station that during those war years averaged 100,000 commuters on their way to and from work every day.

Like everyone else he was stunned by the news. As he walked into the station’s concourse, Wilson looked off into the distance as he watched an elderly woman, her hair pulled back in a bun, sitting on a wooden bench, suddenly get up and
fall to her knees to pray. With that, a businessman in a three-piece suit sitting next to her did the same, and soon it was a scene that was being repeated all over Union Station. For the next few moments an uncommon hush fell over the normally deafening station, turning the place into what Wilson would later describe as a proverbial cathedral. Then, after a few minutes had passed, the commuters were back on their feet, going their separate ways to carry on their normal daily tasks. But in that moment that they prayed to God for national and personal sustenance, they had become spiritually bonded to one another, spiritually bonded to other Americans who like them were taking the time to pray at that moment, and spiritually bonded to the boys who were attempting to scale the cliffs of Normandy on that defining day.

I could go on and tell you extraordinary tales of how prayer played a seminal role in the deliberations of our Founding Fathers at a critical moment, or how it sustained the human spirit in individuals caught in the web of slavery, or how it led prominent industrialists, artists, scientists, labor leaders, and athletes to pursue their dreams. I could share with you the prayer life of every president of the United States and how each has invoked God’s name and asked for Divine Providence in every inaugural address ever given. I could spend hours letting you know about the wonderful stories behind the greatest hymns ever written by American composers or how the first prayer was transmitted from outer space. The stories seem endless.

So when we talk about faith, work, and vocation, the theme of this breakfast, we must never forget the very powerful role that prayer has played in our history and continues to play in the steady rhythm of our country and in our personal lives. To dismiss prayer in the life of America amounts to nothing more than a fool’s errand. It is not some kind of sentimental anachronism as it might be for people in other developed countries. It is far more than that.

I hope this book will remind us always of what unites us and not divides us, what we hold in common with one another and not what our hyphenated differences might suggest. If it does, it will help us to put last November’s election and every election that is to follow, no matter what color state we happen to live in, in proper perspective.

We can only wonder in the absence of prayer whether Woodrow Wilson, Jimmy Carter, or George W. Bush would have ever become president, or whether Woody Guthrie, Elvis Presley, or Johnny Cash could have continued to compose songs or perform on stage after experiencing serious personal setbacks, or whether Anne Bradstreet, our first poet, or Harriett Beecher Stowe, the author of that consequential work Uncle Tom’s Cabin, or Mary Lou Williams, the acclaimed jazz composer, might ever have set pen to paper in such remarkable ways. I wonder in my own life whether I would have written this book.

And so the list continues to grow even today—Americans who are turning to prayer as a personal and collective lifeline. Emanating from every walk of life, they turn to prayer to acknowledge, to submit, and to hold themselves accountable to a higher power and in turn to one another.

Prayer will always remain an integral part of our national character and allow us, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, to live “by the better angels of our nature.” In the end the deeply held and widespread practice of prayer in our work, in our faith, and in the pursuit of our individual vocations can only reaffirm to all of us that as Americans, we truly remain one nation under God.
Adam Goren
Class of 2005

Diocese of Texas

September 24, 1977 - December 14, 2004
In January the Seminary welcomed the Rev. Dr. Michael Battle as the new Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Vice President. Dr. Battle is assuming the duties of the Rev. Dr. William Stafford, who left VTS in December to become Dean of the School of Theology at the University of the South.

Dr. Battle previously was Assistant Professor of Spirituality and Black Church Studies at Duke University Divinity School, a post he had held since 1999. Prior to that, he taught Spiritual and Moral Theology at the University of the South. He is one of two chaplains to the House of Bishops, a faculty member on the staff of CREDO, Inc., and a member of the boards of Kanuga Conferences, Inc., and the Episcopal Evangelical Education Society.

Dr. Battle is a graduate of Duke University, where he also earned the Ph.D. in Ethics. His M.Div. degree is from Princeton Seminary and his S.T.M. is from Yale. After his ordination to the priesthood, he spent a year as an assistant priest in a parish in South Africa. Dr. Battle also has served parishes in the Diocese of North Carolina and was rector of St. Ambrose Episcopal Church, Raleigh.

Michael and Raquel Battle are the parents of two young daughters, Sage and Bliss.

Dr. Amelia Gearey Dyer, Director of the Center for the Ministry of Teaching since 1995, is now the Associate Dean for Academic Management and Program Coordination, a new position at Virginia Seminary.

It had become apparent in recent years that the work of the Office of Academic Affairs had become too great for one person to oversee. This is particularly true since the change in the academic calendar and the institution of August and January terms, which have made the Seminary a year-round institution offering not only four degree programs, but also a large number of non-degree opportunities for both clergy and laity.

Dr. Gearey Dyer shares responsibilities for oversight of the Office of Academic Affairs with Dr. Michael Battle. She is a graduate of the State University of New York and earned her Ph.D. at Florida State University.

Dr. Gearey Dyer, who is married to the Rt. Rev. Mark Dyer, Professor of Theology at VTS, will continue to serve as Director of the Center for the Ministry of Teaching through the current academic year.
Martyrs and Confessors of our Time

A Sermon

by

The Most Reverend Njongonkulu Winston Ndungane

Anglican Archbishop of Capetown

November 8, 2004

The Most Reverend Njongonkulu Winston Hugh Ndungane, Archbishop of Cape Town, came to Virginia Seminary in September 2004 as a Woods Fellow-in-residence. The Woods Fellowship enables a person to stay in residence at the Seminary for up to two months for research and study. It was established in 1983 and named for Granville Cecil Woods, Jr., VTS Dean from 1969 until his retirement in 1982.

As successor to Nobel laureate Desmond Tutu, Archbishop Ndungane has provided a moral voice in South Africa and in the Anglican Communion on a range of issues, including the impact of globalization on the poor, Third-World debt forgiveness, gay rights, poverty and unemployment, and has been a strict critic of the South African government over its handling of the AIDS crisis.

2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2; Psalm 67; Luke 10:1-16

Today, in the Church of the Province of Southern Africa, we commemorate “The Martyrs and Confessors of our Time” and our readings are those we heard today.

Coming immediately after the Octave of All Saints, it is a reminder that we should not just think of saints as those who lived long ago. We can also thank God for, and take encouragement from, the lives of Christians of our own era.

Among those who inspire us are Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King, Jr. Then there is Archbishop Janani Luwum, among those assassinated by the Ugandan leader Idi Amin, and Archbishop Oscar Romero, killed in 1980.

Manche Masemola and Bernard Mizeki were both 20th century martyrs in Southern Africa.

Not everyone we commemorate was a martyr. There are Gladys Aylward, the missionary to China, and Apolo Kivebulaya, evangelist in Central Africa. We have spiritual writers like Evelyn Underhill and Thomas Merton; teachers and leaders like Archbishops William Temple and Michael Ramsey; and the South African Dutch Reformed theologian and opponent of apartheid, Beyers Naude, who died in September.

Like the Seventy of Luke’s gospel, they went faithfully where their Lord sent them.

“The love of Christ urges us on,” says Paul (2 Cor 5:14). They were his ambassadors, proclaiming the gospel of reconciliation, wherever and in whatever way they were called to do so.

They were not afraid to stand up for the truth, for what they believed was right, even though for some this led to death.

We recognize in them the authentic expression of a faithful Christian life.

Now, this is an important point. Because there are times when “believing you are right” is not enough. Sincerity is vital, but it is not everything.

Because we can also reflect on our Christian heritage and see that sometimes sincere people made terrible mistakes. Even apartheid was supported on the basis of Scripture by people who at the time truly thought they were right.

And now, within the Anglican Communion, we know there is great divergence on issues of human sexuality, between people who in all honesty believe themselves to be right.

What are we to do? What guarantee is there that even the best seminary training in the world will make sure we get things right? Is there any hope for us?!

Of course! The answer is found in Jesus, and our relationship with him.
It is an answer that we find first through humility.

We must begin by accepting that we can never fully understand everything. We are limited in time and space, limited in experience and culture, limited in human frailty and sinfulness. “Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will fully know, even as I have been fully known,” says Paul in that famous passage from 1 Corinthians 13 (v.12).

Humility before God is our starting point. “Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps 111:10).

We must recognize that we need to look at everything, and everyone, through Jesus’ eyes.

“From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation” (2 Cor 16-17).

We need to look at the world around from the viewpoint of Christ, from the viewpoint of being his new creation. Our whole way of seeing things has to change. Christianity is not about putting “spin” on a human attitude. It is a complete reorientation of perspective.

For clergy and Christian leaders, this is absolutely fundamental. It is a vital part of the Christian formation that happens during training, alongside academic study. It is hard work, and there are no short cuts.

If there is one advice I always like to give to clergy and candidates for ordination in my diocese and province which I would like to share with you, it is this:

Make Jesus the source, the strength, the focus, and the goal of...
all of your life and all of your ministry.

The ordinal of the Church of the Province of Southern Africa says this in the Charge to priests: “You have come to respond to the call from God heard in your heart and confirmed by the Church, to be priest, pastor and teacher, together with your Bishop and fellow presbyters, for God’s glory and the strengthening of his people. Your answer to that call is a lifetime of ministry in the following of Christ. You will only be able to maintain that response by an ever-deepening practice of prayer, enriched by daily reading and study of holy Scripture. You will depend not on your own strength, but on the Holy Spirit of God and his grace given in word and sacrament.”

A terrible warning and a wonderful assurance. We must be totally dependent on making Jesus Christ the heart of our lives. We must strive, day by day, to spend time in quiet prayer, listening as well as speaking, reading the Scriptures, waiting on the Lord, patient for his leading, attentive to his “fingerprints” in the world around us. We must keep studying and learning, not just academically, but with heads and hearts and souls engaged; not just reading that which affirms our understanding, but daring to risk fertile encounters with other perspectives.

Our God is a living God. We must expect his revelation of himself to us to be dynamic, not static. We must expect God always to be challenging us. We must lay ourselves open to him, to that constant process of molding and remolding, so that, as Paul says in the letter to the Ephesians, we are attaining to that Christian maturity which is growing up into “the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph 4:13).

Then he will set his flame of love alight in our deepest beings, and give us hearts of love for those he entrusts to us.

Then he will teach and lead us in his ways. It is through an ever-deepening relationship with him that we will be guided into authentic Christian leadership.

While you are here, use your time to develop these habits of spending time with the Lord. Develop a rule of life that is based on a regular pattern of prayer and the reading of Scripture. When you go from here to busy lives of ministry, it is a practice that you dare not live without. Root it deep within you now while you can.

In my ministry, time and again, it was only my reliance on God’s directing that saw me through. I remember, as a young priest in the 1980s, I had to conduct the funeral of two school children shot by the police outside my church during an anti-apartheid protest. I was in fear and trembling. Angry young people would be gathering for the funeral, and the police could easily be trigger-happy in such a volatile situation. But in Morning Prayer, I found strength and comfort in the lesson of the day: “The Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rearguard” (Isaiah 52:12). It was exactly the word I needed to go forward, and we made it safely through the day.

Some of the great Christians of our time, whom we remember today, followed Jesus even to martyrdom.

We do not know what lies in store for us. We may not be called to be martyrs, God willing. But we are all called to be “living sacrifices,” and it is through this that we will learn the path of true discernment, to go where Jesus sends us, and be the people he calls us to be.

Let me end by praying for you, in Paul’s words to the Christians in Rome:

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed, by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:1-2).

Amen.”

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2005 Alumni and Alumnae Convocation October 4 & 5 Speaker: The Most Reverend Robin Eames Archbishop of Armagh and Chairman of the Lambeth Commission
RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY INITIATIVE CONTINUES AT VIRGINIA SEMINARY

Virginia Theological Seminary continues to make explicit a commitment to racial and ethnic diversity in the academic curriculum, the worship, and other aspects of community life and work. Members of the board of trustees, the faculty, the alumni/ae executive committee, and the student body enthusiastically support and are a part of this initiative. The VTS community is deeply committed to making the changes that will lead to an increased understanding of issues related to race and ethnicity and the elimination of the plague of racism.

The Rev. Joseph Constant Joins the Staff

A reflection of that deep commitment is the recent appointment of the Rev. Joseph Constant as Assistant for Admissions and Community Life. His ministry will focus attention on the work related to racial and ethnic diversity. He will be actively involved in the Racial/Ethnic Diversity Committee (REDC), in recruiting, and in working with students of color on campus. He also will work with international students and off-campus students and their families, and will share in the ongoing pastoral care in the community.

A 2003 graduate of VTS, Mr. Constant comes to VTS following service at St. Timothy’s Episcopal Church in Washington, DC. He was born in Haiti, and he is working to build a residential center/trade school, Le Centre Indigene de Bienfaisance (CIB) or The Indigenous Center of Blessings, for abandoned street children in Haiti. He and his wife Sarah have a five-year-old daughter, Claire, and a newborn daughter, Christiana. Mr. Constant is a skilled pastor and able leader, and we are blessed by his presence and his ministry.
The Racial/Ethnic Diversity Committee

The Racial/Ethnic Diversity Committee was formed to facilitate and oversee programs and initiatives related to racial and ethnic diversity on campus. The committee chairs are Dr. Judy Fentress-Williams, the Rev. Dr. Lloyd A. Lewis, and the Rev. Dr. Margaret McNaughton-Ayers. Committee members include Dr. Stephen Cook, professor of Old Testament; VTS graduates the Rev. Kim Coleman, the Rev. Daniel Robayo, and the Rev. Paula Green, and current students José McLoughlin, Alistair So, and Carlye Hughes.

Among the goals REDC achieved in its first year were a major thrust to observe Black History Month, a faculty retreat focused on racial/ethnic diversity, and the establishment of committees to:

Focus on a communication network for information sharing and support for students of color.

Address the academic and intellectual needs of the community related to racial/ethnic diversity.

Focus on admissions and recruitment of students of color.

Address the community life needs related to race and ethnicity.

Black History Month

Black History Month in February 2005 included a wide variety of campus events planned to raise awareness and appreciation of issues especially related to African American history. Two special services on African American heritage were held, one of which was the dedication of the African American Episcopal Historical Collection to the Archives of the Bishop Payne Library. During the month visual images were placed throughout the campus, and forums and discussion opportunities were offered as well.

Academic Goals

The faculty of VTS is committed to two major goals for the 2004-05 academic year:

1) the creation of a resource bank that will include a list of materials related to race and ethnicity to enable faculty to stay current with available educational products, as well as information for getting in touch with scholars; and

2) the development of teaching groups across disciplines to create bibliographies and syllabi that will include works by racially and ethnically diverse writers, and to discuss issues of assignments and grading.

Scholarships

Two scholarship funds have been created to support students of color. The Bishop John T. Walker Scholarship Fund was developed to support African American and Hispanic applicants. The Bishop John Payne Scholarship was created to support African heritage applicants.

Workshops

Two workshops related to diversity and racial reconciliation are convened each year. One is a day-long diversity workshop offered during orientation; the other is a two-day racial reconciliation workshop. Additionally, the Worship Committee is making every effort to increase use of diverse worship materials for Seminary chapel services.

New Initiatives

VTS is recruiting students of color and has an active program of support for those currently enrolled. At the same time, programs are being strengthened and new initiatives designed to take the institution to a deeper level of change in relation to its commitment to racial and ethnic diversity.

New initiatives in education for those within and outside the VTS community, and additional staff support for recruitment and pastoral care, include:

Recruitment of students of color by:

• building relationships with students of color in colleges and universities across the country.

• initiating a recruitment conference for racially and ethnically diverse populations.

Continuing support for racially and ethnically diverse students enrolled at VTS by:

• supporting regular gatherings with hospitality provided

• responding to identified needs

Establishing workshops at regular intervals in the academic year that will increase the consciousness of the Seminary community in matters related to race and ethnicity, such as:

• inclusion workshops

• racial reconciliation workshops

• faculty education around course preparation, syllabi, and reading lists using outside consultants

Increasing educational opportunities for those within and outside of the VTS community by:

• offering study fellowships (travel, room, board, and library privileges) to those who wish to do research in the African American Episcopal Historical Collection, which is housed in the Bishop Payne Library on the VTS campus.

continued on Page 56
• offering fellowships to Episcopal scholars of color, both clergy and laity, who wish to take study leaves.
• acquiring and making accessible through the Bishop Payne Library specialized resources and primary source materials that document the religious experiences and contributions of African Americans. This project will include systematically collecting archival materials related to the Bishop Payne Divinity School. These library resources will be a valuable complement to the Library’s growing African American Episcopal Historical Collection and will allow scholars awarded fellowships to interpret the contributions of African American religious leaders in the larger social and historical context, from the colonial period to the present.
• inviting visiting professors to teach classes during the January term on subjects related to race and culture.
• inviting consultants to work with VTS to deepen understanding of racial and ethnic diversity issues and to develop skills for addressing and eliminating racism of every kind.

Instituting reunions and conferences designed to strengthen the VTS commitment to racial and ethnic diversity by:

• sponsoring a reunion for VTS graduates of color to enhance networking opportunities in the areas of employment, study, and research, as well as other areas of interest.
• sponsoring conferences for college students of color who are interested in exploring theological education.

The commitment to systemic change within the VTS community as it grows in diversity and awareness is significant and will continue.

The Diversity Challenge Needs Your Support

The Seminary has received a challenge grant for the Racial and Ethnic Diversity Initiative from the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, requiring the Seminary to raise $118,000 before March 31, 2005. Meeting this $118,000 challenge will provide the necessary funding for this important initiative over the next three years.

Contributions to meet this challenge by March 31 will enable the Seminary to continue its ongoing efforts to recruit and support students of color for positions of leadership in the Church; to provide enhanced educational opportunities within and outside the Seminary community; and to heighten our community’s awareness of, and responsiveness to, the complex issues of racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity. Such knowledge and skills are essential for leadership in an increasingly diverse world.

The Board of Trustees, Dean Horne, the Faculty and the Alumni/ae Executive Committee of the Seminary all agree that renewed attention to issues of racial and ethnic diversity at VTS is a top institutional priority. Please support this priority initiative by sending contributions by March 31 to Virginia Theological Seminary c/o Dean Martha J. Horne, 3737 Seminary Road, Alexandria, Virginia 22304. Donations also may be made online at www.vts.edu.
Missionaries in Kenya

Dr. Sandra and Dr. Martin McCann are ECUSA appointed missionaries to Africa from the Diocese of Atlanta. Sandy is a 2003 VTS graduate, ordained in the fall of 2004, and a radiologist; Martin is a pathologist. Their first assignment was an “internship” with Drs. Nancy and Gerry Hardison in Maseno, Kenya, and the following are newsletter excerpts with some updating from those six months.

Since this article was drafted, the McCanns have accepted an invitation to work in the Diocese of Central Tanganyika where Sandy is teaching at Msalato Bible College and Martin is developing a histopathology laboratory at the McKay House Medical Clinic in Dodoma, as well as consulting and teaching at Mvumi Mission Hospital.
From the 2004 Newsletters of Sandy and Martin McCann:

Martin and I arrived in Maseno, Kenya, in April, 2004, after ten weeks of Kiswahili language school near Morogoro, Tanzania, and another two weeks of visiting several Tanzanian dioceses. Maseno is a hard, six-hour drive west of Nairobi, 50 kilometers from the Uganda border. One of Maseno’s claims to fame is that the town sits on the equator. This is duly marked with a large yellow Lions Club signpost and is therefore the stopping point for many a picture by western tourists.

The weather here is quite nice year round, ranging from the 60s to 80s, due to the relatively high elevation. Unlike much of Africa, it is green all year round. The closest town of any size is Kisumu (30 kilometers), a once-important port city on Lake Victoria. Kisumu obviously has seen better days, but there is a Barclay’s ATM there, and more importantly, a shop that sells Skippy Extra-Crunchy peanut butter!

We are living in a comfortable three-room cottage on the grounds of St. Philip’s Theological College. The setting is lovely, as we are surrounded by large trees that produce welcome shade, and there are wonderful breezes. About ten monkeys are living in these trees, and they use our corrugated iron roof to maneuver between the trees on either side of the cottage. It sounds more like elephants stomping on the roof than small monkeys. They are becoming braver and braver, each day walking a little closer to us. We stare at each other quite a bit! We live on a red dirt road, which will be familiar to any of you who grew up in the rural South of the United States. On either side are fields of corn, the main staple of the diet here.

In order to get to know St. Philip’s students, we invited them over in pairs on successive evenings for soft drinks and cookies. There are 14 students, 13 men and one woman, mostly from the provinces of Western Kenya. They tended to come with their close friend from the same tribe and diocese. Tribalism is, sadly, very real and debilitating here in Kenya, affecting the politics of both the country and the church. All the students are trilingual, speaking their mother tongue (tribal language), as well as the two national languages, Kiswahili and English.

The majority of students come from polygamous families, with one young man having 33 brothers and sisters and six “mothers.” Eight men are married with children, with the wife taking care of the farm back home. Several have the background of being an evangelist. An evangelist here is a sparsely-paid church worker spreading the gospel under the auspices of a parish priest, who has a minimum of three churches, more often five to seven. Preaching and praying are not new to these students, and their aim in seminary is to hone these skills and add others so that they can be ordained. To be a priest one must be monogamous, but polygamy is a normal part of life for most people here. It does not seem all that strange, even to Christians, and certainly is not in the same “sin league” as drinking or smoking.

Each seminarian has, in addition to class work, a job assignment. Paul’s

“Vervet monkeys use our corrugated iron roof to maneuver between the houses and trees on each side of our three-room cottage.” -- Sandy McCann
The exhortation to the Thessalonians of no work, no food is basic math here. Jobs include milking, tending crops, slashing grass, doing carpentry, repairing bicycles, and grinding maize. Isaac is an electrician, and Tom is a skilled carpenter. All of the desks, tables, couches, and chairs at St. Philip’s were made by four students under Tom’s guidance. To accommodate all the summer visitors this year, Tom’s crew was very busy making several new beds. They began by cutting the boards from felled trees on the grounds, all without any electric tools.

Joash is quite an expert in horticulture and oversees the gardens where they grow cassava, cow peas, beans, a special grass for the cows, and sunflowers, the latter for the honey bees and for the oil from the seeds. We occasionally “sneak” a few of these stunningly beautiful sunny faces for the chapel vase.

Because none of the students can even come close to paying their fees, Professor Nancy Hardison, Ph.D., principal of the school, has encouraged several self-sustaining projects to raise revenue. Our first harvest of honey has just been canned and sold. Honey is a highly sought-after delicacy here; it sells in no time at all. An animal husbandry project is growing. There are now two cows, two bull calves, and two more calves are on the way. The hope is to be able to sell...
milk and yogurt. So far, there has only been enough milk to sustain the demand for *chai*, the drinking of which is a “religious ceremony” here twice a day! To our minds, this is really hot milk with a ton of sugar and a trace of tea.

Four weeks ago Nan “won” a boy lamb, subsequently named Lambeth, by being the highest bidder at a church auction fund-raising event. All of these animals, including the monkeys, make their homes in our front yard. I can look out our kitchen window and see the little shed for the animals, and they often graze right under our windows. I love the early mornings, the neighboring roosters crowing, the cows beginning to bellow with full sacks of milk, and Lambeth bah-bahing when he hears the workers coming to feed him.

When one thinks of most seminaries or rural hospitals in Kenya and Tanzania, it is necessary to remove all previous pictures from one’s memory bank. At St. Philip’s, there are no book lists for the classes, as the students cannot afford books. In fact, finding a pen or pencil or paper is work. It is really quite unimaginable. The students all have a well-used Bible of some translation, usually Good News or a King James, and occasionally a battered tiny paperback hymnal. In most poor countries, the musical accompaniment is never published for public use. It is simply too expensive to do. These soon-to-be ordained people do not even own their own prayer books. In 2002 a Kenyan Modern English Book of Common Prayer was published, but to save money on the publishing cost, was printed without a lectionary or the Psalter. The paperback version retails for around four US dollars. Not a single student has this book. It was to be published in Kiswahili in 2003, but the publishers ran out of money. Having just left VTS where we were surrounded by books, bought more than we needed or would ever read, and reprinted a page if there was a misplaced comma, the lack of books and paper and basic writing tools has been my greatest shock and cause for dismay as a tutor.

The book drives, like those done annually by the VTS Missionary Society, are the lifeblood of many African theological libraries. When we were at VTS, the drives always came at the end of the academic year when everyone was in exams; therefore only the most faithful of volunteers showed up—usually the head of the committee and his or her brow-beaten roommate or best friend. It was very hard work. In the spring of 2003, my classmate Bill Watson, the president of the missionary society, and Martin were the only ones left to the bitter end of book-packing day. As their backs were breaking and their heads aching from deciding which books to junk and which to send, they wondered aloud if anyone would ever read the books. They need not have worried! Most of the books are not available here.

Even though it does take five to six months for the books to come in the sea mailbags, at $1.00 per pound sea bags are the only affordable means of shipping. It recently cost the mother of one of the student missionaries $25.00 to send her favorite paperback study Bible from Connecticut to Kenya! For future book drives, it would be good for the missionary society members to check with the school selected to see what books they really need. I know at St. Philip’s we have plenty of old spirituality and pastoral care books, but there is a void of study Bibles, theology texts, good commentaries, and theological dictionaries. It would be a blessing if those who could afford to would throw in new copies of these and other up-to-date textbooks. For any group looking for a worthwhile
Hellen Ngatho

Hellen Ngatho is a 23-year-old single woman, the only female student currently enrolled in St. Philip’s Theological College. She is the thirteenth of 17 children born to her late father. Hellen is the first-born of the five children of his fourth and last wife. Her oldest sibling is 52 and her youngest is 13. Hellen claims the Kikuyu tribal identity of her father; her mother is of the Luhya tribe.

Hellen is a cradle-Anglican, as are all of the students at St. Philip’s. Her call was seen by her vicar and friends long before Helen could acknowledge it. Her father was a respected high-ranking police officer, adored by all his children, and Hellen’s only desire all through high school was to follow in his footsteps by becoming a respected woman of the “forces.” She learned after graduation from high school that her father would have no part in her going to the police academy. He feared her being exposed to prostitution, drinking, and drugs. Over the next several months she applied to and was accepted to a catering school and to airline hostess training, but in both cases Hellen was unable to raise the fees by the admission dates.

At the point of her greatest discouragement and disappointment, some church friends and her vicar encouraged her to do an extension course in theology. When she told her father, he was very excited, telling her, “This feels right, Hellen.” He immediately purchased the first set of books so she could enroll. After finishing the initial course, Hellen’s vicar brought her an admission application to St. Philip’s. He encouraged her to apply. Hellen says, “Being a minister had never occurred to me, even though I was saved in 1996 and was active in Christian Union in high school. But my friends and the vicar said they thought I would make a good minister. I figured I had failed at everything else I had tried, so I decided to apply.” When she was accepted, Hellen says her father was very thankful. He immediately went to talk to the bishop. Hellen relates, “To this day I do not know how Dad was able to raise enough of the fees for me to start first term in January, 2003.”

The first time Hellen stepped onto the campus, she said two things to God. The first was, “Thank you, Lord, for bringing me here.” The second was, “Now use me as your vessel.” Hellen says nothing of that prayer has ever changed, even though being the lone woman on campus has resulted in periods of loneliness and social isolation. She says it is difficult in African culture for a single woman to be “buddies” with a man, especially a married man, without people making something more of it. Nevertheless, the staff have seen the positive impact Hellen has made on her male counterparts. They respect her authenticity and quiet courage. Hellen muses, with a twinkle in her eye, that she takes the woman’s side on every issue, thus giving her every benefit of the doubt.

In October of Hellen’s first year, her beloved father died suddenly of a heart attack. Her mother works a small farm, raising maize and beans to support herself and her five children, of whom Hellen is the eldest. Hellen says the only thing that ever disturbs the peace she feels on the campus of St. Philip’s is that sometimes she cannot sleep worrying about how she is going to pay her fees ($200.00 per each trimester for tuition, room, and board.) On campus she works slashing grass and in the carpentry shop. She makes about $12.00 per month, allowing her to buy school supplies and to take care of her personal needs.
Fabian Katamu, a bicycle repairman by trade, is a first-year, 32-year-old married man with six children who range in age from nine months to ten years. The ten-year-old and six-year-old belonged to his sister, who died four years ago with AIDS, following the death of her husband from the same. As Fabian is the eldest of the seven children of his mother and father, it fell to him to adopt his sister’s children. Just recently the family has also learned that the death of another sister’s husband was AIDS-related, but Fabian’s widowed sister remains healthy.

Fabian is of the Luhya tribe and comes from Mumias, a town which is very famous for the sugar manufactured there under the town’s brand name. Fabian’s father was blind and an amputee. The mother supported her seven children by selling beans and maize. Fabian’s paternal uncle helped send him and one other sibling to high school. Fabian’s mother is a Christian, but his deceased father was the head of the traditional religious sect of the Luhya tribe in their community. The traditional sacrificial ceremonies and harvest time festivals were held at Fabian’s home.

“I cannot know how I entered this call,” Fabian says. “As I left high school, I was called by the vicar to help take care of a church, and six months later he confirmed me to be a fulltime teacher of the church. At first I was worried because an evangelist is volunteer work without payment. So I had to question myself about how I was going to sustain my family. But when I went back to my vicar with my concerns, he told me if I took care of church, God would take care of me.”

For the next twelve years Fabian worked as a bicycle repairman and as an evangelist. “And the whole of that time, I have been seeing the grace of God on me.”

In 2003 Fabian’s vicar advised him to attend St. Philip’s and train for the priesthood in order to sustain his enlarging family. “At first my wife refused because she felt she could not take care of the family, but my uncle stepped in and said he would help her. She is still not very happy because of the burden that she is undergoing with the family, but I feel I must do my best to be a better servant of God. I have told my wife it is a burden we must both bear for Christ.”

Fabian is a dedicated, joyful student, but he is not unaware of the great sacrifice his children and wife are making. This past June he received an emergency message to come home immediately. Fabian arrived to find that his sister’s three-month-old daughter had been killed and that his own six-month-old daughter was in the hospital. The two babies had been under a tree when a strong wind came up and broke off a branch. Fabian’s sister and family had been living with his wife. Thankfully, Fabian’s daughter has recovered from her injuries.

Fabian says that the best thing about St. Philip’s is the tutors who provide helpful information and materials for his future work in the field: “It is so great to know more about the Bible and the history of the church. I have learned very much about the prayer book and the liturgy.” He especially enjoys the liturgical practicums. “All my life I have been working where there is a holy table, without knowing the names of the utensils.”
THE CLASS OF 1951 CROSS-CULTURAL INTERNSHIP FUND

Virginia Seminary emphasizes the importance of international and cross-cultural study in a seminary setting and has created scholarships that fund experiences in other countries and cultures.

The Class of 1951 believes that international and cross-cultural immersion experiences enhance the missionary spirit as a strong component of their spiritual formation at Virginia Seminary. The Cross-Cultural Internship Fund, established by the Class of 1951, and supported by other classes and friends, provides financial assistance to VTS faculty and students who are seeking cross-cultural study, immersions, and internship programs.

Please support this Fund by sending contributions to Virginia Theological Seminary, c/o the Very Rev. Martha Horne, 3737 Seminary Road, Alexandria, VA 22304, or donate online at www.vts.edu.

Student and Faculty Participants in Virginia Seminary’s International and Cross-Cultural Immersion Programs 2002 – 2005

Active Response to The Panama Project – March 2003
Tom Eshelman
Jeanne Finan
Jeffrey Huston
Glenda McQueen
Blake Rider
Jason T. Roberts
Sarah Wood

Appalachian Ministries Educational Resource Center
Summer 2002
B.C. Crothers
Summer 2003
Beth A. Palmer
Summer 2004
Allison Sandlin

AIDS Care and Prevention Program, Malawi – January-February, 2002
John B. Gardner and Rachel E. Wenner

Anglican Church of Tanzania
January 2004
Charles Fels

Anglican Frontier Missions, Christian Social Services, Kunming, China
Summer 2002
Sarah B. Councell

Biblical Theology Trip of Perspective, Ethiopia – Prof. Katherine Grieb
January 2004
Robert Browning
Caron Gwyn
Robert Marshall
Shelby Owen
Spencer Potter
Casey Shobe
Bambi Willis

Dominican Republic Parish Internship – Professor Robert W. Prichard – Summer 2004
Sarah Goodwin
J. Peter Swarr
Robert W. Prichard

Dominican Republic Parish Internship Program – Professor George Kroupa – January 2005
Sarah Goodwin
Christy Laborda
Lisa Sanders

Episcopal Church of Sudan and Diocese of Mara, Tanzania
Summer 2004
Oliver Butler

Faculty Visit to Institutions of Theological Education Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi – Summer 2003
Jacques B. Hadler, Jr.
J. Barney Hawkins IV
Mary Lewis Hix
Timothy F. Sedgwick

Gateway Mission Training Center, El Paso, Texas/Juarez, Mexico – June 2002
Tommy Dwyer
David A. Marshall
Stephanie E. Parker

Habitat For Humanity Project, Honduras – January 2003
Mariann Babnis
Adele Dees
Terry Miller
John M. Porter-Acee
Ellen Thober
Mark D. Wilkinson

Immersion in Gallaudet University
January 2002
John D. Brown
January 2003
Carla McCook

continued on next page
Independent Study, India
Summer 2003
Mark Forbes

Independent Study, Kuwait
January 2002
Rachel Anne Nyback

MaryKnoll Institute of African Studies, Nairobi, Kenya
Summer 2002
William J. Watson III
Sallie Watson
Summer 2003
Gerald L. Warren
Kathleen Gannon
Sarah Midzalkowski
Summer 2004
Laura F. Gettys

Mexican-American Cultural Center, San Antonio, Texas
Summer 2002
Kevin Johnson
Summer 2003
Linda K. Gosnell

Myanmar Immersion Seminar
The Rev. Katharine Babson, VTS’92
January 2002
Owen Drey III
Andrew K. Gross
Summer Joy Gross
January 2003
Alan K. Gates
Carlye J. Hughes
Mary L. Staley
January 2004
George Sherrill, Jr.
Mary Staley
January 2005
Cassandra Burton
Meredith Carter
Stephen Day
Robbie Glover
Sandra Lawrence
Robbin Melchiorre
David Nelson

Pastoral Work, Diocese of Alaska
Summer 2004
Marlene Jacobs

Pastoral Work, Reformed Episcopal Church of Spain
January 2004
José McLoughlin

Reading James In Haiti
Professor Katherine Grieb
June 2002
Doyt L. Conn
Joseph M. Constant
David Copley
Rebekah Hatch
Sarah D. Odderstol

Spanish Language and Independent Study, Cuba
January 2003
Todd Miller and Ashley Duggan

Spanish Language Study, Ecuador
Summer 2002
Kenneth H. Brannon

Visit and Supervised Hospice Care Teaching, Tanzania
Summer 2003
Susan Johnson Kennard

Visit Programs of Theological Education, Sudan
Summer 2004
Richard J. Jones

Wittenberg Germany
January 2005
Chris Jones

Dear Friends:

Since the founding of Virginia Seminary in 1823, a tradition of generous giving has enabled the Seminary to prepare the hearts and minds of those who bring the good news of Christ to the world. Many loving and thoughtful individuals were present at the creation of the Protestant Episcopal Theological Seminary in Virginia. The gifts of their spirit and substance first brought the Seminary into existence. These persons included Francis Scott Key, Reuel Keith, William Meade, Richard Channing Moore, Edmund Jennings Lee, and William Wilmer.

In the nearly two centuries since the Seminary’s creation, many friends have followed the example of Francis Scott Key and others by including Virginia Seminary in their wills and trusts, or by making life income gifts to the Seminary. We are thankful for the generosity of such persons as Allen Adams, William and John Aspinwall, Armistead L. Boothe, Molly Laird Downs, Lettie Pate Whitehead Evans, Harold King, Cassius Lee, Louise Paggi, Charles P. Price, Henry St. George Tucker, Margaret Beverley Taylor, Evelyn Thomas, and F. Bland Tucker.

You are invited to join their company as a member of the Francis Scott Key Society to provide for the Seminary’s financial future by including Virginia Seminary in your estate plan.

Mrs. Jesse M. Trotter

and

The Rt. Rev. A. Theodore Eastman

Co-chairs of the Francis Scott Key Society

If you would like to become a member of
The Francis Scott Key Society
please call or write
Edwin King Hall
Vice President for Institutional Advancement
Virginia Theological Seminary
3737 Seminary Road
Alexandria, VA 22304
703.461.1711
Email: ehall@vts.edu
Virginia Seminary hosted a special lecture event on October 12, 2004, bringing together the Rt. Rev. Canon Kenneth Cragg, one of the great Anglican pioneers in Christian-Muslim relations, and Dr. Akbar S. Ahmed, the Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies and Professor of International Relations at American University.

The event was cosponsored by the College for Bishops of the Episcopal Church, the Seminary’s Center for Lifetime Theological Education, and the Tachmindji Endowment of the Washington Theological Consortium.

The members of the Washington Theological Consortium are listed below. The Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences is the newest member.

The School of Religious Studies, Catholic University of America
The Dominican House of Studies
Howard University School of Divinity
Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg
The Protestant Episcopal Theological Seminary in Virginia

Richmond Theological Consortium
Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond
Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology of Virginia Union University
Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education

Washington Theological Union
Wesley Theological Seminary

Associate Members:
The College of Preachers
Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences
St. Paul’s College

The Rt. Rev. Kenneth Cragg, Dr. Akbar Ahmed, and the Rt. Rev. Frederick Borsch talk before the lectures begin. Bishop Borsch introduced the speakers and moderated the question and answer period following the talks.
“SEE THAT YE HURT NOT THE OIL AND THE WINE”
Lecture by
The Rt. Rev. Kenneth Cragg

Transcription of Dr. Ahmed’s address unfortunately is not available.
Bishop Cragg, who spoke without notes, reconstructed his talk for publication purposes, and we are pleased to present it here.

“See that ye hurt not the oil and the wine.”

What does that pair bring at once to mind? Of course, the rescue on the Jericho road. They were healing means then – oil to soothe and wine for antiseptic. The point about ‘not hurting’ them comes elsewhere – and in an odd place.

But why heed it? When our business here is with Muslim/Christian relations. The answer has to be that their first task is to identify the Semitic ground themes that both faiths share, as the surest territory from which to clarify where and why they so seriously differ.

This ‘not hurting the oil and the wine’ has another relevance in the current world scene, in that it occurs in Revelation 6:6 in a passage laden with the doom of war, famine, plunder, and tragedy. There are ‘four horses, white, red, black and roan,’ whose riders deal in these deadly sorrows, dire events in an anxiety-beset world. ‘The black horseman’ is summoned to spare ‘the oil and the wine’ in his ‘breaking of the seals’ of tribulation. Why these two expressly?

Sundry reasons have been argued – that they were especially holy items in the Temple, or that they serviced the rich who should be immunized from the general hardship. But the likeliest reason is that – unlike annual crops of oats or barley – olive groves and vineyards once destroyed (as currently so brutally in Palestine) can take a generation to renew. Resultant privation will be prolonged and bitter.

The Greek verb here, oidyikeses, is uncannily close to the Quranic term zuilm, meaning any kind of ‘violation,’ social injustice, political tyranny, moral turpitude, or economic exploitation. Verb and noun alike indicate what must at all costs be renounced, denounced, and banned.

So Revelation 6:6. is apposite in our fear-ridden age with ‘terrorism,’ our constant ‘fear-monger’ if we allow it so, and thus well suited to our positive task of inter-faith ‘minding of our meaning.’ This requires us to draw from ‘the oil and the wine’ six relational truths of both our cultures, our societies east and west.

(1) Oil and wine are items of the natural order of a good creation. With corn, they made a patient trio in the celebration of the cosmos in the book of Hosea. He used them to align his Judaic faith about husband and husbandry with the cult of the baalim and left us a striking lesson in the art of cross-culture communication, retrieving from paganism the meaning round which it blundered and, so doing, to liberate its mind. But the point here is just that Muslim and Christian alike share this conviction about the natural order as divinely meant.

(2) As such, a thing of dependable processes and intelligible patterns, it is entrusted into human hands and wills. ‘Oil and wine’ are products, demanding skills and processes over which we preside, but only because we ‘appreciate’ an order that responds to these by virtue of its chemistry, biology, or other discernibles within it. The given creation is thus an entrusted creation. The Islamic term for the Biblical ‘dominion’ is khilafah with identical meaning. We humans are tenants, not gods, recipients of a mandate, not lords over a perquisite. What have we that we did not receive? Our cosmic, native heath is a realm of ‘signs’ (ayat) with which we negotiate our privilegium. The ‘nature’ that makes no statements, will ever answer our questions. It and we alike are made for them, in this mysterious (sacramental?) situation.

(3) At once we find ourselves thereby in an economic order. What can thus be produced can be sold. A farm serves a market which awaits it. Revelation 6:6. observes the inflated prices that go with hoarding and famine. This too is shared Semitic territory.

(4) But by virtue of the natural, the entrusted, the economic, we are ushered into a social order. Commodities only belong in communities. What nature yields to husbandry, to the techniques of science, furnishes culture and civilization. Your ‘oil,’ beyond the
olive, the press, the shop, is your light, your healing, your perfumery maybe, your pharmacology. Your ‘wine’ likewise – thanks to patient vintners – underwrites your hospitality. It is the monitor of your good cheer, the celebrant at your festivals of birth or marriage. It is the very soul of mutuality. You may recall how Robert Browning begins his dramatic monologue about Bishop Blougram’s apologia with: “No more wine? Then we’ll push back the chairs and talk,” and the poet is in full flow with episcopal casuistry. Your ‘oil and wine’ – by these measures – are ‘hurt’ at desperate cost.

(5) And so in turn all these belong with a political order, one which administers and governs all the others. ‘Fill your horn with oil...!’ is the summons that will enthrone David and spell the doom of Ahab. Oil anoints rulers, kings and queens. Davidism takes over Sinai as ‘the Lord’s anointed.’ One of the Biblical Messianic images was that of ‘every man under his vine and under his fig tree, none making them afraid.’ We cannot dispense with the torrid business of politics: it has the care of all the rest. The current U.S. election is incredibly preoccupied with ‘none making us afraid.’ But is this fear-complex the one signature of electability? Beyond that ever-blessed refrain about ‘making America secure,’ what about magnanimity and an ability to put off the blinkers of fearsome ‘national interest’ and not label all else with the label of ‘terrorism.’ For there are meanings too deep, too dire, for such self-centered analysis in the poverty and the dignity of nations other than our own. The ‘political destiny’ into which we are summoned can only be rightly ‘pre-emptive’ in being first ‘co-active’ within a world community struggling to affirm itself in a political commonality of each for all and all for each.

(6) As so, unfailingly, because of all five preceding, these worlds are ‘sacramental’ as ‘the oil and wine’ of Luke 9:34 and even as they belong with baptism and the Eucharist in the making of the Christian. Nature bestowing trust, trust engaging with its realm, shaping the ecology/economy of life, enabling the social order and necessitating the politics of nations – all are thereby sacraments, candidates for consecration whereby ‘Tis not that we enrich God’s hands

But they are saved from ours.’ ‘Here we offer and present’ is a liturgy of all.

Perhaps we have arrived at a paraphrase of Revelation 6:6, which might run: ‘See that you flout not either commodity or community. For rape of nature makes a ravaging of society. Let the West learn from a black horseman its own indictment as ‘hurting the oil and the wine,’ by standards of living or patterns of economy that threaten with jeopardy the true habitability of this singular planet. ‘See that you hurt not the springs of compassion,’ as unworthy priorities do. The Samaritan’s ‘oil and wine’ were further fulfilled in the man set in the saddle, in the pence at the inn, in the re-visit lest there be debt to undertake.

The present point is that all the foregoing (except, perhaps, aspects of the sixth) are no less Quranic than Biblical, no more Christian than Islamic. They are common Semitic perceptions of the world in human hands. There are celebratory psalms about nature in the Qur’an no less cognizant of wonder, no less eloquent of ‘sign-quality,’ no less celebratory with gratitude (shukr) than the Hebrew Psalter. It is well that we take due cognizance of shared territory and affirm – indeed assert – a fellowship around it. Only so can we hopefully come to where divergence seriously belongs. As noted, it arises from the sixth but in ways that strongly revert to the fifth.

One must not opine that Islam has no place for the sacramental. The postures of the body at ritual prayer (Salat) are deeply so, and if not ‘means of grace’ in a Christian sense are certainly ‘means of meaning,’ in that what is done transacts what is meant. The same is powerfully true of the mandatory assembly of the Meccan pilgrimage (Hajj), as is the annual discipline of the Ramadan fast. Indeed, it would be fair to say that Islam has perhaps been more effective than any other faith-system in making the temporal and the material sure occasion of the religious. In the same context one might recall the single, meticulous focus of every separate mosque on the radical line to Mecca so that their sundry audiences are sharing the one common religio-geography. Ablutions before prayer also, we might say, are a sort of personal ‘baptism,’ personally administered. For these ‘sacraments’ in Islam are not in the care of a ‘clerisy’ having an ‘ordained’ aegis or prerogative with them. The main function of its ‘professionals’ in Sunni Islam is the teaching one, the hortatory and the text of the fatwa and legal interpretation. If, excepting the ethos of the Shi’ah Islam, this means of religious ‘democracy’ in Islam, it is seen as a matter of pride and a human asset. In this context, the Shi’ah community, with their Imamate, must be seen as a minority divergence on which there is not time here to elaborate.

Christian faith owes its sacraments of Baptism and Holy
Communion, and their liturgical expression, to its distinctive ‘feel’ for divine ‘grace,’ its shape in Christology and its history in the Incarnation and the Passion of Jesus as the Christ. That faith as to ‘God in Christ’ is thus faith as to ‘the Christ in God.’ What is historically ours in Jesus of Nazareth is recognized and loved as ‘God by divine credentialing,’ or ‘God by criteria from within,’ the living presentation of which to us as the Incarnate Word betokens the divine initiative that awaits and anticipates its acceptance in a faith that is ours.

It is the lack, if not the express rejection, of these Christian dimensions of faith in Islam, that occasions the radical differences which are the burden of all inter-faith occasions. They only come, however, in the ‘theology/ecology/economy/history/society’ situation our six points have reviewed. What is distinctive for Christian faith belongs with what is possessed by Islam, but as a further corollary from it to which Islam strongly demurs. It does so for theological reasons on which it strenuously insists. One is the utter incomparability of Allah for whom self-expression in human terms would be unthinkable. ‘Exalted be He above all that ye associate.’ This ruling principle of divine transcendence excludes any incarnational – or indeed other – terms of revelation. It is linked with the abhorrence of shirk, or ‘associating with Allah what Allah is not and can never be.’ For all such ‘idolatry’ Islamic loyalty can have only anathema.

In ‘negotiation’ with such adamantine veto, it is vital for the Christian mind both to welcome a duly moderated truth and, no less urgent, to make a distinction which recruits what Islam already believes (hence our earlier analysis). These two belong in
one concern. What has to be welcomed is the repudiation of ‘idolatry’ as initially Muslims understood it, namely as the diversifying of their worship and their ‘trustings’ so that these focused on tribal deities, local shrines, and physical features. Clearly, understood against such superstitions, Allah’s ‘exaltedness’ was a right emphasis. It accords with the New Testament mind: ‘Beloved, keep yourselves from idols.’

Such necessary veto on shirk, however – making a distinction – cannot well rule out divine participation in human affairs, affairs whose aegis the idolaters transfer to their worshipped phenomena. Our common faith in creation and ‘dominion’/khilafah must learn that, everyday, we are having to do with God and, therefore, God is having to do with us. Since – it is agreed – ‘in Him we live and move and have our being,’ this experience must be in some measure an experience of Him and, therefore, a cognizance about Him. The very ‘names of Allah’ in the Qur’an include nouns of action – ‘Maker,’ ‘Fashioner,’ ‘Presider’ – which are within our ken. We could not be intelligible to ourselves unless thereby, in some measure, Allah was intelligible to us. We would be right to exclude all utterly ‘possessive’ knowledge of Him, but not any knowledge at all.

Muslims allow that we must have – and use – theological language but would have us elide the meaning by ‘not asking how’ the words describe (the bila kaif formula). But if in this way we evacuate our theology do we not also emasculate our worship? Let us hold on to a consistent doctrine of a creation where ‘the heavens declare the glory of God.’

Moreover, the allied notion of ‘idolatry’ as the first Muslims held it, was too literal in its repudiating strategy. It sensed only those repulsive physical images and worship of local paganism. Our contemporary idols of commerce, nation, profit, greed, violence, security, and the rest, need no less to be dethroned. For they exact a far more heinous slavery than any primitivism did. The truth of transcendence is necessary in doing so, but the very liability, on our part, to exorcise them from our culture requires authentic ‘knowledge of God.’ Thus we are back with a reverently confident theology.

But deeper still in this ‘dialogue’ realm between us is the still larger question, not of whether about those feasibly discernible attributes of Allah or God, but where they will take the believer? Into what realms will they venture? We have held as implicit in all our ‘theology, ecology, economy, history’ situation an element of divine ‘risk.’ The decision for creation and for a humanity ‘in charge’ in the ‘dominion’ sense was indeed divine risk. The Qur’an cannot be averse to the word. Surah 2:30 indicates how clearly the Creator ‘knew’ that it was there. Moreover, prophethood (so squarely in the Muslim Confession of faith) witnesses to it in being sent to take stock of it, to guide, educate, and exhort.

All is there in the parable of the vineyard and the rebellious husbandmen (of which the Qur’an has

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an echo at 2:87). The vineyard is ‘entrusted’ to its custodians (humanity over creation’s livelihood-is ing of them). Messengers – conscience, religion, ethics – elicit the fruits. They get a dusty answer. A conspiracy is under way to get possession of the vineyard, if only these usurpers can make it heirless. Hence, in the parable, the ultimate challenge to them of sending him when all the messengers have suffered at their hands.

This vital parable – in all three Synoptic Gospels – is the sure clue to two realities. They inter-relate. One is the length of human perversity, passing from coveting, through suspecting, to defying and usurping – all measures of cumulative sin. The other is the measure of divine counter-action, i.e., the costly mission of ‘the Son.’ Only the son, in context, can re-assert the ownership that is being defiled. Within the parable (for Judaic reasons) that mission is only re-assertive of divine right. Beyond the parable, in the Christology to which it led, it becomes redemptive. ‘I will send unto them my Son’ translated into: ‘God so loved the world that He gave...’ – the only sufficiently divine response to the realistic measure of how wrong we humans can be, and historically are.

It is these dimensions of God, reciprocal to an honesty about ourselves, for which Islam is traditionally unready. It holds these measures of theology improper to ‘exaltedness.’ It sees these perceptions of human need as too drastic. It is more sanguine about how corrigible humans are, thanks to law, guidance, and the disciplines of a religious structure, and more confident about how amenable we can prove to ethical pleas, whether of dogma or conscience.

Thanks to Jesus and his parables, to Paul and his biography, to John and his insights, Christianity holds to a more radical appraisal of human wrongness, of our zulm, our ‘doing hurt,’ indeed our self-violation which the Qur’an is ready to see as zulm al-nafs, ‘the wronging of the self.’ Being where and as we are by these measures of our need as wrongdoers, Christian faith is the more expectant about the length of divine ‘salvation’ from it. ‘Expectation’ in respect of God is more congenial in the Bible than in the Qur’an, for integral reasons such as the Hebraic, ‘I know their sorrows: I am come down to deliver’ around the Exodus. This divine capacity for compassion in such invasive terms had its ultimate in Christology, in ‘the good shepherd seeking until he finds’.

Perhaps one way of mediating this theme into the Muslim skepticism concerning it, is via the very concept assumed to veto it, namely divine ‘greatness.’ Allahu akbar: ‘ever greater is God’ and ‘none is worthy to enter a comparison.’ But in what does divine greatness consist? The word is elastic. What can it comprise? Our ‘souls must magnify the lord’ (same root) but by what criteria? That they might be those of lowliness, of purposive kenosis, of self-expenditure for eminently self-telling reasons, is the splendid mystery. For such are the ways of love, so that the concern of the divine, via creation, for human society might have this further, fuller measure of divine magnanimity. For creation, as mutually understood, gives us reason to think it might have a momentum to redemption, God being thus initially and finally our ‘befriender.’

On this uniting yet dividing situation concerning the divine ‘greatness,’ there can only be commending, not imposing. What is inwardly a theme of doctrine, is outwardly the task of witness. Such ‘commending,’ however, is always a search, across what divides, for what may be recruited to it is what unites.

The mind of the other may well prove incorrigible, non-receptive. The onus does not end, nor is the meaning forfeit. It stays even in the setting of its rejection. For ‘its nature and its name is love.’

There remains one final area from our sixfold survey of our human scene as the mise-en-scène of our religions. It moves from and with the sacramental order of things we have studied, and it harks back to the fifth of them, namely the political order under which religious faith has tenancy and tenure.

We might broach what is at issue by observing that Christian faith and its society became politicized, as Christendom, by the decision of the Emperor Constantine to absorb the Church into his imperial structure. His was a dubious personal ‘conversion’: it inaugurated a radical ‘revision’ of the Church from what had first been a suffering, witnessing, powerless identity, into an imperially-minded faith. Its initial definition, however, has always remained the theology of its raison d’être.

It is fair to say that the politicization of Islam took place, by dint of his Hijrah from Mecca to Medina, inside the career of Muhammad himself. His mission for 13 years had gallantly confronted obloquy and the deep hostility of powerfully-sanctioned vested interests in Meccan paganism. His situation had been analogous to that of Paul in Ephesus, when the Ephesian silversmiths, sensing a threat in his Gospel to their trade and their city’s prestige, drew a mob into the theatre to oust him and kill his threat with him. Muhammad in Mecca had no Roman rescue of that order. Instead, believing
that Allah’s word deserved not to be

denied its way, he removed his

community to the alternative city-site

where some inhabitants had

undertaken by pledge to protect him.

This definitive Hijrah seems nowhere

to have been explicitly commanded in

the Qur’an. It was a pragmatic but

logical decision. What is God’s ought

to succeed and, given implacable

resistance, success needs power.

Thus Islam became belligerent.

The Prophet was transformed into a

martial leader. The transformation in

Islam was critical. To be sure the

prophetic balagh (message) continued

and remained the very rationale

behind the change. What ensued was

no mere brigandage but a purposive

pursuit of power as the instrument of faith.

Muhammad became in effect his own

Constantine mutatis

mutandis.

It is crucial to note that this militancy has

its due place in the

Qur’an, for the verbal

deliverances continued and with

them his own Sirah, or

life-course, another

eight years till Mecca

yielded, and through

two more till his

demise. Thus the

martial Islam, with its

provisions about

booty, captives, truces,

prayer under war

conditions, shunning

cowardice as fitnah (or

feared onus) – all these

have passed into the

daily recital of the

sacred text. Islamic

Tajwid has no escape from its militancy

inside its scriptured memory. By

contrast, in God’s great mercy, the

New Testament page is innocent of the

Constantinian dimension. It stays

blessedly with the pastoral education

of a docile community via its Epistles

and with the defining imagery of the

teaching ‘man of sorrows in his

acquaintance with grief.’

Thus, Islam has been inured to

the exercise of religious power and the

will of powered religion in originally

defining terms, whereas the Christian

tradition only knew these after its first

categorical definition, which had

conclusively abjured them.

It is here that there emerges not

only the most evident contrast but the

most exacting sphere of inter-
dialogue between us and that of

Islam with the global world now. The

mind of Islam has steadily

maintained the Hijrah’s legitimacy

and has proceeded upon it. Faith

without the power to control its own

regime is in default of its chief duty.

Yet the world in which we

now live requires that it should forego

that exclusive exercise of power – and

do so for a faith’s own sake and its

better ministry in monitoring its world.

The reasons are on every hand – a

comity of nations struggling to

contribute a viable world order, a

discipline of ‘united nations,’ in which

alone even the mightiest can hope long

to survive in sanity or justice, a

criminal imbalance of poverty and

wealth urgent for correction, and

seething sanctions on enmity liable to

stem from religious or racial enmity.

All these argue a mutual

internationalism in which religions

honestly participate, holding for the

common good what wisdoms they

contain in honest reference to where

we all now are.

So the burning question is, can

Islam afford or attain such a radical

revision of its history as a return to its

Meccan quality (as its only shape)

would entail? To seek for the answer

we need its two fronts – the one

practical, the other conceptual. The

former is the easier.

The hard fact is that around

one quarter of the world’s Muslims are

now in permanent minority status in

their world – wide diaspora where

they have no realistic hope of

Islamising the state. Some may

entertain the subversive hope that they

might attain to do so but only thereby

jeopardizing the will of good faith on

the part of a majority, studying to be

authentic Muslims as U.S. citizens,

British, German, Dutch, Italian, French
etc., ‘nationals.’ The journal, for example, of the London Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs, is witness to their sincerity in returning to a Meccan-style shape of their Islam (minus the old persecution). Much of their thinking can, of course, help alert and educate the attitudes of all those other Muslims in their majority statehood expression. For the case for constructive co-existence must run everywhere.

Nor, with right perspectives, is anything new in this situation of living and learning a non-political Islam. A comparable situation obtained in the 19th century in India under the British Raj. With Empress Victoria ruling was it Dar al-Islam? Ask the political question and the answer must be No! Ask the religious questions – are the mosques open? Can we pray? Do we go on pilgrimage? Can we keep Ramadan or pay Zakat – the answer certainly is Yes! So Ahmad Khan, the reviver of Indian Islam after the collapse of the ‘Mutiny’ and the founder of the famed Aligarh Muslim College (to replicate Oxford) insisted. But are ‘religious’ issues and tests to be thus isolated from the political? Traditional Islam never thought so. ‘Being just a religion’ was a very ‘secular’ idea. So the issue searches the very definition of Islam.

Moreover, the most significant element is that 25% percent of diaspora Muslims is in today’s India. Not only is their minority status irreversible (there are no more Pakistanis to be contrived), they are living in heavy contrast to the Pakistani neighbor deliberately created on the thesis that such minority condition was un-Islamic and intolerable.

For the Muslim League (with other factors) specifically had India partitioned on the premise that unless Muslims in their majority areas (Punjab, etc., and Bengal) ruled themselves, they could not truly be themselves. On that premise, Indian Islam now ought to have withered away, as some Pakistani case-makers predicted. Instead it flourishes, despite the fact that the making of Pakistan at such tragic human cost might have suggested to India that it become some ‘Hindustan’ where only Hindus would be ‘Indians,’ in exclusive self-rule. So, at least in the subcontinent, there are two mutually exclusive versions of Islam, the one achieving to be in the Meccan religion (minus Meccan-style persecution) and the other requiring to be Medinan via pure Islamic statehood. It is a statehood forever at odds over definition of what such statehood means and how it is made good.

Thus it is clear that Islam would-wide is in the throes of a crisis about its own origins and their traditional ethos, and facing some depoliticization (in the old sense) as a fact of its current existence.

What, then, of any conceptual case-making in response? The first factor is the pride of Islam in how as the Qur’an has it – Allah is never ‘overtaken,’ or out of date as no longer relevant. Muhammad was meant as ‘a mercy to the worlds.’ Then this 21st one is among them. Islam is abreast of whatever time and place require ‘God’s religion,’ to be. Doubtless, some
may read this ‘finality’ as fitting the world to a static Islam; others as knowing an Islam ready and able for its needs, global as they now are seen to be. Secondly, given this finality, we may concede that the Medinan version was valid then. We are not saying that the Hijrah was mistaken. How could it be, and if we are reading its point steadily in our recited Scriptures, we are not saying it should not be there. Arabia then, with its deities sanctioning tribal feuds; urgently needed unity and the God-given way of achieving it was to unify its worship in Allah alone. But this current global century is not that Arabia’s 7th, Islam’s 1st. What may have been authentic once is not so now. As for reading scriptures now no longer at their first in situ, we learn how we may intelligently ignore or supersede what anachronistically we find. Muhammed’s history can be disqualified as, by Christians, Constantine’s aberration can be. Muslims must appreciate that the Qur’an was given into their intelligence, not to their obtuseness. To appreciate the Hijrah’s first validity, is to know it as historical once.

This, thirdly, leads to the familiar Sunni theme of communal ‘consensus.’ Islam derives from the Qur’an and the Sunnah and from the Hadith, and from things on which the community ‘converges’ that are non-repugnant to them. ‘Non-repugnancy’ is a principle of easier application than ‘conformity to.’ Muhammad said: ‘My people will never agree on what is error’ – hence Islam may be what loyal Muslims together affirm it to be. The way in which this may slowly happen is by the ‘initiative’ of pioneers of mind (Ijtihad tending to Ijma’). Doubtless controversy may remain. But has there not been a near practical consensus that the ancient Caliphate, abolished by (‘Muslim?’) Turks in 1924 has not been, and likely will not ever be, re-established? Adaptation is not impossible. Were it to become so, Islam would decay.

In this connection it is noteworthy how little of ‘political’ Islam is Quranic, the Hijrah apart. There is no mention of ‘caliphat’ except the one we all have in our personal khilafah. So much of what politically transpired in the centuries is post-Quranic and revisable. So progressives argue. In part, it seems true to say that the vociferous of the ‘conservers’ simply reflect how at odds they are with pressures they register of menace in change. Islam can learn to appreciate and to reach for a co-existence of religions within a comity of nations.

‘See that ye hurt not the oil and the wine’ – the wine of hospitality in its sharing, of oil in its healing, its fragrance, and its illuminating actions, via lamps of hope. There are two concluding points it remains to add. The one is that this perception of religious faith as no longer politically monopolistic by no means suggests that exoneration from its moral role in politics. It requires only that this role be exercised in open concert with all other religious ‘presences,’ major or minor, among a composite citizenry, bringing whatever wisdom their consciences have to the common good. Indeed, this ‘secular’ shape of non-monopolistic religious relevance puts doctrine and practice on their mettle, so that religion is more ‘religiously’ tested, sifted, and applied. Not to be in unilateral control must make for a more self-interrogating, self-alerting custody of meanings.

Moreover, it is evident that, for historical reasons, a faith that has long had a majority role within a culture will continue so to enjoy, even when religions creatively co-exist within it. To cease to domineer will not mean to cease to dominate. Islam in Dar al-Islam, Hinduism in India, Buddhism in further Asia, but co-existent with due breathing-space for all minorities consistent with law and order – a law and order they have helped to define. Shakespeare and Milton, John Donne and Gladstone, are not going to be eradicated from English culture, any more than Al-Ghazali or Hafiz or Saladin or Ibn al-Farid from the Islamic. But their continuity and legacy will be compatible with the modern version of minorities they have always known.

But the way for Islam is long and hard and slow – thanks to criteria that are all too manifest, that hurdle of the defining Hijrah being so high to vault. Yet the case is being made. Our last query, therefore, must be how far – if at all – a Christian patience can academically serve its case and spiritually aid its mind and heart. The provision is clear enough. The crisis is Islam’s and its resolution is Islam’s alone. Over-much western ‘advice’ can be counter-helpful in the given climate. The case cannot be in the form of: ‘This is our western way: you would do well to adopt it: imitate our admirable democracy and let it solve all your puzzles.’ This smacks of spiritual imperialism. What is ‘admirable’ about American democracy? Nor is democracy any panacea elsewhere. Indeed, if we know human nature, there are no panaceas, but only palliatives. Freedoms have to come about in their due cultural idioms.

Yet, sensitive as the issues are, there may be some role for Christian and other ‘alongsided-ness’ with Muslims in their contemporary vocation – one that builds on the common areas of faith and wisely mediates the disparate meanings. The
academic struggle for the liberty of scholarship is already being won. That for a theological quality of honesty and hope is being ventured and, if nothing else, the West can afford havens of perspective not always available for the faithful under disadvantage.

‘Pouring in oil and wine,’ so right on the Jericho road, is no true formula for what this lecture had in trust. Nor is the other party ‘half dead.’ It is virile and still on the road, but at heavy odds with its contemporary journey, in part aggressive, in part wary of the thieves. Analogies always fail. But at least ‘see that ye hurt not the oil and wine’ is apt enough for our bidding where, currently, Muslim/Christian relationships have their worlds in trust. ❧

Mary Tyler McClenahan of Richmond, Virginia, was one of the first recipients of Virginia Seminary’s Lettie Pate Whitehead Evans Award. A civic leader in Richmond for many years, she was nominated for the Award for her ministry of reconciliation among diverse economic and racial groups. Mrs. McClenahan died January 16, 2005.

The Award honors the legacy of Lettie Pate Whitehead Evans, a devoted member of the Episcopal Church and a friend of the Seminary. The Award is given annually to an Episcopal layperson who has given leadership and unique witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ within his or her congregation and in the world over a significant period of time. Further information is available from Edwin King Hall, Vice President for Institutional Advancement, at 800.941.0083.
In September of 2003 Hurricane Isabel severely damaged one of the most sacred places at Virginia Seminary, our cherished cemetery. Legendary leaders of Virginia Seminary and the Episcopal Church around the world—founders, trustees, deans, faculty, and friends of the Seminary—are buried and remembered in this hallowed place.

This summer the Seminary initiated an appeal for special gifts to help restore this gracious landmark located not far from the chapel. The conservation plans for the cemetery include restoring the historic Minnegerode Arch Gateway and two brick pillars forming the cemetery entrance, replacing the wrought iron fencing around the perimeter, installing a water supply for plantings, and improving access and seating for funerals and visitors. The cost for this much-needed work will be approximately $200,000.

Plans include the recognition of supporters of the conservation initiative on a plaque at the entrance to the cemetery, near the one that commemorates the Minnegerode Arch Gateway. Funds contributed beyond these immediate needs will be set aside in a special Cemetery Conservation Fund for future maintenance and enhancement needs.

Ed Hall, the Seminary’s Vice President for Institutional Advancement, said the Seminary is “thankful for the expression of generous support on behalf of this special endeavor. As of December 31, 2004, $95,000 had been raised for the Cemetery Conservation Initiative. Many devoted supporters of the Seminary have come forth to make special gifts to help rebuild this sacred site, over and above their critical ongoing support of the Annual Fund. The Seminary is indeed fortunate to have such wonderful friends! We hope this outpouring of generosity will enable us to begin restoration work at the Cemetery in the spring.

Contributions to the Cemetery Conservation Initiative may be sent to Virginia Theological Seminary, c/o the Very Rev. Martha Horne, 3737 Seminary Road, Alexandria, VA 22304, or made online at www.vts.edu.
The 2005 John Hines Preaching Award

John Hines, VTS ’33, former Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, was a compassionate man, known for his powerful preaching and commitment to social justice, particularly civil rights. The prophetic element that characterized Hines’ own ministry was deeply rooted in his unwavering commitment to the biblical texts that stood at the center of his life and ministry. His sermons forged the necessary links between the narratives of scripture and the social context of his listeners, as he called people to a faithful and often costly response to the Gospel.

Proclamation of the Gospel has always been at the center of the Virginia Seminary life and worship. It is our hope that the John Hines Preaching Award, established here in 1998, will celebrate the ministry of preaching in our church by recognizing outstanding sermons that are deeply grounded in scripture and responsive to the needs and concerns of the worshipping community.

On the following pages we are pleased to publish the sermon chosen for the 2005 Award.

Martha J. Horne
Dean and President

Previous Recipients of the John Hines Preaching Award:

The Rev. James M. Donald
Rector, St. Columba’s Episcopal Church, Washington, DC
Mr. Todd Miller
Music Director and Pastoral Assistant, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Ventura, California
The Rev. Ramona Rose-Crossley
Assistant Missioner in the Slate Valley Ministry, Vermont
The Rev. Matthew Gunter
Rector, St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Glen Ellyn, Illinois
The Rev. Mariann Edgar Budde
Rector, St. John the Baptist Episcopal Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota
The Rev. Sheila Nelson-McJilton
Assistant Rector, Christ Church, Kent Island, Maryland
The Rev. Dr. William H. Danaher, Jr.
Assistant Professor of Theology and Christian Ethics
School of Theology at The University of the South
It is hard to sleep when you are hungry, when you know that you have hit the end, when you cannot sink any lower, when you are doing things that make you ashamed.

This is where I was. I couldn’t sleep because I knew that if I continued what I was doing, I would die.

During many long, agonizing nights, I would begin to remember. There was one memory I could not shake. It was the moment when I went to my Father and demanded my inheritance. I knew and he knew what I was saying: “Old man, you are as good as dead to me.”

Why did I deliberately hurt this man who had loved me every moment of my life? My desire for freedom and excitement drove me. His love made me feel cramped and I resented his hopes for my life.

For a while I consumed everything that my heart and body desired. Looking back, I can see that I had become ever more frenzied as the thrills delivered ever diminishing returns.

I was so involved with indulging myself that I paid no attention to the money running out. And it did. With my pockets empty, my friends proved to be fickle and my lovers false.

There was nothing for me to do but to go to work. Now I knew work, even hard work, but I had never been forced to do work that demeaned and broke you. It was the only work I could find—feeding the pigs. But then maybe it was appropriate for the pig to feed the pigs.

It now sounds silly to say this, but my pride kept me at this work for a long time. I kept thinking, “I will get a break. This can’t be my life. There must be a way out.” But things only got worse, until one night when it seemed like the fog cleared. For the first time in months, maybe years, I felt like I had come back to myself.

So, I left the pig farm and began the long walk to my Father’s house. I didn’t expect him to receive me as a son—that relationship was over—but I knew that I would be better off as his slave than in that pigpen.

I will never forget the moment when I saw my Father in the field. Seeing him, I knew that he had been waiting for me, and I could almost feel his eyes drawing me back home. When he recognized me, he threw down his tools and began running down the road. As we came near to each other, I fell at his feet and begged to become his slave, but he greeted me as a beloved son. I groveled as the wastrel, the scoundrel, the whoremonger that I was, but he brushed off all of my words with his tears and kisses.

He called all the servants together. As they gathered, I could tell that they were not pleased to see me. They respected my Father, and they knew that I had broken his heart.

My Father, though, immediately cut through the tension in the air with these words: “…this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!”

Even though they were cleaning me up and starting the fires for the fatted calf, I couldn’t relax. You see, I knew that I still had to face my older brother. Things had never been good between us. He had always been the good and responsible one; and I, well, you know what I had been.

He came. He saw me. He sneered at the ring on my finger and the robe around my shoulders. He curled his lips in disdain and said to our Father that “this son of yours” doesn’t deserve any of this. Looking at my Father, I saw that my brother’s words hurt him just as deeply as my words asking for my inheritance.

I am now reporting to you events that happened many years ago. There has been some talk, especially among the young and restless, about all the carousing that I had once done. Some of the stories have a kernel of truth, but most have been embellished for the titillation of the audience. I have
even heard some people refer to me as the Prodigal Son, but that is to miss the point of the story. Do you want to know the true prodigal? It was my Father. The story is about his lavish, extravagant, and prodigal love.

Some people have questioned my Father. Just what was he thinking when he gave me the inheritance? Just what was he thinking when he welcomed me back? That is just too easy. You can’t just give love away like that, they say. Some of these people are not parents, which means that they do not know about the intricate and delicate dance a parent has with a child around freedom. Some of these people just don’t know much about love, do they?

Some people think that my brother was treated unfairly. Some may identify with him and his dutiful and responsible ways, and some of them resent people like me. Some of these people have forgotten that my Father loved him just as much as he loved me.

I now see that neither of us understood my Father and his love. I had thought that I could destroy it, and my brother had thought that he needed to earn it.

Why do I stand before you and tell this story? Maybe there is someone here who is now experiencing his or her own sleepless and desperate nights. Maybe there is someone here who needs to come back to himself, to herself. Maybe there is someone here who needs to come back to God. If so, don’t hesitate. God not only waits for you; He sent his only son on a rescue mission from heaven to find you. If my wonderful, though human and fallible father, could love so freely and completely, just think how prodigal God’s love and mercy must be.

And then maybe there is someone here who is like my brother. He was a good fellow, he meant well, but his feeling that the weight of the world was on his shoulders had pinched his heart. Do any of you feel that way? It is not a good way to feel. If anyone here identifies with him, would you please believe that you are loved, and that all that the Father has is already yours.

My father threw that feast for me when I returned home. That is what parents do. Today God, our Father, throws this feast. The feast of Jesus. Please don’t come thinking that you need to earn your way here either with your remorse or your righteousness. Just come. Come and acknowledge your hunger for God. Come and be filled. There is enough for all. There is room for all. The Father delights to see his children feast together. 

“The Return of the Prodigal Son” by Rembrandt van Rijn.
Dean and President Martha J. Horne announced in the fall that, beginning in the summer of 2005, the Seminary will offer a Doctor of Ministry in Educational Leadership, in collaboration with the National Association of Episcopal Schools (NAES). This new program, designed for leaders in full-time school ministry, such as heads of schools, chaplains, rectors, and teachers of religion, will provide the Seminary with the opportunity to serve the Episcopal Church in the fastest growing area of ministry in the denomination: pre-school through grade 12.

“Episcopal schools are at the cutting edge of growth in the Episcopal Church, with school enrollment up 29% in the past ten years or so,” said the Rev. Roger Ferlo, Ph.D., Director of the Center for Lifetime Theological Education and board member and treasurer of NAES. “VTS is proud to be partnering with the National Association of Episcopal Schools in training leaders for the next generation, with the firm conviction that the life of the mind and the life of faith are essential to one another.”

The D.Min. in Educational Leadership will give school leaders the opportunity to develop new professional skills in critical areas of school ministry. The Seminary also hopes to attract leaders in school ministry from other denominations, thereby enriching its doctoral studies with an ecumenical gathering. The program will involve three summer sessions, each being a three-week, on-campus residency.

Virginia Seminary has offered the Doctor of Ministry for 30 years, focusing primarily on church leaders--most of whom were in parish ministry--who were seeking to develop leadership skills in theological reflection for their ministry. Just as the Seminary responded to the needs of the church in the 1970s, with what is now called the D.Min. in Ministry Development, the need for an academic/professional degree which will focus on the challenges of school ministry has now been addressed.

With Episcopal High School as a neighbor and other relationships with church-related schools, Virginia Seminary has had an historic, long-term interest in and commitment to school ministry. Many of its graduates serve, or have served, as heads and chaplains of Episcopal Schools.

The Seminary’s new Doctor of Ministry in Educational Leadership degree was announced in November at the biennial conference of the National Association of Episcopal Schools. Among the participants in the conference were Dr. Amy Gearey Dyer, Director of the Center for the Ministry of Teaching; Dr. David Charlton, President of the Church Schools in the Diocese of Virginia; Lifetime Theological Education Director the Rev. Dr. Roger Ferlo; and Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program, the Rev. Dr. Barney Hawkins.
Through the generosity of members of the family of the late Henry Powers, a student dormitory room in historic Madison Hall was dedicated on August 19th to the memory of this wonderful member of the Class of 1942, who spent his life in creative and distinguished service to the Church. After the dedication ceremony, a reception and luncheon were held in the refectory. Pictured above are members of the extended Powers family.
News from the Classes

1934

The Rev. Harry T. Burke was honored recently by St. Stephen’s Episcopal School, Bradenton, Florida, with the publication of a 26-page booklet entitled “This Is Your Life, Harry Burke.” The booklet is a compelling chronicle of Mr. Burke’s life and career, beginning with his birth in Kentucky in 1909 and including his experience as a missionary and teacher in the Philippines, and two years as a prisoner of war during World War II. The booklet includes excerpts from his diary kept during his time in the prison camp.

After the war Mr. Burke returned to the Philippines to work at Brent School in Baguio. He later returned to the United States and began graduate study in education administration. He was headmaster at Smith School in Lincoln, Massachusetts, for six years and later became academic dean at St. Andrew’s School in Sewanee, Tennessee. While preparing for retirement, Mr. Burke unexpectedly received a call to become assistant headmaster at the new St. Stephen’s School in Bradenton, and remained there for three years. While there he had the wonderful surprise of discovering that the fathers of two of St. Stephen’s pupils had played an important part in his life during the war, although he had not known it at the time. One was a former paratrooper who had parachuted into the prison compound and liberated the occupants in February 1945. The other was a pilot on one of the planes that dropped food and supplies to them after they were freed.

Mr. Burke is retired and living in Mentor, Ohio. His prison camp diary is now part of the Yale Divinity School Library.

1943

The Rev. Bolling Robertson and his wife, Marilyn, who recently left Virginia to return to Liberia where they had been missionaries for many years, write that they are at home in Robertsport, Grand Cape Mount County. “We praise God every morning and evening, joining our voices with a small group of lovely friends who gather in our house. . . The number varies, but the group usually includes our driver, a member of the Bishop’s Committee, a teenager who keeps our water barrels filled, the vicar of St. John’s Church, and two ladies who live nearby and are parishioners at St. John’s. Occasionally a Muslim friend joins in . . . We are surrounded by people whose love is a real sign of God’s love for us. . . Bolling never goes anywhere without a young friend or two, anxious to walk beside him and help him over the rough spots . . .”

“As I write this letter I am looking through our window at the spectacular view. To the left is a vast expanse of Atlantic Ocean; to the right is Piso Lake . . . The two are separated by a golden sand bar that stretches into the far distance. This view always fills us with joy and peace. St. John’s Church is about 75 yards away . . .” From Marilyn Robertson in Liberia
February 2005

“It is a joy to report that the orphan girls at Bromley are thriving and happy. The donations have flowed in and they know they are loved. They are receiving much loving and caring attention from Bishop and Mrs. Edward Neufville (VTS ’74).”

From Marilyn Robertson in Liberia

1949

The Rev. Stanley A. Powell provided the Journal with the photograph at the bottom of this page of seminary students in 1949, standing on the steps of Sparrow Hall. Mr. Powell writes as follows: “The Class of 1949 came to Seminary at the end of World War II. The most colorful member of our class was John Shinberger. Shortly after we arrived at VTS we heard that ‘Shin’ was going to be on the radio. We tuned in and heard, ‘This week we bring you General Omar Bradley, the United States Army Band, and our Salute of the Week, Colonel John B. Shinberger.’ Shin told about how he had been wounded in the Battle of the Bulge, said the Prayer of Thanksgiving, and felt called to go into the ministry by the words, ‘Show forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to thy service.’ When the time came for Shin to retire, he would have been entitled to a dress parade. Since he was not on an Army post he wouldn’t get a parade, so some of us decided to give him one. We had ‘Shinberger Day’ and many of us came to class in our uniforms.”

1951

The Class of ’51 held a three-day reunion in October, gathering first in Seattle and then visiting Victoria, Canada. Eight couples and three singles attended the bi-annual reunion.

The Journal editor is grateful to the Rt. Rev. Philip A. Smith for helping us identify most of the faces in this photograph of seminarians in 1949. If readers recognize some of the unidentified, please let us know and we’ll run the photograph again. In the front, beginning at the far left: Thom Blair(?); Vernon Quigley(?); Fred Park; unidentified; John Shinberger; Bill Belser; and Phil Smith. In the back: Bob Peeples; John Stevens; Gordon Charlton; Ed Conklin; two unidentified men; Henry Seaman; unidentified; Pete Farmer; and one more unidentified.
In January the Seminary welcomed the Rev. Rosemari Sullivan as the new Director of Alumni Affairs and Special Events.

Ms. Sullivan has served the church with great distinction, as associate rector at Grace Episcopal Church in Alexandria, Virginia, 1985-1987, rector of the Church of St. Clement in Alexandria 1987-1998, and for the past six years as executive officer and secretary of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church. This year she was honored by being elected Canon by the Diocese of Colombia, the Cathedral of St. Paul in Bogotá, Colombia.

Ed Hall, Vice President for Institutional Advancement, said, “Rosemari’s appointment accentuates the high esteem Virginia Seminary has for its graduates, and the support we intend to provide them as leaders of our church.” Ms. Sullivan replaces Katie Lasseron who, in December, stepped into a new role as Program Coordinator for the Seminary’s Center for Lifetime Theological Education.
1953
The Rev. John F. Woolverton’s new book, Robert Hallowell Gardiner and the Reunification of Worldwide Christianity in the Progressive Era, will be published in 2005 by the University of Missouri Press. The book, which will be reviewed in a future issue of the VTS Journal, explores the life and career of Gardiner, a Maine attorney, who was in his day (he died in 1924) “the heart and soul of the ecumenical movement; he and a handful of friends sought international cooperation and goodwill among both nations and churches . . . and to that end singlehandedly created a network which eventually resulted in the founding of the World Council of Churches.” Dr. Woolverton taught Church History at VTS from 1958 until 1983.

1955
The Rev. David Greer is serving as interim at St. John’s, Barrington, Rhode Island, while St. John’s rector, the Rev. Neal Goldsborough (VTS ’81) serves in Kuwait as a Navy chaplain. Mr. Goldsborough’s tour of duty is scheduled to end in January 2006.

1962
The Rev. Harwood “Woody” Bartlett and his wife, Carol, have jointly founded Georgia Interfaith Power & Light, a non-profit that seeks to focus the faith community on reducing the pollution caused by the ways we generate and use electricity. It is part of a national Power & Light movement now present in 15 states. Over 30 Georgia congregations have joined in the effort. The Bartletts founded the organization out of deep respect for God’s Creation and to bring the faith community to its next large task – changing the way that we relate to the Creation from exploitation to partnership. Mr. Bartlett says, “Addressing our use of energy gets quickly to the core of the matter. And doing it in practical ways such as energy audits, the use of compact fluorescent light bulbs, and the purchase of green energy makes it concrete so that everyone can participate.” Paulist Press has recently published Mr. Bartlett’s book, Living by Surprise: A Christian Response to the Ecological Crisis.

1971
The National Association of Episcopal Schools (NAES) announced in December that it had presented the 2004 Ruth Jenkins Award to the Rev. George E. Andrews II, headmaster for the past 16 years of Saint Andrew’s School, Boca Raton, Florida. The Ruth Neal Goldsborough, right, departs for a year as a Navy chaplain in Kuwait, leaving his parish in the hands of David Greer, left.
Jenkins Award is named for one of the founders of NAES and is given to individuals who have provided outstanding service to the Association and “have done so with passion, commitment, and vision.” Prior to beginning his service at Boca Raton, Mr. Andrews was Scholar-in-Residence at St. Paul’s School, Concord, New Hampshire, for a year. He was headmaster at St. George’s School, Newport, Rhode Island, from 1984 until 1988.

Charles Barker

1973
The Rev. John Abraham, formerly senior associate with St. Philip’s-in-the-Hills, Tucson, Arizona, has accepted the position of executive director with End of Life Choices Arizona (EOLC AZ). The non-profit organization has about 1,700 members in Arizona and operates ten local chapters throughout the state. More information about EOLC is available on the internet at www.choicesarizona.org.

1974
Thirty years after leaving VTS, the Rev. Thomas E. Beasley, Jr., was ordained to the transitional deaconate on November 9 by the Rt. Rev. Samuel Johnson Howard, VTS ’89, Bishop of Florida. Over the years, Mr. Beasley continued his training for ordination through the Anglican Institute of Studies in the Diocese of Florida. He now is planting mission stations in prisons in the diocese and working to meet Bishop Howard’s goal of an Episcopal presence in ten Florida prisons by early 2005. There are 27 prisons within the boundaries of the diocese. “Our liturgy has attracted more than expatriated Episcopalians,” Mr. Beasley writes. “Pentecostals, Baptists, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, and one Messianic Jewish inmate have made up the congregation at Baker Correctional Institute where I serve.”

The Rev. David R. Barker, rector of St. Mary’s, Sutton Valence, Kent, England, received a visit in August 2004 from Edwin King Hall, the Seminary’s Vice President for Institutional Advancement. The Halls were visiting England and took a snapshot of Mr. Barker in front of St. Mary’s. The early Norman church is more than 1,000 years old, with church records that list the names of rectors, vicars, and curates beginning as far back as 1288.

Peter Cheney, VTS ’75, left, Director of the National Association of Episcopal Schools, and George Andrews.

1975
An item in the September 2004 Journal’s Class News section erred in saying that the Rev. David Rich is the pastor of Christ Our Healer Ministries, a counseling center in Buffalo, New York. Mr. Rich has retired from the counseling center, after nine years there, and is now very involved with the Anglican Mission in America. He is testing and evaluating “prospective AMiA clergy while helping in the discernment process in which they are involved.” He also has begun research for a book on worship.

1976
The Rev. Philip Tierney has been called by St. Paul’s, Wickford, Rhode Island, after six years as rector of Christ Church, Charlotte, North Carolina.
1977
The Rt. Rev. Jon Bruno, Bishop of Los Angeles, has been elected to the board of directors of the Compass Rose Society, an international organization for the support of the Anglican Communion.

1980
The Rev. Linda Leibhart served as a chaplain in Kuwait for 10 months, beginning in April 2003, and is believed to be the first female chaplain to serve in a combat zone. In February 2004 she was Medevac’d home after a non-combat-related injury in Qatar and is now working with the Veterans Administration in Rochester, New York. Of her experience in Kuwait, Ms. Leibhart writes, “I eventually became the Base Camp Chaplain Manager for Camp Wolf. All personnel entering or leaving the theater of operations (including Iraq) passed through my camp. I gave reunion briefs to soldiers going home, so they could be prepared for what they were going to experience. I gave suicide prevention briefs, and post-traumatic stress disorder briefs. All in all there really was never any down time. The wounded were flown in from Iraq on the evening before being Medevac’d to Germany and on to the States, and I or one of the chaplains that worked with me would visit with them before they were flown out. Now that my fractured hip has healed perfectly, I am deployable again and I am willing to go back. All the endless hours of ministry there have taught me that no matter what the cause, I am there for one thing—the troops and their spiritual care.”

1982
The Rev. Antoinette (“Tony”) Wike is successfully combining two vocations, those of attorney and priest. Ms. Wike works as a lawyer with the Public Staff of the North Carolina Utilities Commission, representing the public in cases before the commission. She also has been serving as priest associate at St. Paul’s, Cary, North Carolina, for 20 years.

1987
The Rev. Ambrose Gumbs was elected Bishop of the Virgin Islands in January 2005. He had been rector of St. Andrew’s in St. Thomas, VI, since 1990.

1989
The Rev. Dr. Leon P. Spencer began duties as Dean of the School of Ministry of the Diocese of North Carolina on July 1, 2004. His office is adjacent to the campus of St. Andrew’s Church, Greensboro. Dr. Spencer most recently served as executive director of the Washington Office on Africa, an ecumenical advocacy organization that seeks to support a just and faithful U. S. policy toward Africa. He also was liaison director for the African Network of Institutions of Theological Education Preparing Anglicans for Ministry (ANITEPAM).

The Rev. Robert Alves has left All Saints Church, Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina, where he had been since 1993, to become rector of St. Barnabas, Greenwich, Connecticut.

1990
The Rev. Gale Cooper is now the assistant to the rector at St. John’s Church, Charlotte, North Carolina.

The Rev. Art Hancock and his wife Katie recently traveled to Liberia to pick up their newly adopted twin boys, Moses and Gabriel. The boys were two years old on June 3, 2004. Liberia has been devastated by years of war, and there are thousands of children who have no families and no one to take care of them. Mr. Hancock owns and operates Cross Woods Adventure Camp near Mason, Wisconsin. The camp is the site of the weeklong summer Camp Horstick for the Diocese of Eau Claire.

1991
The Rev. Frank Russ has left St. Francis, Goldsboro, North Carolina, where he had been the rector since 1996, to become the rector of the Church of St. Matthew & St. Timothy, Manhattan.

The Rev. Henrietta Haigh Grossoehme was elected and installed as Chaplain of Bethany School, Glendale, Ohio, by the Sisters of the Transfiguration in October. She had been rector of St. Peter’s Church in Akron since 1996, The Rev. Edward S. Gleason, VTS ’60, preached at the installation service. Ms. Grossoehme’s husband, the Rev. Daniel Grossoehme, VTS ’92, is staff chaplain at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Center.

1993
The Rev. C. K. Robertson, Ph.D., has been appointed Canon to the Ordinary/Canon for Congregational Development & Stewardship for the Diocese of Arizona. Canon Robertson has been serving as rector of St.
Benjamin Speare-Hardy, ’90, Henrietta Haigh Grossoehme, ’91, and John Thomas, ’93, talk at the conference of the National Association of Episcopal Schools in November 2004. During the conference the Seminary announced its new doctoral degree, the Doctor of Ministry in Educational Leadership, which is being offered in collaboration with NAES.

Stephen’s, Milledgeville, Georgia, since his return to the U.S. from England in 1999. He also has recently published Religion and Alcohol: Sobering Thoughts, the second in a three-part series on religion and popular culture in America.

1998
The Rev. Nancy Lee Jose has been called as rector of St. Thomas’ Church in Washington, D.C. She had been the associate rector at St. Paul’s, Norfolk, Virginia, since 2001.

1999
The Rev. Jennie Lou Reid began a new ministry as associate at St. Thomas’ in Coral Gables, Florida, in August, after 19 months at Trinity Cathedral in Miami.

2000
The Rev. Joshua Varner is assistant to the rector at Holy Trinity, Greensboro, North Carolina, after three years as assistant at St. Luke’s, Durham.

The Rev. Lance Horne, vicar of St. George’s in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, has accepted a call to become rector of St. Paul’s, Quincy, Florida. Mr. Horne’s spiritual home has been in the Diocese of Hawaii since 1994. He is a retired Naval officer.

2001
The Rev. William Allport, assistant rector at St. Thomas’ Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, has been called as rector of St. Peter’s, Honolulu.

Carrie Morrison Allport, MTS ’02, had been serving as Missioner for Children and Youth in the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania. The Allports, including baby daughter Abigail, moved to Hawaii in September.

The Rev. Brian Winter has moved to Trinity-on-the-Hill, Los Alamos, New Mexico, where he is associate rector for youth and family ministries. He had been vicar at St. Michael’s, Brigham City, Utah, and Cheri Winter, MTS ’02, had been diocesan resource center specialist. New Mexico is home to both the Winters.

The Rev. Philip Dinwiddie has been called as rector of St. James, Grosse Ile, Michigan, after serving as assistant at All Saints’, East Lansing, for two years.

2003
The Rev. Chantal Morales Dennis is now the assistant rector at St. Mary’s, High Point, North Carolina. She had been assisting at St. Francis, Greensboro.

2004
The Rev. David Frazelle is now associate rector at the Chapel of the Cross, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.
The Rev. Evan Kachiwanda has been appointed Provincial Secretary of the Province of Central Africa, which includes Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia, and Botswana. His appointment was effective on December 1.

The Rev. Ginny Bain Inman is assistant to the rector at St. Paul’s Church in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

The Rev. Simon Be Bin Htu finished his course work for the Doctor of Ministry degree in the summer of 2004 and is back home in Myanmar, where he is lecturing at Holy Cross Theological College in Yangon. He also serves as parish priest at Holy Cross Church and is translating *Hymns Ancient and Modern* into his native language. Mr. Htu will receive his diploma in 2005.

In November 2004 the Seminary and the Diocese of Los Angeles held a dinner at the California Club for VTS graduates and friends in the area. Above: the Rt. Rev. Sergio Carranza, Class of 1967, with VTS friends Louis Abrigo and Urla Price. Other recent Seminary visits have been to Kanuga, Richmond, Virginia, Wilmington, North Carolina, and Houston.

Attending the Los Angeles event are Jonelle Bruno, Tom King, Giovan King, and Rachel Nyback, VTS 2003. Photographs courtesy of the Diocese of Los Angeles.
News of the Faculty

The Rev. Dr. Richard Jones, Professor of Mission and World Religions, spent part of his fall 2004 sabbatical visiting seminaries of the Episcopal Church of the Sudan. In February at St. Paul’s, Alexandria, Virginia, he helped launch a nationwide network of parishes and dioceses with links to the Sudan, called American Friends of the Episcopal Church of the Sudan (AFRECS). In January Dr. Jones delivered a talk at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, Berkeley, California, on “Sharing the Word: Listening to African Anglicans.”

On July 23, 2004, the Seminary community rejoiced over the safe arrival of Claire Danielle Hensley, born to theology professor Dr. Jeffrey Hensley and his wife, Danielle. The Hensley family also includes Noah, age 4.

In October Dr. Tim Sedgwick, the Clinton S. Quin Professor of Christian Ethics, was elected to serve three years as vice-president of The Anglican Theological Review. In November he and the Rev. Julian Bull, headmaster of Campbell Hall in North Hollywood and a final year student at VTS, presented “The Case for Casuistry: Organizing an Ethics Course Around Case Studies” at the biennial meeting of the National Association of Episcopal Schools in Washington, DC.

The Rev. Dr. John Yieh, assistant professor of New Testament, was invited to read a paper entitled, “The Sermon on the Mount: A History of Effects Approach,” in the First International Congress of Ethnic Chinese Biblical Scholarship in May 2004. The conference was held at Chung Chi College, the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Dr. Yieh’s new book, One Teacher: Jesus’ Teaching Role in Matthew’s Gospel Report, was published by Walter de Gruyter in Berlin and New York in July.

Dr. Amelia Gearey Dyer, Director of the Center for the Ministry of Teaching and the James Maxwell Professor of Christian Education and Pastoral Theology, led the clergy conference for the Diocese of Huron in October 2004. Dr. Gearey Dyer, who has accepted a new position as Associate Dean for Academic Management and Program Coordination, will continue to serve as Director of the CMT through the 2004-05 academic year.

Assistant church history professor Stephen Edmondson’s new book, Calvin’s Christology, was published in 2004 and has been described as the first significant volume to explore Calvin’s christology in several decades. Dr. Edmondson also is working with his parish church, St. Mark’s, Capitol Hill, on the Anacostia River Project, an effort that integrates outreach, environmental awareness, and Christian spirituality.

The Board of Trustees in November granted tenure to faculty members Dr. Carol Doran, Professor of Music and Liturgy and Seminary Organist, and the Rev. Dr. Kate Sonderegger, Professor of Theology.

“THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG IN THE LAND”

Dean Martha Horne is coordinating a conference at Kanuga in June that will look at how churches may be agents of ecological and spiritual health. That You May Live Long in the Land: Biblical Perspectives on Ecological and Spiritual Health, will feature Dr. Ellen Davis, former VTS Professor of Old Testament Language and Literature, and the Rev. Norman Wirzba, chair of the religion department at Georgetown College, Georgetown, Kentucky.

The conference will focus on the biblical recognition that the human creature is essentially related to the fertile soil on which our life depends: Adam is formed from adamah, soil (Gen. 2:7). Participants will explore how our relationship with basic elements of our physical environment—soil and water—reflects and affects our life with God, and will read biblical texts alongside the work of contemporary agrarian writers. They will consider the multiple ecological dimensions of our present cultural practices, and how churches may be effective in bringing about positive change.
BOOK REVIEWS

Basic References: A Review Article .................................................................................. Mitzi Jarrett Budde

Grant LeMarquand, An Issue of Relevance ........................................................................ Richard J. Jones

Elaine Pagels, Beyond Belief .............................................................................................. Joseph W. Trigg

Elisabeth Sifton, The Serenity Prayer ................................................................................ J. Barney Hawkins IV

Christopher L. Webber, Give Us Grace ........................................................................... Jeffrey Hensley

Wm. Sachs and Thomas Holland, Restoring the Ties that Bind
Jim Kitchens, The Postmodern Parish
Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce, Beyond the Ordinary .................................... Joseph Stewart-Sicking

A Review of Basic References

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The Anchor Bible Dictionary. 6 vols.
Edited by David Noel Freedman.
$390 (cloth).

Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible.
Edited by James D.G. Dunn.
Pp. 1649. $75 (cloth).

The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship.
Edited by Paul Bradshaw.
Pp. 498. $45 (cloth).

The Study of Liturgy.
Edited by Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold, and Paul Bradshaw.
Pp. 601. $45 (pb).

Love’s Redeeming Work: The Anglican Quest for Holiness.
Edited by Geoffrey Rowell, Kenneth Stevenson, and Rowan Williams.
Pp. 790. $55 (cloth), $29.95 (pb).

The Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling
Edited by Rodney J. Hunter.
Pp. 1376. $75 (cloth).

An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church.
Edited by Don S. Armentrout and Robert Boak Slocum.
Pp. 578. $36 (pb).

This book review is the first in a series that our Book Review Editor envisions for the next several issues of the Seminary Journal. The series will focus on reference resources for those in parish ministry. The first review will introduce several general, basic references, and specifically several dictionaries, that clergy or congregations might want to purchase.

One might be inclined to ask, “Why dictionaries?” Dictionaries provide an entryway into complex subjects and often provide links to the most authoritative works on a topic. Reference works can also be stimulating reading. In an 1839 letter to a friend, Elizabeth Barrett Browning opined, “At painful times, when composition is impossible and reading is not enough, grammars and dictionaries are excellent for distraction.” In his book Society and Solitude, Ralph Waldo Emerson called dictionaries “the raw material of possible poems and histories”—and, we might add, of sermons as well.
For this first review, the assumption is made that everyone already has a good study Bible and that our predominantly Episcopal readers have the Book of Common Prayer, the Hymnal 1982, Lesser Feasts and Fasts, and Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church, and so those essential texts are not included here. A future review will be devoted to biblical commentary series, and so commentary sets will not be covered in this review. Other reviews will consider references in specific subject areas, such as ethics, theology, pastoral care, and spirituality.

The best overall dictionary, both for parish leaders and for seminarians, would have to be the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church. This one-volume dictionary provides a wealth of information in succinct entries and covers the time span, geographic breadth, and theological complexity of Christianity. There are entries for key individuals in the history of the church: theologians, divines, bishops, deans, monks, popes, philosophers, poets, reformers, heretics, separatists, architects, etc.

GIFT OF RARE BOOKS FOR THE BISHOP PAYNE LIBRARY

musicians, monarchs, and mystics. Theological and liturgical terms are defined and explained. Although coverage of the Bible is intentionally light in this dictionary, as acknowledged in the “Preface,” each biblical book and every key codex has its own entry, as do important Bible translations and commentators.

Articles on countries provide a concise overview of the history and expression of Christianity in that place. Religious groups and movements are covered. Every article includes a bibliography of the most important works on that topic, thus providing a gateway for deeper research. This dictionary has useful guidance to impart to everyone: inquiring laypersons, practicing clergy, and teaching theologians.

A good Bible dictionary is an essential tool for all preachers and teachers in the church. The Anchor Bible Dictionary is a six-volume tool that seeks to provide comprehensive coverage of “all biblical subjects and topics” (from the “Introduction”). The “Lord’s Supper” article, for example, covers New Testaments texts from Paul, the Synoptics, John, Acts, Revelation, Hebrews, Jude and 2 Peter; texts outside the New Testament, like the Didache, Ignatius, and Justin; and Jewish and pagan influences. The dictionary covers biblical characters, concepts used in the Bible (such as “Appeal to Caesar”), geographic locations (four columns on “Mizpah”), archaeological sites and discoveries, and modern approaches to biblical scholarship (for example, “Computers and Biblical Studies”).

A parish clergyperson might wish to have a one-volume commentary within easy reach beside the Bible dictionary. The new Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible would be a good candidate for that slot on the bookshelf. This 1629-page work provides essays on each book of the Bible, including the apocryphal books, contributed by 67 different biblical scholars. This commentary does not try to address the texts verse-by-verse as more extensive commentaries do, but rather it deals with groups of verses as units, either by whole Psalm, by chapter, by parable, by event, by speech (Job), or even by act (treating Ruth as a drama). The articles vary in perspective by the scholars who authored them; however, in most of the articles, historical critical and form critical approaches are less evident, and literary and social approaches more so. Most of the essays also include suggestions for how the biblical book might be used in preaching and teaching from these texts. Each biblical book begins with an introductory overview of the book and ends with a bibliography of key resources on that book.

Clergy who lead worship every week may not immediately sense a need for a dictionary of liturgy. However, The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship should be tempting. Although the book is ecumenical in scope, the Anglican worship tradition receives excellent coverage with contributions by Anglican liturgical scholars such as Neil Alexander, Colin Buchanan, Martin Dudley, Ruth Meyers, Bryan Spinks, and Kenneth Stevenson. The dictionary’s denominational scope is very useful in articles such as “Marriage,” which covers early Christianity, Eastern Churches, Medieval and Roman Catholic, Anglican, and eight other denominational traditions, each section separately authored by a representative of that tradition. This kind of background material would be invaluable to a parish priest preparing to perform a wedding between people from differing traditions. The fourteen-column article on “Vestments” is extensive and interesting enough to teach a parish class from it—all that is lacking is pictures. Other articles would likewise lend themselves as tools for teaching, such as the articles on “Eucharistic Theologies,” “Music in Worship,” and “Sick, Liturgical Ministry to the.” For a deeper exploration of liturgics, one might also want to turn to The Study of Liturgy.

Love’s Redeeming Work: The Anglican Quest for Holiness will feed the soul when one feels the hunger for theological reflection and spiritual refreshment. This work is a rich anthology of mystical, poetic, and theological writings, selected from across the breadth of the tradition of the church. Part 1 covers the period 1530-1650; here is Lancelot Andrewes on “The Spirit of Peace” and John Donne on “Reading the Bible in Community.” Part 2, which covers the time period of 1650-1830, provides treasures for every week may not immediately sense a need for a dictionary of liturgy. However, The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship should be tempting. Although the book is ecumenical in scope, the Anglican worship tradition receives excellent coverage with contributions by Anglican liturgical scholars such as Neil Alexander, Colin Buchanan, Martin Dudley, Ruth Meyers, Bryan Spinks, and Kenneth Stevenson. The dictionary’s denominational scope is very useful in articles such as “Marriage,” which covers early Christianity, Eastern Churches, Medieval and Roman Catholic, Anglican, and eight other denominational traditions, each section separately authored by a representative of that tradition. This kind of background material would be invaluable to a parish priest preparing to perform a wedding between people from differing traditions. The fourteen-column article on “Vestments” is extensive and interesting enough to teach a parish class from it—all that is lacking is pictures. Other articles would likewise lend themselves as tools for teaching, such as the articles on “Eucharistic Theologies,” “Music in Worship,” and “Sick, Liturgical Ministry to the.” For a deeper exploration of liturgics, one might also want to turn to The Study of Liturgy.

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and Counseling has not been surpassed. The 1990 book version is still available, according to the Books in Print database. (The 1996 CD-ROM version is now out of print.) This encyclopedic dictionary seeks to provide pastoral practitioners with relevant and practical material for ministry. Articles such as “Hospitalization, Experience of,” “Hospice,” “Older Persons, Pastoral Care and Counseling of,” and “Prayer in Pastoral Care” would provide valuable resource material for ministry. Articles such as “Hospitalization, Experience of,” “Hospice,” “Older Persons, Pastoral Care and Counseling of,” and “Prayer in Pastoral Care” would provide valuable resource material for training laity to visit hospitalized and shut-in members. Practicing clergy might find helpful insight in articles such as “Pastor (Popular Stereotypes and Caricatures)” and “Marriage and Family Life, Pastor’s.” The dictionary focuses on ecumenical Christianity, distinguishing denominational differences where appropriate (“Anglican Pastoral Care,” “Lutheran Pastoral Care,” “Methodist Pastoral Care,” “Roman Catholic Pastoral Care”). Some interfaith perspectives are included as well, especially in terms of issues such as marriage, death, and general pastoral care. Some articles are dated: the Myer Briggs Type Indicator no longer has as much prominence in assessing seminarians as the “Theological Students, Evaluation and Empirical Studies of” article would indicate. Overall this dictionary is still a valuable tool for parish ministry and chaplaincy settings.

While the assignment was for six titles, the Bible often uses seven as the perfect number—thus, a brief plug for a seventh title: An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church. From “Aaronic Blessing” to “Zwingli, Huldreich,” this dictionary provides an Episcopal perspective on theology and praxis. A full review can be found in the August 2000 issue of the Seminary Journal.

These resources are intended to be appetizers. Feeding one’s mind and heart through reading and continuing education is vital for the mental and spiritual health of parish clergy and lay leaders. These resources are tools to help parish leaders stay current and are springboards from which to dive deeper. When you hunger to read more of Lancelot Andrewes or Charles Gore or Evelyn Underhill than Love’s Redeeming Work provides, contact the Bishop Payne Library at the seminary (paynelib@vts.edu). The library lends books via United Parcel Service to alumni/ae in the continental United States. Let us send you the next course in the life-long banquet of theological reading and reflection. “Take up and read!”—the call that Augustine once heard is still our vocation today.

Mitzi Jarrett Budde Librarian

Marlene Jacobs from the Diocese of Minnesota introduces her friend, the Rev. Trimble Gilbert, to the Missionary Society’s Forum Hour on Native American Ministry in September. Father Trimble is an Episcopal priest in Arctic Village, Alaska, and an Athabascan Tribal Chief. He was in Washington to take part in the opening ceremony for the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian. Father Trimble spoke to the Forum Hour about the native people of Alaska and the preservation of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.
By Grant LeMarquand.

If the Bible is the Church’s book, and the Church has put down roots in the cultures of five continents, then it is time for readers of any given culture or class or sex to expect to be startled by other Christians’ readings—readings that would never have occurred to them in the tranquility of their own study.

LeMarquand, a Montreal native who taught at St. Paul’s United Theological College in Kenya before coming to teach New Testament and mission at Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry in the USA, has discovered a hundred serious African Bible scholars worth hearing. Setting North Atlantic readings of the story of the woman with the flow of blood alongside the readings of African biblical scholars, LeMarquand finds predictable surprises. “North Atlantic exegesis before feminism did not read the story of the bleeding woman with much interest in the bleeding or the woman” (p.215). For feminist scholars, “her loss of bodily blood is a sign of her impaired life within the body of the community” (216).

Current African scholars turn out to be attentive to the woman, to the ancient and present-day meanings of blood for life and for purity, and to the frequent exclusion of women “from their families, from society and from holy things because they bleed” (216). While LeMarquand does not assign the final interpretive word to any one community or continent, he does note how African sensibilities can lead to an interpretation that male Christian leaders will lose spiritual potency if touched by a menstruating woman—as well as to an interpretation that Christian women may exercise

Several students play the drums for a special community Eucharist in September.
unrestricted leadership because Jesus, rather than being defiled by the woman’s touch, called her “daughter.”

Le Marquand suggests that the greatest contribution of African biblical scholarship to the present-day Church may be its forthrightness in declaring that we all read the Bible, and rightly so, with local life issues very present to our minds. Hence the title of his book. We North Atlantic Christians need not be surprised if African churches adduce biblical grounds for differing from us on certain issues. The Scriptures have been speaking to them in their setting.

Richard J. Jones
Professor of Mission and World Religions

Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas.
By Elaine Pagels.
Pp. 257. $13.00 (pb).

When I was eleven, the rector of my church showed me his yellowing sermon file. His favorite began as a paper at the Virginia Seminary: “Why I am not a Gnostic.” Gnostics had long been the inauthentic other against which genuine Christianity defined itself. If Elaine Pagels has her way, we may hear sermons—just as engrossing, no doubt—on “why I am a Gnostic.”

Pagels opens by telling how at a time of great personal need she, a distinguished scholar of Early Christianity alienated from the Evangelical religion of her childhood, found a worshiping community at the Episcopal Church of the Heavenly Rest in New York City. She presents her research into long despised and neglected varieties of early Christianity, represented in the Gospel of Thomas, as a resource for such communities.

Pagels has found a publishing opportunity in the gap between serious scholarship on early Christianity and the largely uninformed assumptions of most otherwise educated people, including most Christians. In her books on Satan and original sin she alerts people to scholarly conclusions that are now, for the most part, at least a hundred years old. In this and a previous book on Gnostic gospels, Pagels lets much the same people in on a more recent scholarly consensus, that early Christianity was irreducibly pluralistic. Furthermore, she holds that the recovery of the long neglected and despised Gnostic approach to Christianity can offer needed resources for Christians today. With such resources, communities like the Church of the Heavenly Rest can give up being defined by belief and be defined instead by promoting the self-realization of their members.

Using the Gospel of Thomas as the prime example, Beyond Belief presents the Gnostic approach to the Christian message. Pagels assures us that the Gospel of Thomas gives us access to Jesus’ teachings comparable to that offered by the four canonical gospels. Nonetheless, she provides no real arguments why a book, the existence of which cannot be attested before AD 200, should be taken so seriously. We must likewise take her word for it that the Gospel of Thomas is a book that we can understand and learn from today. Those who check out the translation appended to this...
It would be good if someone who has found a public eager for her
image to restore that image.

Christ came—and had to come—to
human sin has marred the image;
realization is not enough because
God. Rather, they believed that self-
image in themselves. She gives no
point, but only point, toward the
ultimate mystery of God.

Pagels stresses the importance
of the image of God to the Gnostics and
sees Gnosticism as a movement
leading people to a realization of that
image in themselves. She gives no
indication that the image of God was
just as vital to more mainstream
Christians such as Athanasius or
Gregory of Nyssa. They did not deny
or even belittle the importance of
humanity’s creation in the image of
God. Rather, they believed that self-
realization is not enough because
human sin has marred the image;
Christ came—and had to come—to
restore that image.

Pagels is an engaging writer
who has found a public eager for her
work. It would be good if someone
with comparable talent could provide
an equally engaging presentation of a
fuller range of early Christian
experience, including the tradition that
has lasted continuously until now.

Joseph W. Trigg
Adjunct Professor in Church History

The Serenity Prayer: Faith and Politics
in Times of Peace and War.
By Elisabeth Sifton.
$26.96 (cloth); $16.95 (pb).

God, give us grace
to accept with serenity
the things that cannot be changed,
courage to change the things
that should be changed,
and the wisdom to distinguish
the one from the other.

Elisabeth Sifton’s book is becoming
an important part of the long-running
conversation that surrounds this
famous prayer. Arguably, it is
America’s best-loved prayer, and
Sifton is attempting in her book to
rescue the prayer from
misinterpretation and from the many
ways it has been trivialized.

I was drawn to the book
because in the house of my childhood
on the kitchen wall there was a faded
lithograph of the famous prayer.
Others have also wanted the prayer
front and center of daily living. If the
twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous
are its creed, then the Serenity Prayer is
the organization’s daily collect. Since
World II, the prayer has been mass
produced—needle-pointed, cross-
stitched, painted, printed for framing,
and written on small cards and carried
in wallets as a daily reminder—as
people search for serenity in a less
than serene world. Indeed, thousands
of people begin and end the day with
the prayer.

It has long been thought that
Reinhold Niebuhr was the author of the
Serenity Prayer. Richard W. Fox’s
Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography (1985)
provides a full account of the prayer.
Reading The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr:
Selected Essays and Addresses by Robert
McAfee Brown, one is given the
theological and historical frames by
which to conclude that the famous
prayer is certainly in harmony with the
ways Niebuhr applied the Christian
faith to life. There are, however,
dissenting voices about the prayer’s
authorship. In its organizational
history, Alcoholics Anonymous claims
that in early 1942 the prayer appeared
first without attribution in a routine
New York Herald Tribune obituary.
Enter Elisabeth Sifton. In The Serenity
Prayer she presents a daughter’s case
that her father was the original author
of the prayer. This widely respected
editor drives together her many
remembrances of her famous father to
conclude that he crafted the famous
prayer. Hers is a personal testament to
the father who wrote the prayer, and
perhaps first said the prayer, Reinhold
Niebuhr’s own comments about the
prayer are not that convincing.
Niebuhr said once to an interviewer:
“Of course, it may have been spooking
around for years, even centuries, but I
don’t think so. I honestly do believe
that I wrote it myself.”

Sifton’s book begins with
recollections and images of the
Niebuhr family in wartime at their
summer place in Heath,
Massachusetts, a farming village
almost from another century. It was
1943, and “Pa,” as his daughter calls
her father, wrote the prayer as part of a
Endowment Fund for Continuing Education
Established by the Class of 1963

THE ENDOWMENT FUND FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION has been established by the class of 1963 to fund continuing education programs at Virginia Theological Seminary, administered by the Center for Lifetime Theological Education. These funds will be used for individual scholarships and other financial assistance to support those programs which provide continuing education for ordained clergy of any denomination in congregations with members of 200 or less, with a priority in the use of funds for graduates of Virginia Seminary and clergy of the Episcopal Church.

The Class of 1963, as an act of thanksgiving for the excellent education received from Virginia Theological Seminary, and in recognition of the need for continuing education to take place after graduation, wishes to leave a legacy in its name for ordained clergy to receive financial support to continue their education and to maintain their professional qualifications. Contributions from other classes and individuals are encouraged.

To celebrate 25 years of a happy and joy-filled marriage, Joan and Doug Hiza have given a sum of $25,000 to establish this fund. In addition, they will match up to $50,000 of contributions from graduates of Virginia Seminary.
sermon he delivered to the village congregation. It is safe to say that, because of the year, the sermon was influenced by Gandhi and was a muscular response to the fascist horror Hitler was visiting on Europe and the world, even the hamlet of Heath worlds away. This summer place was a respite from the family’s New York apartment and Niebuhr’s teaching responsibilities at Union Seminary. In both households Sifton names with ease the steady stream of family, friends and luminaries: W.H. Auden, whom she calls Wystan, Episcopal bishop and theologian Angus Dun, William Scarlett, Marion and Felix Frankfurter, “Aunt Ethel” and many others. It seems that the Heath house was the summer post for much of the Union Seminary faculty.

In the book we meet theological and political celebrities of the twentieth century. There’s the young Paul Tillich; a German Lutheran, later Christian martyr, named Dietrich Bonhoeffer (“My mother never thought Bonhoeffer was much of a theologian . . .”); and T.S. Eliot, Harry Emerson Fosdick, Archbishop William Temple, and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. Sifton recounts several “bracing” encounters with Karl Barth who in 1956 referred to Niebuhr as a sort of “hardboiled American business-man.”

At the heart of the book are Sifton’s hard questions about the source of prayer, the nature of prayer, and relationship of prayer and worship, indeed the “right way” to worship. Her musings are set in an appreciation of what she calls the “succulent” pages of the Book of Common Prayer. She allows that it is hard to imagine “that one could improve on the BCP’s stupendous formulations.” Yet, her “Evangelical father” may have found the model for his prayers less from the Book of Common Prayer and more from the Psalms. Even then, Niebuhr, as we meet him through the daughter, was “distrustful” of “formulas” for prayer. Niebuhr was more concerned about the “soul” being open “to receive the inspiration that alone could bring forth true prayer.” Sifton says “Pa” was not inclined to prayers from “previous generations, no matter how great their ecclesiastical authority or gifted their prose style.”

So, it is no wonder that Sifton believes that her father would write and could say such a “new” prayer, a prayer not from another time but from his time, a time of war. In the post-war years, Sifton rightly notes that students flocked to Union Seminary to sit at her famous father’s feet. She says he remembered those years, long since the summers at Heath and the tempo of a world at war, as some of the best. He taught the “very best students he ever had” for “they had not only new but old concerns, and they weren’t sure they knew how to accept with serenity what cannot be changed or courageously to make necessary changes.”

As Sifton concludes her memoir, her remembrances also reveal how very much this daughter is her father’s child. In her critique of the post-war era, Sifton makes plain the gulf between her “Pa” and many of the ministers in American Christianity. She is ashamed of their “social conformism.” As if her father were writing, Sifton laments the “feel-good mega-preachers like Norman Vincent Peale or Billy Graham,” and all those who “rarely lifted a finger to help a social cause… but checked up on their pension funds and ignored their parishioners’ lives.”

By the 1960’s the famous prayer had become, it seems, almost an encumbrance for Reinhold Niebuhr. Yet, he never separated himself from the prayer that was first published in 1944. Sifton remains steadfast in claiming, once and for all, that her father wrote the prayer that was never copyrighted. While she wants her father remembered as the author of the prayer, she clearly wants him to be remembered for so much more.

In the end, Elisabeth Sifton makes the famous prayer a clear window into the life and times of Reinhold Niebuhr. Where others have written about Reinhold Niebuhr from a theological or historical perspective, Sifton edits a life and writes a personal testament that keeps alive both the prayer and its author. Elisabeth Sifton has written a book no one else could write about a giant of a man who has taught us much about Christian faith as action in the world in times like his and in times like ours, in all times of peace and war.

J. Barney Hawkins IV
Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program
Professor of Parish Ministry

Give Us Grace: An Anthology of Anglican Prayers.
Compiled by Christopher L. Webber.
Pp. xxi + 521. $29.95 (cloth).

“Prayer, the Church’s banquet, Angels’ age,/God’s breath in man returning to his birth/The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,…” so begins George Herbert’s famous poem “Prayer.” Herbert certainly understood that the banquet of Anglicanism, a paraphrase of its theology, and the
Virginia Seminary was well-represented at the institution of the Rev. James Herbert Cooper, ’70, as the rector of Trinity Church-St. Paul’s Chapel, Wall Street, in September. Left to right: the Seminary’s Vice President for Institutional Advancement, Ed Hall; the Rt. Rev. Herbert A. Donovan, Jr. ’57, vicar of Trinity Church; the Rev. Milton C. Williams, Jr. ’96, associate at Trinity Church; and Mr. Cooper. Mr. Williams was the cantor at the service.

Christopher Webber’s anthology, *Give Us Grace*, beautifully invites us to feast at this banquet, to pray with Anglicans both past and present, from England and around the world. In this text Webber, an Episcopal priest in Connecticut and author of such popular texts as *Welcome to Sunday*, *Welcome to the Episcopal Church*, and *Love Came Down: Anglican Readings for Advent and Christmas*, has compiled over 1000 prayers reflecting the Anglican tradition in all of its diversity and richness. It is both a useful reference tool and devotional resource and reflects the eclectic nature of the Anglican tradition—combining Catholic and Protestant sensibilities, Celtic and Roman influences,
sacramental piety with evangelical fervor. Moreover, the collects, litanies, and the homiletical, scriptural, and devotional prayers that Webber has collected represent the wide range of theological concerns that have especially interested Anglicans—the incarnation, sin and redemption, grace and the sacraments, the church, evangelism, personal morality, social justice, and civic responsibility.

Webber arranges his collections of prayers chronologically beginning with Thomas Cranmer, whose “genius has left its stamp on all subsequent liturgical prayer in English” (p. 3), and moving to contemporary writers such as Madeleine L’Engle, John Stott, Malcolm Boyd, Desmond Tutu, David Adam, and Frank Griswold. Moreover, he introduces each author with short, accessible biographies that not only provide a context for the author’s prayers but also link the writers together as an interesting way of retelling the history of Anglicanism.

While many of the familiar and most influential thinkers of the tradition are represented (e.g., Lancelot Andrewes, John Donne, Jeremy Taylor, John Keble, Edward Pusey, William Temple, and Austin Farrer), Webber also includes some lesser known authors (e.g., Thomas Becon, Susanna Hopton, Nathaniel Spinckes, Thomas Wilson, Elizabeth Rowe, Hannah More, Alexander Viets Griswold, Charles Brent, and Miles Yates) who were, however, no less influential in developing Anglican devotional piety and public worship. Important political figures like Elizabeth I, Charles I, Lord Nelson, and William Wilberforce and essayists/novelists like Jonathan Swift, Samuel Johnson, Jane Austen, Christina Rossetti, Elizabeth Goudge, and Alan Paton are also well represented. Of special interests to readers of this *Journal* are the authors that have some connection with the history of VTS—William Meade, Phillips Brooks, Henry Potter, Walter Hullihen, and Walter Russell Bowie.

Readers perhaps will not find every prayer in Webber’s anthology edifying, but this is not a liability to the collection but rather one of its strongest assets. It demonstrates the great tensions within the history of Anglicanism’s piety, theology, and even political history. For example, George III’s prayer “Against the King’s Unhappy Deluded Subjects in America Now in Rebellion Against the Crown” stands in direct political tension with the various General Thanksgiving prayers celebrating American Independence. The former supports the establishment of the church and the divine right of kings while the latter give thanks for the separation of church and state and democratic forms of government. These tensions are arguably most evident in the prayers surrounding the American Civil War. “A Prayer for the Confederacy,” published by *The Southern Churchman* during the war, and Walter Hullihen’s prayer at the dedication of the statue of General J. E. B. Stuart on Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia, stand alongside Absalom Jones’ “Thanksgiving Prayer for the Abolition of the Slave Trade” and Bishop Horatio Potter’s prayers to commemorate the day of National Thanksgiving decreed by Abraham Lincoln after the Union’s victory at the Battle of Gettysburg, Anglicans found themselves praying to the same God and yet on opposite sides of violent conflicts.

Webber concludes his anthology with an impressive collection of contemporary prayers from around the world, and especially from non-English speaking countries. These prayers come from five continents, and many were translated especially for this collection. Some of these prayers come from current versions of indigenous Prayer Books (e.g., Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, Australia, Canada, and Nigeria) that reflect traditional collect and litany forms, while others represent regionally used prayers to commemorate special festivals or practices (e.g., a prayer from the Chinese Book of Common Prayer to be said at the Duan Wu or Dragon Boat Festival) or address current circumstances or crises within the church (e.g., the Kenyan prayers for those infected with HIV / AIDS).

*Give Us Grace* functions more than just another collection of prayers, even prayers unique to Anglicanism. It provides a window into the pilgrimage, to return to Herbert’s metaphors, of a communion of faith and piety; it captures beautifully the heart and soul of the tradition. The banquet is truly rich, plentiful, and varied in tastes and sensibilities. The tensions around the table are evident and long-standing, but the banquet continues as the church responds to God in thanksgiving, petition, lamentation, and praise.

Jeffrey Hensley
Assistant Professor of Theology

(Footnotes)
1 Webber mistakenly states that Brooks was “a graduate of Episcopal Divinity School” (p. 315). In fact, Brooks graduated from VTS in 1859, and EDS, or more accurately Episcopal Theological Seminary as it was known prior to its merger with Philadelphia Divinity School in 1974, was not founded until 1867.
Narrative is powerful. People believe the stories they are told, and those stories inevitably structure their realities. Mainline Protestantism certainly knows the truth of this axiom. The torrent of stories touting the mainline’s decline has raised the anxiety level of many clergy and lay people and led them to question the viability of their tradition. But what if there were other stories? Stories about renewal, not decline; creativity, not...
stagnation; consensus, not conflict. These stories would be worth hearing and passing on. And by telling stories of congregational strength and creativity, these three studies provide examples of how to begin this conversation.

In Restoring the Ties that Bind, Sachs and Holland seek to challenge the belief—reinforced in countless books on family systems theory—that diagnosing conflict is essential in understanding congregational life. Instead, they focus on health, noting that “in the final analysis, the form that conflict most often takes in the Episcopal Church seems more energizing than anxious, more collegial than adversarial, more hopeful than despairing” (p.114). The authors base this conclusion on the data from the Zacchaeus Project, a national study of Episcopal congregations concluded in 1999. Zacchaeus stands as one of the first major studies of congregations to make use of the narrative and appreciative inquiry methods suggested in James Hopewell’s landmark book Congregation; in Restoring the Ties that Bind, one can see the many fruits of this approach.

While the authors note that the traditional ties that once bound Episcopalians—such as denominational identity, church parties, or regional identities—no longer function in most congregations, new ties are taking shape from the grassroots up. With an influx of spiritual seekers, the basis of community has changed from an assumed and inherited denominational identity to an emphasis on intentionally building local communities in which people can share the spiritual journey. The result of these changes is a church that is vital at the local level, often sustained by parachurch networks, in which the Eucharist is central, diversity is emphasized, lay leadership is strong, and women’s ordination is affirmed. Sachs and Holland see these changes as hopeful signs of a spiritual renewal of the church from the ground up.

In light of these new congregational realities, the authors conclude from the data that conflict is proving more creative than destructive and that the reasons for conflict are better understood as disconnects between denominational structures and local realities than rooted entirely in a liberal-conservative culture war. Thus, they suggest that leaders in the church need to change to address these new patterns of churchgoing in order to strengthen the new ties that bind.

Restoring the Ties that Bind was written before General Convention of 2003, and it may seem that ensuing events contradict its rather hopeful analysis. However, the shape of reactions to the consecration of Gene Robinson fit Sachs and Holland’s model. Despite a fragmentation within the denomination, the Episcopal Church remains quite vital at the congregational level. Many congregations still see themselves as strong places where people of diverse views can come together to share the spiritual journey (witness the success of the Going Forward Together conferences), and those congregations most polarized by the denomination’s decision have banded together through parachurch organizations.

This de facto congregationalism suggests some important theological questions for this research. Does congregationalism fit with an Anglican understanding of ecclesiology? Moreover, are all congregational adaptations equally valid? Since the new ties that bind have arisen from the spiritual seeker culture, shouldn’t the church be aware of the strengths and limitations of that culture? And if Episcopalians are finding resources in looking back to the spiritual traditions of the church, how do they discern which uses of tradition are authentic and which are inauthentic? As Restoring helps church leaders appreciate the strengths emerging in their congregations, they would be advised to give these issues some critical thought.

Restoring the Ties that Bind is an excellent example of appreciative inquiry and the strengths of this approach to congregational study. Church leaders, both clergy and lay, would do well to read it, recognize the strengths of their own churches, and pass the story on to others.

In an approach that reflects the best of the Alban Institute, The Postmodern Parish joins explicitly theological reflections with practical case examples. Jim Kitchens provides the examples from his ministry as a Presbyterian pastor in terms of how to focus on the mission of the church in an era where old assumptions about Christian identity and practice no longer hold. His stated purpose is to provide a resource written from a mainline perspective on how congregations can change their understanding of church in a postmodern, post-Christian, and post-denominational context.

Through discussions of worship, Christian formation, mission, and leadership, Kitchens provides a strong theological rationale for practicing what many churches are already beginning to explore. His reflections are rooted in a robust postliberal theology that sees each of these areas as an opportunity for Christianity to move beyond the therapeutic and positivistic emphases of modernity and proclaim the Gospel rather than accommodate it to contemporary culture. In each area,
Kitchens adopts an ecumenical stance that adapts practices from the best of mainline and evangelical churches (though it might be helpful if he were to distinguish post-evangelicals such as Brian McLaren from old-line evangelicals who are themselves trapped in modernity), and he enfleshes these practices through concrete stories about his congregation.

While Kitchens’ discussion could benefit from more attention to how these new practices are contiguous with the longer traditions of the church (e.g., how does experiential, Eucharistic-focused liturgy flow from a Reformed understanding of worship?), his examples tend to show that the practices of the postmodern parish are rooted firmly in the practices of the historic church. On the whole, The Postmodern Parish is a strong and concise introduction to the practical implications of postliberal theology which provides concrete examples of how to apply its insights. Moreover, Kitchens has done readers a service by linking the postliberal theology of writers such as William Willimon, Anthony Robinson, and Martin Copenhaven with Loren Mead’s reflections on issues of mission and leadership in The Once and Future Church (Alban Institute, 1991). Where many pastors have found themselves looking to post-evangelical writers for resources, they will find in Kitchens’ book a good starting point for engaging emerging cultural realities in a way that is faithful to their heritage.

Beyond the Ordinary is Woolever and Bruce’s second offering of results from the U.S. Congregational Life Survey, an ambitious survey research study in which some 300,000 worshippers in over 2,000 congregations participated in 2001. While the project’s first book, A Field Guide to U.S. Congregations (Westminster Press),...

The design of the research and the analysis focus on congregational strengths. Woolever and Bruce operate from an assumption that all congregations have strengths, and they hope that their research both reveals new ways of seeing congregational strengths and sparks congregations to have discussions about how to build on their strengths. While some church leaders emphasize “trump cards” which they believe are the key to success (e.g., congregational size, theology, structure, process, etc.), Woolever and Bruce wisely remind their readers that congregational strengths are multidimensional—there are no silver bullets.

To explore congregational strengths, Woolever and Bruce created a functional definition of the congregation that could cross theological traditions, and from this definition they formulated questions which would assess tasks they believe congregations should do well. These questions coalesced into ten strengths: spirituality and faith development, meaningful worship services, participation in congregational activities, a sense of belonging to the congregation, caring for children and youth in the congregation, community involvement, sharing faith with others, welcoming new people, empowering congregational leadership, and a vision for the congregation’s future. Each chapter of the book explores how a given strength was measured, its link with demographic categories (denominational family, congregational size, and average age in the congregation), and myths that are often associated with it.

The book is cleverly designed and does an outstanding job of presenting complex statistical analyses through straightforward prose and diagrams. In fact, the findings are presented so clearly that any mainline Protestant (or Roman Catholic) reader of the book is likely to come away with one question: “Why did conservative and historically black churches come across so much stronger?” For nine of the ten strengths measured, conservative Protestant and historically black congregations scored significantly higher than mainline and Roman Catholic congregations (the only exception being community involvement). Since this finding is likely to cause concern for many readers, it would have been desirable for the authors to speculate on it: Was it expected? What could limit its validity? What corroborates it? How did the cultures of the denominational families affect response patterns?

It would have been helpful for Woolever and Bruce to have addressed such questions. However, it is also worth noting that no single study, not even one as large as this, can answer every question one might have about its subject. In fact, it is the questions raised by this study about the nature of mainline and Catholic vitality that suggests the need and focus of further studies.

*Beyond the Ordinary* is a book worth studying, and the authors provide a good place to start in suggesting that congregations use their findings to begin a discussion about their own strengths: those strengths which they hadn’t noticed before and those strengths they would like to increase. The project’s website, www.uscongregations.org, also provides a leader’s guide for use in congregations. If congregations accept their invitation to focus on their strengths, the project will have done an important service to churchgoers across the country.

Discussing congregational life from the perspective of its strengths is not always easy, but from a theological point of view, it is crucial. As Christians, we have positive stories to tell: stories of strength, creativity, holiness, and God’s grace. These studies suggest the beginning of the sharing of such stories.

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**Explanation**

For many years, VTS publications have used the designation “alumni” to refer to our graduates, wanting to acknowledge both the women and the men who have attended VTS. Recently, several people have observed that this usage is awkward and cumbersome, and have suggested that we follow the example of many universities by using “alumni” to refer to all graduates. (In Latin “alumni” is not only the nominative, plural, masculine form of “alumnus,” but is also the collective plural, encompassing both male and female.)

From now on, seminary publications will use “alumni” when referring collectively to our male and female graduates. This is not meant to ignore, disparage, or marginalize our women students and graduates! Articles, photographs, or other features that address women graduates only will continue to use “alumnae” to describe those groups.
At left, junior Meredith Carter “baptizes” a doll in liturgics practicum. Fellow students Erika Dettra and Joe Hensley and liturgics adjunct Geoffrey Price observe. Above, Seminary friend and former board member Bettie Lacy visits the campus.

Above, Junior Joe Hensley finds the most efficient way to get around campus is the unicycle. At right, the Doctor of Ministry candidates pose with professors and staff in front of Sparrow Hall during their residency in January.
Archivist Julia Randle nearly disappears among the 70 cartons that made up the most recent contribution to the Bishop Payne Library’s African American Episcopal Historical Collection.

Junior John Daniels, foreground, and middler Matthew Cowden helped raise money in the Seminary’s annual Alumni and Alumnae Phonathon.

Dabney Carr, VTS ’60, former Director of Development, and staff member Carol Dawson talk at the farewell reception for Donna Kennedy in December. In the background is Food Service Director Benjamin Judd.
Several princesses, Scooby Doo, a Cat Person, and Dorothy of Oz leave the Butterfly House at Halloween and visit the rest of the campus.