Living with God

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The obvious vocation of a theological seminary is the preparation of persons to do ministry: preach, teach, administer the sacraments and other rites, train the laity, and serve the larger church. The more subtle, maybe even more foundational vocation of the seminary, is to prepare the persons who do ministry to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18) and to capacitate them continually to make a fearless personal moral inventory and to practice those habits of life conducive to personal and public virtue.

My thesis is that we prepare for life in the course of life. The period of seminary education does not put the life of the seminarian on hold, restraining whatever it is, either of ease or adversity, that might intrude itself into the seminarian's life. Experience provides the lived material to work with, provided one is willing to experience the experience that memory makes available.[1] Kierkegaard called this the task of becoming a "subjective thinker"[2] which requires "the grave strenuosity of faith."[3] The threat and promise of this entire enterprise is to have the stamina, steadfastness, and will to experience.

Living *for* God is the more conventional way of describing the Christian life. Such discipleship calls for discernment, sacrifice, zeal, commitment, conviction, and a devotional life supportive of these demands. Living *with* God is a concomitant factor of discipleship. Persistence,

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1 C. John Weborg, "Spiritual Formation in Life for Life in the Interlude Called a Theological Education," *Covenant Quarterly, LVIX* (November 2001): 3.

2 Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson, completed and with Introduction and Notes by Walter Lowrie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1941), 73, 84, 267–270.

3 Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 188.

perseverance, protest, gratitude, a capacity for disillusionment as well as devotion, and at times a dogged game of hide and seek all make living with God a venture of faith continuing to act in love. As the Christian serves in faith, acting in love, he/she waits in hope for God to vindicate God's promise of presence, fruit, and covenant loyalty. The structure of the theology presented here, both as prima and secunda, is theocentric rather than Christocentric. In the process of living with God while at the same time living for God, faith, hope, and love are kept alive as the Holy Spirit, by means of word and sacrament, attests that "the renewal of creation has been wrought by the self-same Word who made it in the beginning."[4]

The Problem

Barry and Connolly say, "Resistance is a critical element in the development of every interpersonal relationship."[5] Resistance inhabits the space between the perceived need for change and the risk required to address it. Persons know the need long before it is brought into speech, adding to the accumulating tension contributing to its repression. No less than in significant human relations, the same agony often accompanies the negotiation of a relationship with God.

According to Barry and Connolly the accumulated literature of spiritual direction specifies five crucial areas where resistance can assert itself in uninvited ways. Variations on these five themes are ubiquitous:

1. Issues relating to the image of God with which each directee has lived. This can be related to experiences of power, gender, maturation levels, laxity, scrupulosity, etc.

2. Fear of losing one's relationship with God, including being overcome by the immensity of God, especially if one cannot pray in mature ways, expressing genuine feelings, memories, grievances, etc. Directees can be taught that there is no "right" way to pray, a kind of hidden code that needs to be found in order to legitimate one's prayers. I find the staple antidote to this fear is to "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" the prayers in Scripture (Proper 28, *Book of Common Prayer*).

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4 Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* (London: D. Nutt, 1891), 2.

5 William A. Berry and William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (New York: Seabury, 1982), 81.

3. In the maturation of relationships, differences between oneself and the other, including God, may intensify. Expectations get undermined or even derailed in the process of allowing others to be other than one's image of them. In turn the painful process of letting one's self be other than one's projection of one's ideal self is set in motion. Here the capacity for receptivity to grace as the ground of freedom toward God, self, and others is the crucial factor. The God who is other than one's image of God can be lived with in the process of mature differentiation, and the self who is other than one's ideal self can be lived with by grace.

4. There is realistic fear of texts calling for a demanding discipleship. Some examples might be: "Be angry and sin not," "sell what you have, give to the poor, and follow me," "in everything give thanks," or "pray without ceasing."

5. The presence of secret sins.[6]

It is striking that three of the five categories relate directly to the God issue. If the issues in the first three categories are not dealt with appropriately, the last two will fall victim to the first three. For example, if one's images of God are drawn from the field of jurisprudence or from authoritarian models only, one might not have the confidence required to pursue the risky demands of some of the discipleship texts. The risk of displeasing God is too great and the risk of failure in one's own eyes is too immediate. The decisive issues in formation and direction are theocentric in origin and outcome.

With the permission of a former student of mine, I am presenting a "case" early in the paper to demonstrate the inherent theocentric issues in trying to come to terms with the demands of the Christian life.[7] The "case" should make it painfully apparent how early in life these formational issues are engaged. This account concerns missionary kids (MKs) and their need for coping capacities dealing with long separations from families, both immediate and extended. The event in question is leaving home (the place of parental missionary service) to attend a boarding school where other MKs are educated. The single event of leaving home

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6 Barry and Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, 82–91.

7 James Gould, "Bringing Spiritual and Emotional Healing to Adult Missionary Children Through Rituals of Lament and Assurance," paper submitted in Theology of Caring and Health, North Park Theological Seminary, July 2001.

involves four losses: relationships (parents and friends), material (familiar objects and surroundings), control (familiar routines, interactional systems), and role (a sense of one's place in a social network).

James Gould enlists the help of Ruth E. Van Reken, who underwent the same experience he did, to verbalize the process: protest (parents said the plane ride would be fun; it was tears all the way); despair (I quit crying at bedtime; it doesn't do any good); the teachers think I'm well adjusted (they don't know that I've given up); and detachment (withdrawal of investment in parental relationships; it's as if I have to count you as dead). As can be imagined, the thought of reunion with parents is not very comforting.

Spiritual formation issues enter the picture when missionary circles stress a "victory only" spirituality,[8] masking grief and anger. Painful feelings are a sign of spiritual weakness and worst of all, people are expected to spiritualize their experiences rather than to express true feelings. It is not hard to conceptualize the toll this takes or the future occasions when this will erupt in anger and opposition to the church and to the faith that landed the family in a place where the faith failed them (as the perception goes).

Van Reken, according to Gould, argues that these losses are tied directly to God since God is the one who calls to missionary service and is the one whom they serve. Pain issues and faith issues coalesce. "To question the pain is to question God."[9] Expressions of pain by MKs were rebellion against God. "Pain and faith were antithetical." One MK said,

> If someone had been . . . able to accept my questions about why I felt so rotten if God wanted my parents to do what they did, instead of speaking platitudes about God taking care of everything if you trust him, I might have found an easier way through those years. Instead, I ended up feeling . . . [that] my pain was a consequence of my failure to trust God. But I didn't know how to trust any more than I was and the pain didn't go away. [The] lesson I learned was that you couldn't count on God. . . .That is a very lonely place to be—not able to trust people or to trust God.[10]

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8 Ruth E. Van Reken, *Letters I Never Wrote* (Oakbrook, IL: Darwill, 1985), 5, 9, 37, cited in Gould, "Bringing Spiritual and Emotional Healing," 5, 6.

9 Doug Manning, *Don't Take My Grief Away from Me* (Hereford, TX: In-Sight Books, 1979), 78, quoted in Gould, "Bringing Spiritual and Emotional Healing," 8.

10 Ruth E. Van Reken, "Possible Long-term Implications of Repetitive Cycles of Separation and Loss During Childhood on Missionary Kids," unpublished paper presented at Christian Association for Psychological Studies Convention, Lancaster, Pa., 1987, 7, quoted in Gould, "Bringing Spiritual and Emotional Healing," 9.

Nearly every one of Barry's and Connolly's five areas of resistance are included in some way in this case. The theocentric issues dominate. Living with God, especially if it is one's parents' God, is more than can be expected. What is more, missionaries undergo some kind of formation during their preparation. For that very reason the image of God, let alone concept of God, communicated by home, church, and school of preparation could not serve as a conversation partner. As Gould's narrative shows, the consequences were for a lifetime.

Intellectual and spiritual dishonesty can be mitigated in part by a theological education that stresses God as both subject and as subject matter, as someone lived with and as well as lived for, a relationship as symbiotic as the ancient formulation "the law of prayer is the law of believing" (*lex orandi*, *lex credendi*). This in turn requires a theological approach that can hold *theologia prima* and *theologia secunda* in tandem as the seminary prepares persons for ecclesiastical service. Such persons can develop a capacity for an intellectual integrity and a spiritual integrity that can permit God as both subject and subject matter mutually to inform and interrogate each other in the life of the person living with God, a life that does not go on hold even in seminary.

Perspective

A brief distinction needs to be drawn between *theologia prima* and *theologia secunda*. *Theologia prima* as primary theology is speech *to* God. It is speech in the second person, direct and personal—as if face to face. When God is the conversation partner it is not a conversation between equals. Primordial thinking is its *modus operandi*. John Macquarrie explains primordial thinking by contrasting it with calculative and existential thinking. *Calculative thinking* clearly differentiates the subject from the object. Control belongs to the subject; objectivity inhabits the distance between subject and object, and instrumentality—the subject's use of the object—is the aim. *Existential thinking* does not aim at use or distance. It is subject to subject conversation wherein each shares in the same humanity, and there is reciprocal participation in the revelation each one unfolds. Third, *primordial thinking* is also subject to subject but in a unique fashion: one of the parties is transcended, mastered, overcome, but in such a way so as neither to be objectified nor necessarily robbed of personhood. In fact, the overwhelming of one being by another may be a time of great freedom, as in the case of grace, or great *angst*, as in

the case of guilt.[11]

Primordial engagements are freighted with ambiguity: attraction and alienation; desire and dread; intimacy and intimidation. In an exquisite *Andact* [devotional reflection] on the encounter between St. John of the Apocalypse and the glorified Jesus Christ, the one before whom John fell down as though dead, Johann Albrecht Bengel comments that John was both frightened and fortified with Jesus's gesture of laying his hand on John and telling him, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades" (Revelation 1:17b–18).[12] The ambiguity of this experience and the ambivalence felt by John bear striking resemblance to the encounters of Hannah (1 Samual 1–2), Isaiah (ch. 6), Peter, unworthy of the miraculous catch of fish (Luke 5), or Paul at his conversion (Acts 9). So astounded is Paul by this sovereign act of grace and vocation that he appropriates an unlikely metaphor: *ektroma*—a miscarriage. More conventionally translated, Paul is one who is untimely born, who is the least of the apostles and unfit to be called such (1 Corinthians 15:8–9). Paul is living with a grace that defies his categories yet daring him to believe it. Too good to be true! Grace easily becomes its own worst enemy and becomes the grounds for its own defeat, basically because it is unbelievable! It frightens yet fortifies—fearful of being presumptive on such grace yet fortified by its gratuitousness. Live with it by living by it. Grace defies a calculus.

Theologia secunda, on the other hand, is speech *about* God. It is speech in the third person. It has some commonality with calculative thinking in that it works not so much with a subject but with subject matter. Secondary theology seeks an appropriate method and a coherent "system" of the Christian faith such as one might find in Tillich's *Systematic Theology*. I offer here a schematic comparison between the two approaches, although it is not in any way exhaustive:[13]

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[11] John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1977), 91–95. Macquarrie cites his dependence on Martin Heidegger's, *Was ist Metaphysik?*

[12] Johann Albrecht Bengel, *Sechzig erbauliche Reden über die Offenbarung Johannes oder vielmehr Jesu Christi samt einer Nachlese gleichen lnhalts*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Johann Christoph Erhard, 1758), 49 and 63.

[13] Jean Leclercq develops a contrast between monastic theology and scholastic theology in *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catherine Misrahi, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974). Previously Elmer Colyer and I worked at this way of making distinctions in *Evangelical Theology in Transition: Theologians in Conversation with Donald Bloesch*, ed. Elmer Colyer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 158–160.

Theologia Prima	Theologia Secunda
Silence	Conceptual clarity
Experience seeking understanding	Epistemology: faith seeking understanding
Bible stories, screams, parables	Hermeneutics, exegesis
Injustice, anger seeking vindication	Theodicy
Guilt seeking remission	Atonement
Death, grief seeking reprieve	Resurrection
Persons in search of community	Initiation and ecclesiology
Good fortune seeking praise	Eucharist
Hope deferred	Eschatology
Prayer, protest, stymied thoughts yet stubborn resolve	Propositions, resolutions

Theologia prima resists systematization and forestalls premature conclusions. When *theologia secund*a is trumpeting the consistency of its logic and hermeneutics, *theologia prima* will provide the text that will not fit! Helmut Thielicke says that "theology betrays its deepest secrets in moments of inconsistency."[14] *Theologia prima* knows that and finds it to be a source of suffering, an occasion to tempt intellectual integrity searching for the quick fix, secretly wishing perhaps that Sebastian Moore was wrong when he said to Kathleen Norris that God behaves differently in the Psalms than in systematic theology![15]

Theologia prima and *theologia secunda* are not alternatives. They belong together as do *lex orandi* and *lex credendi*. Education is painful, learning requires unlearning, concepts need to be distinguished from convictions, and the seminarian requires freedom from the need to personalize everything: every question addressed to the seminarian is not an attack on his/her person. Differentiation of self from one's thought without succumbing

[14] Helmut Thielicke, *Modern Faith and Thought*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 99.

[15] Kathleen Norris, "The Paradox of the Psalms," in *Out of the Garden: Women Writers on the Bible*, ed. Christina Buchmann and Celina Spiegel (New York: Faucett Columbine, 1994), 222.

either to indifference or to total separation from one's intellectual activity is a painful process and belongs in a theological education.

Noel Annan, writing about the emergence of dons at Oxford and Cambridge, says that the one task of the university is to cultivate a capacity for learning.[16] Granted, the radical exclusivity of the proposition may not be entirely satisfying because skills, practice, and knowledge are also the anticipated fruits of an education. Yet the educated person is one who cultivates a capacity for learning, including the painful aspects of recognizing one's blinders, ignorance, and at times unwillingness to recognize, identify, and confront one's resistance to learning.

If education means cultivating the capacity for learning, spiritual formation concerns itself with the capacity for receptivity to the work of the triune God. In the tradition of Pietism (North Park's native air) there was talk of the conviction of sin as the Holy Spirit confronted believers with the law and the gospel. It is natural to resist such exposure because one has no preunderstanding of how deeply or to what extent one's life will be laid bare (Hebrews 4:12–13). The most painful part is to admit the truthfulness of the conviction (Psalm 51:4). To do so is to repent and repentance is the formational equivalent of admitting the need to unlearn something or to admit that what one had treated as fact is only a prejudice, and in social ethics, a custom, not a moral stipulation.

At that point the construction job that is one's life can implode. Implosion is one of the ways God uses to free persons by the truth for the truth. In some ways education and formation are one long (lifelong, hopefully) process of crisis stewardship. Education and formation are never freed from their nemesis, namely a seemingly intractable capacity for resistance to both grace and knowledge. The crisis of which one is a steward is epistemological: the process of knowing is a process of revelation, of uncovering hidden truth whether hidden by ignorance, prejudice, or the plain cussed resistance of "I have my mind made up; don't confuse me with the facts." Paul warns against a darkened understanding due to ignorance and hardness of heart. Classical theology called this the noetic effects of sin. Put plainly, sinners are characterized as unteachable (Ephesians 4:18). The consequence of such hardness and darkened understanding is the loss of sensitivity and an abandonment to a behavior that dehumanizes oneself and victimizes others (Ephesians 4:19). No wonder persons want deliverance from a theological education and a sustained

[16] Noel Annan, *The Dons: Mentors, Eccentrics and Geniuses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 3.

exposure to formation. It is a continual exposure to one's ignorance and worse, the preferential option for ignorance. Ignorance seems easier.

The mystery of having the capacity for education and formation, for grace and knowledge, is at the heart of the matter. The development of such a capacity requires that *theologia prima* and *theologia secunda* be allowed their rightful place in the economy of a theological education so that seminarians may know in a healthy fashion that God is both subject and subject matter. Seminarians also need to know that to subsume subject into subject matter is to eliminate any possibility of a relationship with God. Subject matter thrives in the atmosphere of calculative thinking and third person speech. Theology or subject matter is unresponsive to human need and unable finally to answer all of the questions posed to it. Yet the pursuit of the final answer, like Stephen Hawking's search for the theory of everything, has a flaw: Who can certify the omniscience to claim such a feat? My view is that when calculative thinking reaches its end result, it too finds that not everything is calculable. For theologians there is always text that does not fit or an experience that is minimized so that one can supply a packaged answer in the manner of Job's friends. I think Godel's proof in mathematical theory is instructive for theologians: "This proof states that within any rigidly logical mathematical system, there are certain questions that cannot be proved or disproved on the basis of axioms within the system. Therefore it is uncertain that the basic axioms of arithmetic will not give rise to contradictions."[17]

Is it not also possible that basic axioms in theology, if always taken to their logical conclusion, can give rise to contradictions? That certain issues in theology cannot be proved or disproved on the basis of axioms within the system? When primordial thinking rather than calculative thinking faces some of these questions, primordial thinking seeks theological perspective more than a theological position. The reason is a seminarian has to live with God as well as learn about God.

I have no idea why God closed Hannah's womb (1 Samuel 1:6), yet that assertion becomes a pretext for Peninnah to turn it into a *cause célèbre* (1 Samuel 1:7) and to continue such harassment year after year. Is the closing of Hannah's womb a verdict rendered by divine revelation? If so, is God aware that it was a setup for Hannah's daily horror? Is it a human interpretation of a physical condition attributed to divine activity? Does such an attribution mask a notion of punishment for latent sin? Can a

[17] Patricia Barnes-Svarney, ed., *The New York Public Library Science Desk Reference* (New York: Macmillan, Stonesong Book, 1995), 42.

modern woman, afflicted with infertility, read this text without some kind of horror and without becoming jealous of Hannah who finally did conceive? Does such a woman get caught in a vortex of centripetal and centrifugal forces wanting to worship a God whom she distrusts?

Theologia secunda argues that God is sovereign, free, and in some theological systems, accountable to no one. *Theologia prima* asks God for some accounting, not only for the sake of humans but for God's sake.

Practice

This section briefly develops how the perspective sketched above might provide a method (*theologia prima*) to deal with the central issue in forming and living the Christian life (*theocentricity*) and how this contour of spiritual formation might become part of formation teaching and practice in theological education.

The two testaments of the Christian Bible show a narrative coherence. In both testaments there is clear evidence that poets, prophets, historians, gospel, and epistle writers were disciplined by the OT story to find their place in that story even as the story was appropriated to "tradition" new traditions. This may be illustrated by several texts. First, within the OT, Jeremiah uses the Exodus narrative as a basis for showing how a redeemed people forgot their redeemer and lost track of their vocation to be redeeming (7:21–26; 11:3–5; and 16:14–15). When Jeremiah engages their ingratitude (2:13) he does so using Deuteronomy 6:10–15 to show how Israel has taken over cisterns they did not dig as though they were children intoxicated with entitlement. Deuteronomy 4:9–24 and 8:2–18, preoccupied as they are with the perils of forgetfulness, made clear to Israel that their forgetfulness of God's election and Exodus jeopardized their existence. Forgetfulness of God was a repeated concern of the psalmists (55:11; 59:11; 78:7; and 103:2). Hosea 12:2–4 retrieves the Jacob story as a heuristic device to bring continuing internecine injustice and conflict in the nation to public exposure.

Second, among many examples in the NT writers' use of the OT, the two genealogies of Jesus are a story of many stories providing the Christian reader with a narrative coherence of the two testaments and forecloses on any identity description of Jesus that ignores the OT. When Matthew composes the narrative of the slaughter of the children by Herod (2:16–18), he does so by appropriating the Rachel story (Genesis 35:16–21 death during Benjamin's birth) and Jeremiah's use of it (31:15 Rachel watching the trek into exile). For Matthew, Rachel continues to weep during Herod's time and the later time of Matthew's congregation. The text on ecclesiology in

1 Peter 2:9–10 is constructed out of Exodus 19:6 (priestly kingdom and holy nation) and Hosea 1:9–10 ("the ones once not a people now are God's people") among others. The good shepherd and hireling themes of John 10 are in contrast to Jeremiah 23:1–5 and Ezekial 34.

One way to account for the narrative coherence of the two testaments of Christian Scripture is that the one and the same God is active in both. The one and same God who called and sent Israel into its ministry called and sent Jesus of Nazareth. The one and the same God who brought Israel out of Egypt brought Jesus out of the tomb.[18] The theocentric character of the documents is evident and can be illustrated briefly in relation to several subjects: in relation to sending the Son—John 5:24, 30; 6:44; 17:3, 18, 21, 23; 1 John 4:4; in relation to the atonement: 2 Corinthians 5:7; Romans 3:25; 8:3; John 3:16; in relation to the resurrection (God raised Jesus)—Acts 2:23–24; 2:36; 3:15; 5:30–31; Romans 1:1–5; 8:11; Galatians 1:1; Philippians 2:5–11; 1 Corinthians 6:41; in relation to salvation history: Hebrews 1:1–2; in relation to the Holy Spirit: John 10:26, Galatians 4:4.

When Jesus prayed, he prayed to the one and same God to whom Abraham, Hagar, Moses, Hannah, Judas Maccabeus, and others had prayed. In this he was instructed and inspired by the story to which and by which he had been disciplined.

The theocentric character of Jesus's life comes to full expression in Hebrews 5:7–10:

> In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

The one to whom he prayed was the one whose work he had come to do and whose words he had come to speak. This one to whom he prayed was the one to whom Moses and Hannah had prayed. Like them

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[18] Robert Jensen, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1:42–46; Bernd Janowski, "The One God of the Two Testaments: Basic Questions of a Biblical Theology," *Theology Today* 51 (2000): 297–324; and Frederick C. Holmgren, *The Old Testament and the Significance of Jesus: Embracing Change–Maintaining Identity: The Emerging Center of Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

he appropriated words from the tradition to "tradition" his own life with God. Note the Psalms which are quoted from the cross.

Jesus could engage this one in ways as vigorous as his predecessors. For example, Psalm 22 begins by asking why God had forsaken his servant. Verse 3 proclaims the holiness of God. In the one prayer there is both accusation and acclamation. The accusation in the English text is prefaced by "yet" followed in v. 6 with a "but," in v. 9 with a "yet," all showing a prayer processing what it meant to live with God. Confusion shares space with confidence. The theology Jesus inherited permitted the process of thinking out loud, praying oneself from confusion to confidence, if not always to certainty and clarity. Was it because of this history of truthful prayer, of story—laden phrases and references, that Jesus could say, "Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit"? The location of that text in Psalm 31 is preceded by a lament at being the scorn of enemies, an object of horror, and the victim of a treacherous scheme. It is followed by a petition to be saved from shame and a declaration of praise in honor of God's steadfast love. At the moment of death, if he is conscious of the entirety of Psalm 31, he is relying on vv. 23–24: "Love the Lord, all you his saints. The Lord preserves the faithful but abundantly repays the one who acts haughtily. Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord."

All the while that Psalm 69 is used to "foretell" the offer of vinegar to the crucified Jesus, the rest of the psalm poses nearly every spiritual issue related to the crucifixion:

- Drowning in tears, vv. 1–2
- Outnumbered by enemies, v. 4
- Shame, dishonor, reproach, and alienation, vv. 6–8
- Zeal for your house has consumed me, v. 9 (cf. John 2:17)
- Object of insults, gossip, and the lyrics of songs, vv. 10–12
- But also prayer for deliverance and rescue, v. 13
- A plea for God not to hide from psalmist's distress but answer quickly, v. 15
- At the end a request that the oppressed might see the reward of the wicked and know the Lord hears the needy, does not despise his own that are in bonds, vv. 27–33

How does all this relate to the practice of formation? Formation people can make profitable use of the expression "the faith of Jesus." The expression opens up the entire issue of Jesus's human nature (Hebrews 4:14–16;

5:7–10). Richard Hays argues that Jesus is justified by faith just as Abraham was (Galatians 3:6, 22; Romans 3:26). The righteousness of God is revealed through the faith/faithfulness of Jesus, meaning I take it, Jesus trusted in God for vindication, kept himself faithful, and was vindicated in the resurrection.[19] God justified Jesus by vindication through the resurrection and in so doing showed that Jesus's faith was not faith in faith but faith in God. Helmut Thielicke argues in a similar fashion, namely "that I have the new life through and in the fact that Jesus Christ believes, so that here he is thus taken as the prototype of my faith . . . the point where I stand is thus the very point where he so believes."[20] The seminarian/ecclesiastical servant believes with Jesus in the same God.

A detailed study of the psalms used in the composition of the gospel narratives orients the reader to the formation tradition which was contextual for the isolated verses quoted in the NT. To read psalms like 22, 31, and 69 in their *entirety* is almost a transcript of people seeking to move from confusion to confidence. The full psalm is the formational context to pray and behave with Jesus and with those who told his story. But to tell the story of Jesus they had to tell the story that shaped him. Our canon exhibits this narrative coherence.[21]

To believe *in* Jesus as well as *with* Jesus puts the believer in touch with marginality. Many of the people Jesus served were the marginalized. By the end of his ministry, he was numbered among them. The pain of the marginalized is known in no other way than by letting them teach one what life at the edge is like. Hannah, Hagar, Lazarus, and the Syro-Phoenician woman all have stories to tell if one allows oneself to hear them. But hearing them creates pain, resistance, and anger at them for exercising a claim on one's life, pity, maybe empathy, and perhaps most of all an impotence in not being able to do anything.

Two types of marginalities can be identified. One can be called "vul-

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[19] See Richard Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11* in SBL Dissertation Series, 56 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 165, 171, 249.

[20] Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics: Foundations*, ed. William H. Lazareth; 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1966), 1:189. Additional literature on the subject of the "faith of Jesus" may be found in Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*. trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1978), 79–139; Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM, 1963), 201–246; and Donald Baillie, *God Was in Christ* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), 106–132.

[21] Richard Hays, "Paul's Use of an Early Christian Exegetical Convention," in *The Future of Christology: Essays in Honor of Leander Keck*, ed. Abraham J. Malherbe and Wayne Meeks (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 125–127.

nerability-based marginality." People do not choose it. They have it thrust on them in the form of disabilities, wealth, chronic pain, and a host of other factors. The other is "value-based marginality." People "choose" it by choosing to live a prophetic life which generates opposition and marginalization.[22]

Seminarians and church workers will come to know both forms of marginalization. They can be made instantly vulnerable by disease or disaster, "promotion" or "success." They can make a ministry decision according to values and find themselves alone and maligned. This experience was known in classical theology as the *active obedience* of Jesus, i.e., active, intentional obedience to the law, and his *passive obedience*, i.e., what he *underwent* for having actually *undertaken* love of neighbor to the fullest extent. Passive obedience is the hardest since one wants to quit. At this point the seminarian or church worker is called to believe with Jesus that the God who sent Jesus and through Jesus has sent other workers is trustworthy. The faith of Jesus is one's comfort. The narrative coherence of the two testaments, rooted in the story of one and the same God at work, entails the use of the entire canon of Scripture in formation.

The person who experiences one or both kinds of marginalities described above, or who finds obedience to and faith in the God of Israel and Jesus a questionable venture, needs to be taught that the entire canon of Scripture is at one's disposal, the praise as well as protest, the accusation against God as well as the acclamation of God. As for a particular example, take the psalms of lament and anger. When visited by immobilizing sorrow or intoxicated with anger, the person in formation or in ministry needs to know that such visitations need not be denied or spiritualized. They are real and are not incidental to life as such or to ministry. One can pray one's anger or one's lament in good biblical company.

Brueggemann says that generally speaking, the psalms of anger have two parts: own it and yield it. Vengeance belongs to God alone.[23] I have had students use this pattern to write anger psalms to go along with their reading the psalms of anger. This is not a technique. It is a biblical form that frees one to pray angrily one's anger, but pray it nevertheless. There is no way to maintain the relationship except to keep in conversation, at times confronting God, at times conceding yet confessing with Jesus

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22 Laurent A. Parks Daloz, Cheryl H. Keen, James P. Keen, and Sharon Daloz Parks, *Common Fire: Lives of Commitment in a Complex World* (Boston: Beacon, 1996), 72–74.

23 Walter E. Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms* (Winona, MN: Christian Brothers Publications, 1986), 70–71.

that even though God is the source of our faith, God poses the most challenging questions to faith.

The model for this spiritual formation is the relation of God to Jesus. God vindicated a faithful but discredited and marginalized person whose faith in God held fast, nourished by the story to which and by which he was disciplined.

The faithfulness of God to Jesus is the seminarian's and church worker's margin of strength to persevere in life and in ministry. No such worker has guarantees that the fruit of his or her labor will be seen. Moreover, ministry copes with a mystery at its very outset: the very message proclaimed and ministry practiced hardens some and heals others simultaneously. The vocation itself can marginalize the minister by his/her very ministry and message.[24]

The source of perseverance is God who promised that his word would not return void but would accomplish the purpose for which it was sent (Isaiah 55). But it is not guaranteed that the servant of the word will see the effectiveness either of word or ministry. Resolve to continue is found in this, that the God who vindicated Jesus and Jesus' faith, will, in God's time, vindicate the message and ministry carried out by faith in Jesus' name.

In this manner the spirituality of those who serve may be able to gain some detachment from ministry as a source of ego strength and some differentiation from ministry as a form of identity. Persons in ministry, like Jesus, must await vindication. In the process of waiting, it may be learned that one ought not ask God "to bless me and my ministry." Rather, following the model suggested, we ask God to vindicate his word and sacraments. In this way some distance may be maintained between the person and his/her vocation so that the vocation does not become all-consuming. In the end it is not the minister's word; it is God's word and God must vindicate God's promises, none of which are subject to human control. The ministry is carried out in the vortex of faith acting in love (Galatians 5:6), a faith that, as God vindicated Jesus, so God will vindicate the ongoing ministry of word and sacrament.

Lutheran Pietism appropriated Luther's uncompromising insistence on the force of the word order of Galatians 5:6: faith active in love.[25]

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[24] Donald Juel, "Encountering the Sower: Mark 4:1–20," *Interpretation 56* (2002): 273–283.

[25] *Luther's Works: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 5–6, Lectures on Galatians, 1519, Chapters 1–6*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1964), 37:28–31, 333–336. See George W. Porell, Faith Active in Love (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1954).

Bengel especially appropriated this feature of his heritage to stress the theocentric character of the Christian life. The entire Christian life existed in faith, hope, and love.[26] Faith acting in love is the vehicle for the entire Christian faith.[27] Faith is the empowerment and energy of love. Neither faith nor love is self-renewing. But since faith is not faith in faith but in God, faith is subsidized by the one who renews faith by word and sacrament. Faith then maintains love's perspective.

Faith in God's will to justify persons through Christ grounds the freedom of the Christian to act for the glory of God and love of neighbor. Faith in God's justifying grace is the source of courage to engage the world for the sake of truth and to give service to one's neighbor without placing ultimate trust in one's capacity to do the task. That capacity may prove to be very limited or the motivation to sustain it may burn out. If one begins this service with love alone, it may sour. If one begins with hope alone, it may be discredited too easily.

Faith does not hesitate to act in love out of concern that one's motives are less than pure or one's commitment less than full strength. If the human concern is that one's love must be right before service to God and neighbor can commence, one will never begin. In a telling exegetical note on Matthew 25:25–26, Bengel says of the one servant who from fear buried the money the master told him to invest, "*sine amore, sine fiducia* (without love, without confidence)."[28] Distrust of the master truncated the servant's stewardship. The controlling image maintained by the servant was that the master would honor safety over obedience.

Faith imparts an eschatological dimension to acts of love. Faith can wait for the right time; love wants to make the time now. When love acts in a suffocating manner, it becomes a burden to people in need and gradually deprives them of agency except finally to rebel. In the trying period of waiting the Holy Spirit will bring to our awareness the things of Christ—not just his words but his confidence in God. When the Holy Spirit bears witness to Jesus Christ it must include God in relation to Christ (John 14–16 and Romans 8:12–30).

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[26] Johann Albrecht Bengel, *Das Neue Testament zum Wachstum in der Gnade und der Erkentniß der Herrn Jesu Christi nach dem revidirten Grundtext iibersetzt und mit dienlichen Anmerkungen begleitet* (Stuttgart: Johann Benedict Metzler, 1753), 736.

[27] Bengel, *Das Neue Testament*, "Von der rechten Weise, mit göttlichen Dingen umzugehen," Anhang VII, 1000–01.

[28] D. Joh. Alberti Bengelii, *Gnomon Novi Testamenti* (Editio Tertia, M. Ernestum Bengelium, 1835 edition by Johanne Steudel; Londini: Williams et Norgate, MDCCCLXII), 135.

Faith waits and knows it has no control over the outcome of the love in which it has acted. Faith learns to be conscientious without being compulsive, compulsiveness being a sign of a lack of faith. In this way faith knows of a vindication it cannot see and rests its case on the paradigmatic act of God on behalf of Christ, who on the third day vindicated the work of his son. So, the minister relinquishes his/her ministry to God's future, believing with Jesus that God is true to God's word.

In a results-oriented culture this is probably bad news. It requires the grave strenuosity of faith to plant seeds and see no plant. But dormant seeds should not be mistaken for dead. They just await "the fire next time" as do seeds of the sequoia trees. Ministry and service in league with Jesus Christ require the grace of relinquishment to remain healthy and hopeful. It means living with God whose ways are not always ours, but whose ways require our service for their accomplishment. Formation in this tradition stresses the faith that acts in love and then waits. Waiting is an intrinsic ministry.

Two Biblical Examples

Two brief studies of biblical prayers, one by Moses (value-based marginality—reluctantly he consented to serve his vulnerable people in slavery) and the other by Hannah (a vulnerability-based marginality—infertility) demonstrate *theologia prima* at work trying to traverse the vagaries of primordial thinking.

Moses. In Exodus 32:7–14 the debacle of the golden calf is described. In wrath God says to Moses, "Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them, and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation" (v. 10). Moses once again becomes *defensor fidei* and in authentic fashion turns litigious by a cross examination of God. In paraphrase: why will you grant the Egyptians their point that you brought out the Israelites only to kill them? Verses 12–13 are worth citing in full:

> Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, "I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever."

Samuel Balentine reports that this is the only occurrence in Scripture

where God is the subject of the sentence, "Leave me alone."[29] It is a command ignored by Moses and, as I read it, the basis for Moses to take initiative to contravene God's intention to obliterate the people. Moses asks God to take his life and let the people live. The people live and Moses grows introspective about his vocation as the leader of God's people. When the dramatic action has come to an end and Moses has time for some solitude, second thoughts set in. "Now, if I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways so that I might know you and find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people" (33:13). God answers, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." Moses pushes his point: "If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people from every people on the face of the earth" (vv. 14–16). Moses wants to see God's glory. God says, "I will pass by and while doing so, cover your face with my hand and when I take my hands off, you will see only my back" (vv. 20–23). Fretheim makes the point that when the prophets suffer, part of their vocation is to hold the anguish of God before their people as much as their vocation is to hold the anguish of their people before God.[30] Fretheim concludes that in Moses's prayers the future of Israel is not the only source of such urgent intercession but the future of God.[31]

Moses prays two points: What will the Egyptians say? and, God, will you go back on your promise? The former is a forceful question, but the latter is the most persuasive. Moses quotes God against God. It is God's word against God's word. This is *theologia prima* at its finest. Like *theologia secunda*, *theologia prima* builds a case and cites sources. It constructs an argument but not primarily *for* God in an apologetic sense but an argument *with* God for the survival of the intercessor's trust and God's reputation. To be sure, there may be a secondary apologetic outcome in that when God does act it adds to God's credibility. But *theologia prima* speaks *to* God and *with* God for the sake of the one who prays and those for whom prayers are offered. The preservation of faithfulness in life is at stake more than the survival of a theological system.

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29 Samuel E. Balentine, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of Divine–Human Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 135–139. I also owe my use of "patterned prayer" to Balentine.

30 Terrence Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984), 109. Fretheim refers to the "divine lament."

31 Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 51.

Hannah. Hannah's situation is instructive for our topic. She is the object of Peninnah's sarcasm as well as the solicitations of Elkanah. On the way to the sanctuary to offer sacrifice he gives her a double portion because "he loved her." Even the solicitousness of Elkanah's question conveys no solace. "Why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?" (1 Samuel 1:8). The last question was the most evocative, the crux of the issue. Hannah's issue is that without sons, who am I, a forbearing husband notwithstanding? Hannah resists any form of solace that evades her truth, and she eschews silence as a way of bearing her fate.

The Hannah narrative requires attention to two matters: the incident as a possible "paradigm shift," albeit subtle, and the prayer itself. The liturgical background of this shift is complex, apparently due in part to the varieties of worship practices that may have preceded the more Deuteronomic standardization and the way women may have participated in these various rites and places, an issue I note but am not competent to assess.[32]

The possible "paradigm shift" happened when Hannah resorted to silent prayer in the sanctuary yet moved her lips. Gerald Sheppard comments about Eli's puzzle over Hannah's prayer practice,

> The tradition assumes that Eli's inability to overhear the prayer is exceptional rather than normal. As in the case of Job, prayers were not considered in general in the Old Testament to be secretive, silent or private exercises. The capacity of a prayer to be overheard is a characteristic rather than an incidental feature of it.[33]

The possible trajectory of this shift has been drawn out by two other contemporary scholars. The Hebraist Marcia Falk, having noted this innovation, argues that the Hannah narrative will later "become the model for the prayer of the heart" (*b. Ber.* 31b).[34] She further asserts that

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32 Jacqueline E. Lapsley, "Pouring Out Her Soul Before the Lord: Women and Worship in the Old Testament," in *Making Room at the Table: An Invitation to Multicultural Worship*, ed. Brian K. Blount and Lenora Tribbs Tisdale (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 8–15.

33 Gerald T. Sheppard, "Enemies and the Politics of Prayer" in *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics*, ed. Norman K. Gottwald and Richard Horsley, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 381.

34 Marcia Falk, "Reflections on Hannah's Prayer" in *Out of the Garden: Women Writers on the Bible*, ed. Christina Buchmann and Celina Spiegel (New York: Faucett Columbine, 1994), 98–99.

Hannah's protest to Eli that she was not drunk and wanted to be heard "became the basis for a later rabbinic ruling that one must not let a false charge to oneself go uncorrected—one must not be apathetic in defense of oneself" (*b. Ber.* 31b).[35]

Cynthia Ozick argues in a similar way.[36] Hannah lived before the time the House of the Lord had become a House of Prayer. In doing so, Ozick avers a new understanding of God: God is not only the commander of events but also the listener to the still small voice, a voice capable in spite of its weakness to influence an event (the opening of her womb).

Given that Hannah was of questionable value because of her closed womb and thus reduced to instrumentality (reproductive function), when Hannah mustered the *chutzpah* to enter the sanctuary and confront the Almighty using her own words, Ozick says that "intrinsicness declares itself against instrumentality."[37]

The content of Hannah's prayer (1 Samuel 1:10–11) is strikingly similar to the words of Exodus 2:23–24. Hannah: "O Lord of hosts, if only you will *look upon* the misery of your servant, and *remember* me, and *not forget* your servant, but will give to your servant a child, then . . ." Exodus: "The Israelites groaned under their slavery and cried out. Out of their slavery their cry for help rose up to God. God *heard* their groaning and God *remembered* his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God *looked* upon Israel and God *took notice* of them" (emphasis mine). If so, Hannah forged a combination of patterned prayer and personal prayer. Her prayer, having some of the language of *a credo* (I believe), was her petition but was based on a history. Hannah forms an argument from history for a new history in which she would be the chief beneficiary of this new exodus. She prayed the story even as the story prayed her. Hannah was practicing *theologia prima*, quoting its sources and identifying her "innovative" act as perfectly in line with her ancestors who prayed their faith that God heard, looked, took notice, and remembered his covenant with the ancestors.

Previously in this prayer I had noted Fretheim's observation that Moses, by praying, participated in the anguish of God as much as he presented the anguish of the people before God. In a somewhat analogous fashion Ronald Wallace suggests a similar vocation for Hannah. Averring that she was troubled by the sanctuary corruption as reflected in the behavior

35 Falk, "Reflections on Hannah's Prayer," 98-99.

36 Cynthia Ozick, "Hannah and Elkanah: Torah as the Matrix for Feminism," in *Out of the Garden: Women Writers on the Bible*, 89.

37 Ozick, "Hannah and Elkanah," 90.

of Eli's sons, she found a reason to reorient her anguish over her childlessness. If she had a child who became a prophet like Moses, he could rebuke corruption and properly set forth God's word. Wallace, taking note that the custom of the day prohibited such a role to her, argues that in praying for a son she was doing so vicariously as if in the indirect way of motherhood she too was entering into conflict with God's opponents and becoming prophetic. In so doing she knew the anguish of a prophet. Living with God meant some understanding of God's anguish.[38]

But the system has problems with too many Hannahs around. In trying to say too much, offering too many explanations based on the axioms of the system, it turns out in the end to be too axiomatic and, at least perceptibly, contradictory. Sometimes *theologia secunda* ends up serving the system rather than the people who are trying to believe or the God who is to be believed.

Hannah's *theologia prima* was short on axioms but long on anticipation that vindication was a prayable issue. Her primordial encounter with God, like that of Moses, did not render her speechless. If anything, it made speech a necessity. Is prayer perhaps God's own speech back to God in a human voice?

A pedagogical move is suggested by Moltmann: "There can be no theology 'after Auschwitz' which does not take up the theology in Auschwitz, i.e., the prayers and cries of the victims."[39] Several recent works demonstrate praying a theology "in" some situation.[40] Readers of these texts will notice an intertestamental as well as intratestamental use of

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[38] Ronald Wallace, *Hannah's Prayer and Its Answer: An Exposition for Bible Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 6–8.

[39] Jürgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 29.

[40] Marcia Sachs Littell, ed., *Liturgies on the Holocaust* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1986); James Melvin Washington, ed., *Conversations with God: Two Centuries of Prayers by African Americans* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994); Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "Singing a New Song: On Old Testament and Latin American Psalmody," *Word & World 5* (1997): 155–167; Stephen P. McCutchan, "Framing Our Pain: The Psalms in Worship," *The Christian Ministry* (July–August, 1995): 18–20; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women–Church: Theology and Practice* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985). McCutchen illustrates a narrative and canonical coherence in liturgical use by suggesting Pss 42 and 43 to parents of critically ill children; of reading Ps 39 and the story of Peter's denial as coordinates in the case of suicide; and lastly of reading Ps 88 and 2 Sam 13:1–22 (the rape of Tamar) as a way of dealing with rape and abuse homiletically. Ruether reproduces a rite of healing contextualized in the midst of friends. The rite is a narrative paraphrase of Ps 22 and is reproduced from Del Martin's *Battered Wives* (San Francisco: Glide Publications, 1976), 1–5.

texts, characters, and stories as a way of praying the story to which and by which one is disciplined, as well as allowing the story to pray through the intercessor. Primordial theological thinking is doing its theological work in the only method it knows: prayer, but it is prayer rooted in sources and relying on the canonical coherence of the narratives used.

Conclusion

No matter the marginalizations in life, whether vulnerability-based or value-based, they cannot be put on hold, whether in seminary or in ministry. But such marginalization need not put life on hold. Yet while marginalizations may never be fully remedied, they can be related to the larger perspective of the canonical text, namely, that God is to be trusted. At times one must take another's word for it. Prayer thus is always in company.

God can be lived with but not easily. A grave strenuosity of faith is required to do primordial thinking where thinking and praying seem to merge. When the primordial thinker is tempted to quit thinking, it is probably not that the questions are too hard but that the one thinking/praying is afraid to pray his/her thoughts about God to God. But the fearful can be fortified by the canonical narrative that is populated with persons who can quote God to God, not to blaspheme but to trust more deeply. When one's imaging systems preclude honest prayer, let the narratives embolden and equip one to pray biblically so that the faith in the God of Abraham, Moses, Hannah, and Jesus is allowed to mature in the way it acts in love. If faith does not act in love, it will not mature into a deeper life with God.

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