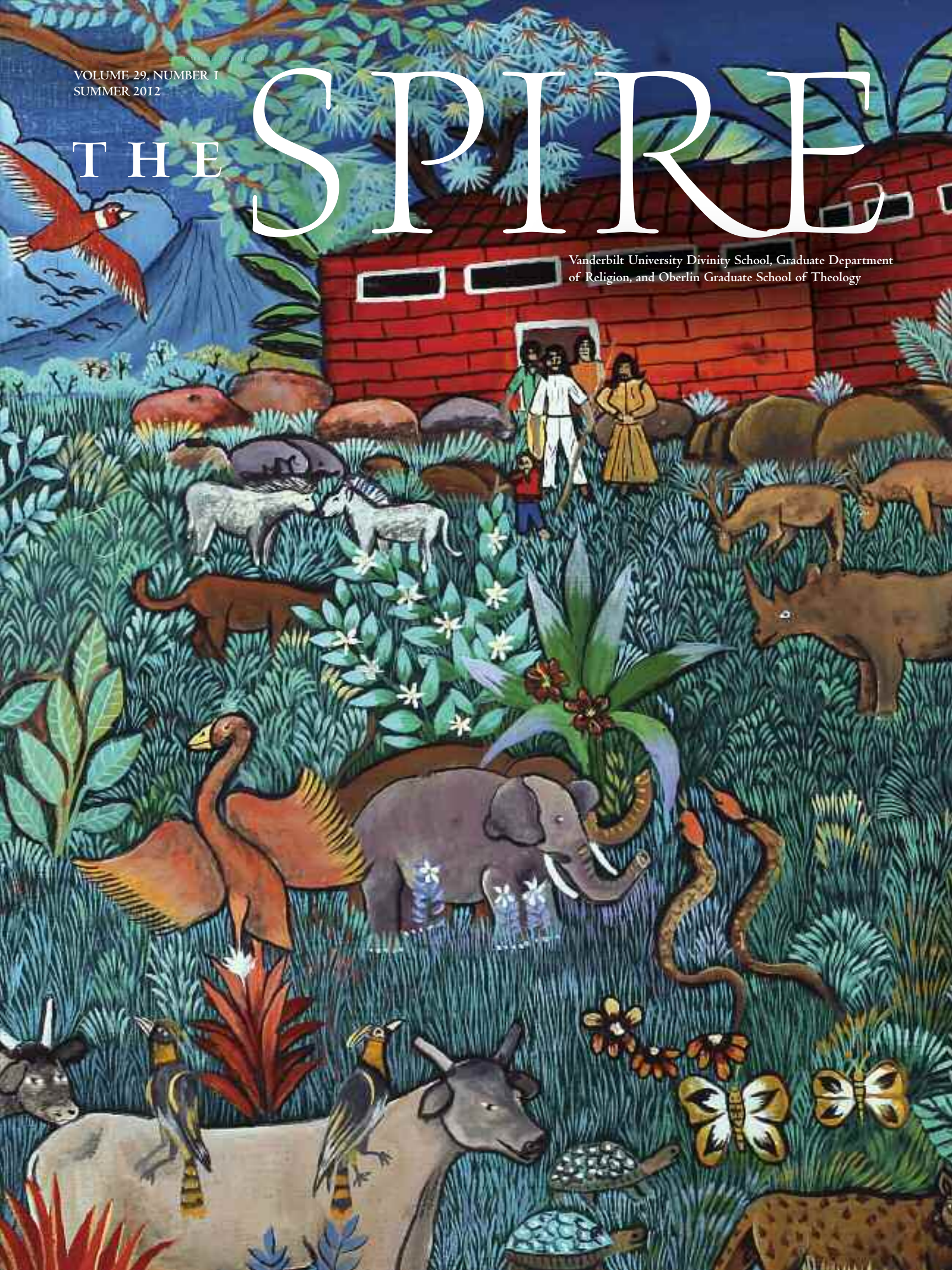


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THE SPIRE

Vanderbilt University Divinity School, Graduate Department
of Religion, and Oberlin Graduate School of Theology





El Nacimiento del Mesias

2010

by José Ignacio Fletes Cruz

León, Nicaragua

(born 1952, Managua, Nicaragua)

oil on canvas

20" x 16"

courtesy of Zacharey Austin Carmichael, BA'10, MA'12

from the exhibition *The Religion, Art, and Politics of Solentiname: Reminiscences and Visions*

commissioned for Vanderbilt University Divinity School

THE SPIRE

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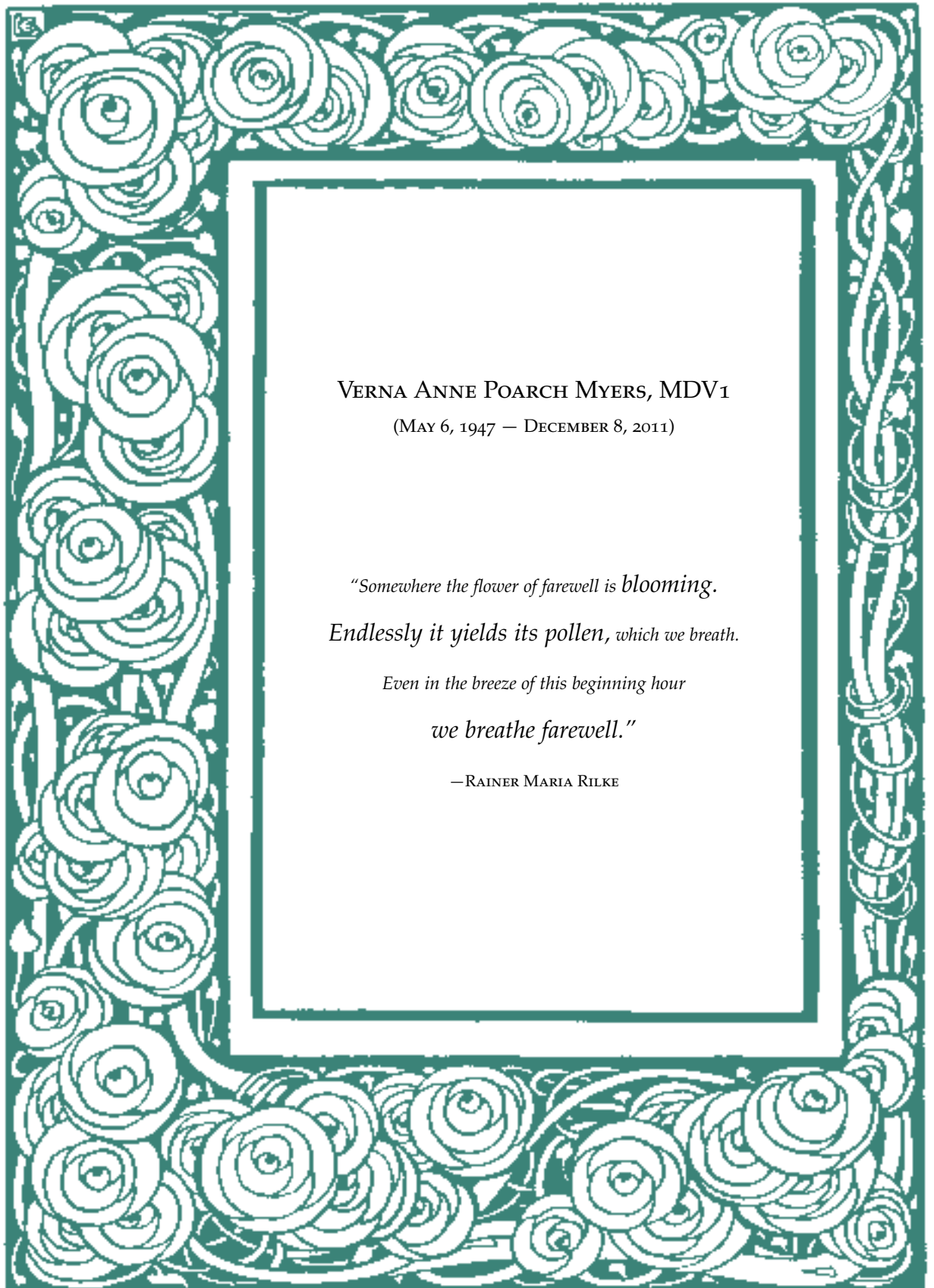


ZACHAREY CARMICHAEL

On the cover: In commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of the Theology of Liberation, Vanderbilt University Divinity School commissioned eleven oil paintings by Nicaraguan artist José Ignacio Fletes Cruz. A member of the community of primitivist painters in Solentiname, Fletes Cruz sought refuge in Costa Rica during the Nicaraguan Revolution of 1978-79 but returned to his homeland where he paints the flora and fauna of the countryside. *El Arca de Noé* is among the paintings from the Divinity School's exhibition, *The Religion, Art, and Politics of Solentiname: Reminiscences and Visions*, and is reprinted, courtesy of the editor.

Left: Nicaraguan artist José Ignacio Fletes Cruz and Latin American theologian, Sister Ivone Gebara of Brazil, shown with their hosts, Professor Fernando Segovia and Professor Elena Olazagasti-Segovia, attended the Divinity School's program on the *Misa Campesina Nicaragüense*, the Nicaraguan Peasant Mass, as part of the School's commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of liberation theology.

In Memoriam



VERNA ANNE POARCH MYERS, MDV¹

(MAY 6, 1947 — DECEMBER 8, 2011)

*"Somewhere the flower of farewell is blooming.
Endlessly it yields its pollen, which we breath.*

*Even in the breeze of this beginning hour
we breathe farewell."*

—RAINER MARIA RILKE

From the Dean

On Friday, May 11, 2012, seventy-seven graduates from the Divinity School became the newest members of our alumni/ae community after receiving the following charge from the dean.

Pouring Yourself into Ministry

BY JAMES HUDNUT-BEUMLER, PH.D.
DEAN AND THE ANNE POTTER WILSON DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR
OF AMERICAN RELIGIOUS HISTORY

If fifty-one or eighty-four credit hours, or thousands of real hours of study, or millions of words of reading have qualified you for nothing else, they will have made reading the popular theology on bumper stickers painful for the rest of your lives.

Some are not so bad. The one that says COEXIST where the letters are made with the symbols of the world's major religions—that is pretty good. Some are more obvious: "God is not a Republican; God is not a Democrat."—a simple, but worthy reminder in this election year.

Others are sophomoric while trying too hard to be clever: "God is dead," Nietzsche. "Nietzsche is dead," God.

The one that is under my skin today is the one that says: "Try to look busy. God's watching."—as if we can fool God, as if the great cosmic game is all about rewards for looking good rather than genuinely being good. Just once I would like to be behind a car where the bumper has a sticker saying: "Be still and know that I am God" and have some confidence that the driver does not think that the sticker refers to himself.

This is, of course, to start by way of digression to acknowledge that the essential question of graduation from the Divinity school is: How will life be different because of your experience here? Some of you may be slower than others to claim for yourselves the word "minister," but whether you are being graduated into a church that likes to use the term in a special clerical sense, or whether you will teach, or lead, or serve in another sense, I urge you to keep the verb minister close to your identity the rest of your lives, especially if you are part of one of those traditions that says that people like you cannot be a minister.

Minister is a verb just like nurse, doctor, and engineer. This is a strong clue that the usefulness of any minister, as in the person, is a restorative, constructive, or transformative action. Just as no one gets better from a

nurse who does not nurse patients, no one benefits from a minister who does not minister to people. The value of your degree comes from pouring yourself out for others.

The great difference between ministry and being a doctor or a nurse is that only a little of our work comes to us when we are ready and waiting in a building with a big cross on the side. People talk about having doctor's appointments; they do not talk about having minister's appointments. This is a problem and a great opportunity.

So real ministry does not fit on a bumper sticker, and it rarely signs in at the front desk and shows its insurance card. But it is real, and we, your teachers, watch with joy as our students and graduates become ministers, in the deep sense of minister as verb. Here are two glimpses of such ministry.

One of you receiving your degree today experienced ministry up close and personal when you visited an aged parishioner in a nursing home, and you poured yourself out for another person. The parishioner was a ninety-four-year-old man, who is remembered as somewhat of a difficult figure in the church, even in his better days. All the senior minister could say was how much the parishioner and the facility smelled.

On the day a long put-off visit occurred, the senior minister was overcome by the odor, plugged her nose, and spoke in a loud voice from across the room. And you? You smelled what everyone else smelled, but you walked across the room and touched the arm of your brother, another child of God, and left your hand there all the time you talked. You do not know why you did that. But there is a time to touch and a time to refrain from touching, and on that day in the midst of the facility no one wants to occupy, you reached out to the boy and to the man inside the frail



body, and you became, in no uncertain terms, a minister worthy of the name.

Also this year, I became aware that a Divinity School alumna, who later enrolled in the Graduate School, has reemerged as the voice in Tennessee organizing the interfaith religious community on behalf of undocumented immigrants and their human rights in this state. This young woman did not become the Bible professor she set out to become; she became something harder, perhaps better, she became a prophet after the examples of Moses and Deborah, a fighting voice leading a people who wanted to do something in their hearts but needed a leader to make it happen.

And you? When have you been, and when will you be ministers? God alone may know, but God will be watching, of that we may be assured.

I, therefore, charge you: Go and minister, each in your own way as your gifts and the needs of others give you opportunity. Place your confidence and purposes larger than yourself, yes even in God's purposes. Be of good courage. Uphold the weak. Seek the truth with humility. Teach others what you have found to be wise. Continue to learn all the days of your lives. Amen.

Around the QUADRANGLE

Founder's Medalist 2012



PHOTOS BY JOHN RUSSELL

Left: Dean James Hudnut-Beumler and Chancellor Nicholas Zeppos congratulate Kyle Brent Thompson Lambelet upon receiving the Founder's Medal for the Divinity School during Commencement 2012. Right: During the Act of Worship and Celebration for Commencement 2012, Dean Hudnut-Beumler recognized Kyle as the ninety-third Founder's Medalist in the history of the Divinity School.

Kyle Brent Thompson Lambelet, MTS'12, became the ninety-third Founder's Medalist in the history of Vanderbilt University Divinity School during Commencement 2012. Endowed by the University's founder, Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, the Founder's Medals have been awarded since 1877 and are presented to the degree candidates earning first honors for scholarship within the ten schools comprising the University. Kyle was graduated from Vanderbilt Divinity School having maintained a perfect grade point average on the University's scale.

Upon earning his baccalaureate in Biblical studies from Azusa Pacific University in California, Kyle responded to a call to promote social justice and to advance political change by working as a community organizer and by becoming a resident in two intentional

Christian communities. In Atlanta, Georgia, he served as a volunteer for the Open Door Community where the residents modeled their ministries in the Catholic Worker tradition. In Greensboro, North Carolina, he entered the Beloved Community Center where he worked for the liberation of individuals on the margins: the homeless, the imprisoned, people of color, and victims of police brutality.

For his academic promise and for his active commitment to issues of social justice and ministry, Kyle was awarded a Carpenter Scholarship when he matriculated at the Divinity School in 2009. He served as one of the leaders in the Economic Empowerment Coalition, a student organization that educates and advocates for workers' rights and economic justice at Vanderbilt University and in Middle Tennessee. Kyle also was a

founding member of Organized and United for Respect at Vanderbilt (OUR Vanderbilt), a community union for promoting economic justice for our University's employees.

Kyle, his wife, Nicole; their three-year-old daughter, Garren; and newly-born daughter, Naomi, whom they welcomed to the Lambelet family on May 26, will depart in August for South Bend, Indiana, where Kyle will begin his doctoral studies at the University of Notre Dame. He plans to pursue a program of studies in moral theology and Christian ethics, and in international peace studies at the Kroc Institute. He aspires to enter the Academy as a professor of ethics, but whatever direction his vocation takes, Kyle says, "I will endeavor always to imagine a better world through the eyes of my children."

Commencement Honors 2012

The Founder's Medal for first honors in the Divinity School's Class of 2012

Kyle Brent Thompson Lambelet

The Academic Achievement Award and Banner Bearer

Angela Marie Flanagan

The Umphrey Lee Dean's Award for exemplifying the mission and vision of the Divinity School

Seth Dillon Terrell

The Florence Conwell Prize for accomplishments in preaching

Robert Kendrick Newton Jr.

The Saint James Academy Award for composing the outstanding sermon

Melanie Chanté Jones

The W. Kendrick Grobel Award for accomplishments in Biblical studies

James Christian McCain

The J.D. Owen Prize for accomplishments in the study of the New Testament

Angela Marie Flanagan

The Elliott F. Shepard Prize for accomplishments in church history

James Greenawalt Squibb III

The Wilbur F. Tillett Prize for accomplishments in the study of theology

William Douglas Levanway

The Nella May Overby Memorial Award for honors in field education

Jane Myers Herring

The William A. Newcomb Prize for exemplifying the idea of minister as theologian and for receiving honors on one's master of divinity degree project

Cameron Scott Barr, for "Covenantal

Ecumenism: An Ecclesiology for the United Church of Christ"

The Chalice Press Book Award for academic distinction by students representing the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, and the Disciples Divinity House

Eliezer Rolon

Andrew Lawrence Shepherd

The Luke-Acts Prize for composing the most significant paper on an aspect of Luke-Acts

Luke Davis Townsend

The Bishop Holland Nimmons McTyeire Award for exemplifying the Wesleyan ideals of Christian servant leadership

Candice Michelle Fisher

Whitney Stone Mitchell

The Bettye R. Ford Graduate Student Service Award for significant contributions to Vanderbilt University's Graduate Department of Religion

Carolyn Jane Davis

The Student Government Association Service Awards presented to the student and member of the administration, faculty, or staff for significant contributions to the Divinity School community

Andrew Lawrence Shepherd

Amy Elizabeth Steele, Ph.D.,

the assistant dean for student life

Certificates earned in the Carpenter Program in Religion, Gender, and Sexuality

Kristin Renee Kelley

Jennifer Marsh Simon

Certificates earned in the Kelly Miller Smith Institute on Black Church Studies

Edward Charles Andercheck

Michael Dorwin Broadnax Sr.

Damien Claudy Durr

Melanie Chanté Jones

Robert L. Moore

Catina Le'juan Parrish

Anthony James Sandusky

LaShante Yvette Walker

Certificates earned in the Center for Latin American Studies

Angela Marie Flanagan

Certificates earned in Religion in the Arts and Contemporary Culture

Jennifer Marsh Simon

Sharon Thompsonowak



PHOTOS BY JOHN RUSSELL



Ann Hsiao-En Wong, MTS'12, was among the graduates charged by the dean to remember that "the value of a degree from the Divinity School comes from pouring yourself out for others."

Degree candidates from the Divinity School stand during the commencement exercises on Alumni Lawn as Chancellor Nicholas Zeppos confers their academic titles upon them. Twenty-six candidates earned the master of theological studies degree while fifty-one graduates received the master of divinity degree.

An Embodiment of the Aesthetic and the Political



PHOTOS BY ELENA OLAGASTI-SEGOVIA

Students from the Divinity School and the Graduate Department of Religion who served as English readers for the poet and priest Ernesto Cardenal included Luis Menéndez-Antuña, doctoral student in New Testament; Jane Myers Herring, MDiv'12; Bridgett Green, doctoral student in New Testament; Angela Flanagan, MDiv'12; Elizabeth Coyle, MTS'11; Fernando F. Segovia, the Oberlin Graduate Professor of New Testament; Jin Young Choi, doctoral student in New Testament; Tara Lentz, MDiv'11; Zacharey Carmichael, BA'10, MA'12, MDiv'3. Seated with Father Cardenal (center) are Victor Judge, assistant dean for academic affairs; and James Hudnut-Beumler, dean of the Divinity School.

To conclude the University's commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of Liberation Theology, Nicaraguan priest, poet, and sculptor Ernesto Cardenal presented a reading from his latest volume, *The Origin of Species and Other Poems*. Awarded the 2012 Queen Sofia Ibero American Poetry Prize and nominated twice for the Nobel Prize in Literature, Father Cardenal is acknowledged as one of the foremost representatives of Latin American letters.

When introducing the poet to the audience in Benton Chapel, Professor Fernando Segovia described Cardenal as "the classic embodiment of the aesthetic and the political, the cultural and the social, the discursive and the material, that has guided the best tradition of intellectual life in Latin America."

A leader in the movement for human dignity and social justice, Cardenal was engaged in the struggle against the dictatorship of the Somoza dynasty from the 1950s to the 1970s. Upon the triumph of the revolu-

tion in 1979, Cardenal served as Minister of Culture, and by establishing poetry workshops throughout Nicaragua, he inspired the people to claim the revolutionary power in language.

"Literature by itself, literature as literature, is worth nothing," states Cardenal. "As all else in the universe, literature must be at the service of humanity; consequently, poetry, too, must also be political—not political propaganda, but political poetry. Poetry can render a service: to build a country, to create a new human being, and to change society. I have tried, above all, to write poetry that can be understood."

The eighty-seven-year-old cleric and artist also believes poetry has the power to heal. Each Tuesday at the La Mascota Pediatric Hospital in Managua, Cardenal conducts a weekly poetry laboratory for children with cancer, and with support from UNICEF publishes the children's poems.



While visiting the Divinity School, Father Ernesto Cardenal went to the site of the childhood home of William Walker who was among a group of men in the 1840s and 1850s known as "filibusters," people who invaded or aided in a revolution in another country to gain money and power. When Cardenal was twenty-five years old, he composed the poem, "With Walker in Nicaragua," based upon the history of the Filibuster War of 1855-57 and the central figure, William Walker of Nashville. Known as the Grey-eyed Man of Destiny, Walker invaded Nicaragua, made English the official language, and legalized slavery with the intention of attaching Central America to the Slave States. Walker is well remembered in Nicaragua where the schoolchildren read about his intervention and his quest for power. In Cardenal's poem on Walker, the speaker describes the filibuster as having "grey eyes, without pupils, fixed like a blind man's, but which expanded and flashed like gunpowder in combat, and his skin faintly freckled, his paleness, his clergyman's ways, his voice, colorless like his eyes, cold and sharp, in a mouth without lips."

Bruce Morrill, S.J., (center) has completed his first academic year as the Edward A. Malloy Professor of Catholic Studies at Vanderbilt University Divinity School. He succeeded Professor *Emeritus* J. Patout Burns Jr. (right) who held the professorship from 1999 until his retirement in 2011. Morrill was introduced to friends of the Divinity School during a fall reception hosted by Dean James Hudnut-Beumler (left).

Morrill's theological scholarship addresses the area of liturgy and sacraments and draws upon interdisciplinary resources from systematic and historical theology, ritual studies, cultural anthropology, and Biblical studies. Another primary interest he researches is political theologies as they investigate the problems of human suffering in social contexts. Morrill's scholarly pursuits have intersected in his books *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory: Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue* and *Divine Worship and Human Healing: Liturgical Theology at the Margins of Life and Death*, both published by Liturgical Press.

At the conclusion of the spring semester, Morrill's book *Encountering Christ in the Eucharist: The Paschal Mystery in People, Word,*



JESSE KOSKA

and Sacrament was published by Paulist Press. In this book, he examines the questions of power as exercised in the rituals of the church, especially the Eucharist.

Prior to his appointment to the Malloy professorship, Morrill served as a professor of theology at Boston College. A member of the New England Province of the Society of Jesus, he earned the doctorate of philosophy

from Emory University. Morrill also has the distinction of being the only Jesuit priest currently residing in Tennessee.

The Malloy professorship is named for Father Edward A. Malloy, PhD'75, president, *emeritus*, of the University of Notre Dame, and one of the first two Catholic priests to earn a doctorate from Vanderbilt.



STEVE GREEN

Night falls on Bishop's Common, the gravesites of Methodist Bishops William McKendree, Joshua Soule, and Holland Nimmons McTyeire, who is buried alongside his wife, Amelia Townsend McTyeire. Landon Garland, the University's first chancellor, is buried also in the plot near the Divinity School. As Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, McTyeire secured funding in 1873 from Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt to establish a Methodist university "of the highest order that would offer literary, scientific, theological, and professional studies." Vanderbilt University was then founded as a Southern institution with the intention to reunite a country that had become fractured by the Civil War. Bishop McTyeire would serve as the first president of Vanderbilt University's Board of Trust, and he declared the Biblical department to be a Schola Prophetarum, a School of the Prophets.

The Elegant Cry of Commitment

BY FERNANDO F. SEGOVIA, PH.D.

The Oberlin Graduate Professor of New Testament

Editor's Note: During Vanderbilt University's year-long commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of Liberation Theology, the Reverend Professor Doctor Gustavo Gutiérrez, a member of the

Order of Preachers and the holder of the John Cardinal O'Hara Chair in the department of theology at the University of Notre Dame, served as



the keynote lecturer. We are pleased to publish for our readers a transcription of Father Gutiérrez's lecture, sponsored by the University's Center for Latin American Studies, as well as the introduction by Fernando F. Segovia, the Oberlin Graduate Professor of New Testament.

The task of introduction entrusted to me is one to be cherished deeply, and so I do indeed, but it is by no means an easy one. How, I ask myself, does one introduce the figure and role of Gustavo Gutiérrez?

The tradition of celebratory introductions such as this one calls for a pointed and generous review of the speaker's life experience, educational trajectory, academic achievements, and professional distinctions. How can anyone possibly convey the achievements of Father Gutiérrez in any one of these areas, let alone all four? This would mean beginning in the 1940s with his early years as a student of medicine at the National University of San Carlos in Lima and his involvement in the then-prominent movement of Catholic Action. This would also entail concluding with the summer of 2010 itself, with the conferral upon him of the honorary degree of *Magister Sacrae Theologiae*, or Master of Sacred Theology, on the part of his own Order of Preachers, an ancient university degree bestowed on such Dominican luminaries as Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas and reserved today for theologians deemed eminent in the promotion of theological studies through doctrinal reflection and research as well as publications of exceptional value. In between, moreover, it would mean summarizing an ecclesial and academic life of truly heroic proportions:

- Sustained pivotal involvement in the church Catholic Roman as well as the church catholic universal, from the years of the Second Vatican Council through the present, with the recently concluded celebration of the five-hundredth anniversary of the presence of the Order of Preachers in the New World, which took place during October 2010 in the Dominican Republic.
- A distinguished philosophical and theological education at the Catholic University of Leuven and the University of Lyons, respectively, and the founder of the San Bartolomé de Las Casas Institute in Rimac, Lima.
- An untold number of key publications and lectures, of which *The Theology of Liberation: Perspectives*—published in 1971—stands as an undisputed classic.
- A host of honors, including more than twenty honorary doctoral degrees and the 2003 Award in Communications and Humanities given by the Príncipe de Asturias Foundation, headed by the heir to the throne of Spain.

Rather than attempting to do so in greater detail, let me offer instead a personal vision of the life and work of Gustavo Gutiérrez. For me, Father Gutiérrez represents an imperative marker of the religious and theological production of Christianity since that fateful decade of the 1960s. His name and his labor signify in exemplary fashion a turning era in church and theology as well as in soci-

ety and culture. This was an era that began with two events that took place within days of one another in January of 1959: on the one hand, the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, with all of its consequences for Latin America in particular and for the Third World in general, still very much unfolding; on the other hand, the call of John XXIII for a new ecumenical council, the Second Vatican Council, with all of its ramifications for the Catholic Church in particular and for the Christian church in general, still very much unfolding as well. Since then, throughout the intervening fifty years, Father Gutiérrez has been the voice of a visionary, foundational, and critical thinker.

A visionary thinker, first of all, because he brought into the optic of theological reflection and construction a number of components that have become constitutive of theology since then: a relentless foregrounding of the Other in society and culture, of the poor and the oppressed, as human beings worthy of dignity and life; a view of theology as an act of reflection on practice in the light of the Word of God and thus of theology as a profoundly contextual exercise, materially as well as discursively, yet of universal reach and impact; and the vision and proclamation of a Reign of God that offers liberation and redemption, fullness of life, to all, but above all to those in captivity, the marginalized and the forgotten.

A foundational thinker, secondly, insofar as his voice, as part of its visionary role, helps to pry open the dominance of Western

theology on the non-Western world and thus opens the way for contextual theologies of all sorts—from Latin America and the Caribbean, from Africa and the Middle East as well as from Asia and the Pacific, and from minority formations within the West. With and after Liberation, not only does the face of theology change but also its voice, making the theological enterprise perform a global endeavor.

A critical thinker, lastly, given the fact that he has never stopped revisiting, deepening, and recasting his original insights. Anyone who moves from his early study of 1968 “Notes for a Theology of Liberation,” where the term “liberation” appears for the first time (*Theological Studies* 31 [1970] 243-61); through his reflection of 1988 on “Expanding the View,” (*A Theology of Liberation*, Fifteenth Anniversary Edition [Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), marking the twentieth anniversary of Liberation Theology; to his study of 2003 on “The Theology of Liberation: Perspectives and Tasks” (Fernando F. Segovia, ed., *Toward a New Heaven and A New Earth: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza* [Maryknoll: Orbis Books] 287-299) where he argues that the historical juncture that gave rise to Liberation has by no means disappeared but rather become even more entrenched—anyone, I repeat, who moves through these works realizes that this is a mind ever self-critical, ever shifting, and ever radical.

All of this, I should add, with a unique combination of elegance and humility, erudi-

tion and charity, conviction and commitment. To this effect, let me quote the final paragraph of an autobiographical piece, “Theological Task and Ecclesial Reflection,” written in 2000:

What we have just said above is a consequence of a realization already brought to mind: the peoples of Latin America are, for the most part, poor and believing at the same time. At the very heart of a situation that excludes and ill-treats them, and from which they seek to liberate themselves, the poor believe in the God of Life. As our friends Victor (now deceased) and Irene Chere, townspeople from Villa El Salvador, said to John Paul II during his visit of 1985 to our country, speaking in the name of all the poor of Perú, a million of whom were in attendance: “With our hearts broken by grief, we see that our wives bear children while ill with tuberculosis, that our children die, that our children grow up weak and without a future,” and then added, “but, despite all this, we believe in the God of Life.” This is a context, or even better a vital reality, that a reflection on faith cannot elude. To the contrary, such reflection must find nourishment in it. Unceasingly.

Such nourishment Gustavo Gutiérrez has been imbibing and imparting, unceasingly, for over forty years. That has been his quintessential cry—elegant and humble, erudite and loving, full of conviction and totally committed.



A HERMENEUTIC OF *Hope*

BY GUSTAVO GUTIÉRREZ, O.P.

Forty years ago, we began speaking in Latin America about liberation theology and how important it was for us “to live liberation,” to be in solidarity with the poor. Reflection is very important also; for the first time in centuries we have theological reflections coming from countries outside of Europe and North America. We have today, theologies coming from Africa and Asia—reflections on the human condition from minorities in the rich countries. Behind these reflections we have movements. We have realities. We have a people committed. We have people killed for their commitments.

In the academic milieu, we were accustomed to theology coming from Europe, and maybe for you younger students of theology, it is not unusual for you today to speak about theologians from different areas of the world or from different social groups in rich countries, but this was not the case when I was a student of theology in the middle of the twentieth century. While the theologies from outside Europe and North America are referred to by the curious expression “contextual theologies,” any theology is contextual. Our ideas are not original, but we believe even today we are confronting important challenges of the Christian life, not only in Latin America, but in the world, and our reflections involve two processes.

The Absent Become Present

The first process comes from human history, from the daily lives of people. In the middle of the twentieth century, and in Latin America at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, we had a new presence—the poor sectors. The poor people of our population were more present than before, and this was a significant challenge not only for theology but for politics and for the democratic nations. The “absent people” became present, more and more, but when I say absent, I mean they were not physically absent from history, but they were not relevant. The poor were more and more present; consequently, a new consciousness about poverty emerged.

For a long time, humanity has seen poverty as a fact and as a fate. This idea, prevalent in the Greek milieu, is ever present among the poor of today who say, “It is a pity, but I was born poor.”

We are then only one logical step away from saying, “It is the Will of God you are

poor while other persons are rich.”

We can ask the poor to be humble, to accept their fate, and to be helped by the rich people whose “duty” is to be generous with the poor; however, it remains difficult for humanity, not only for the rich and for the churches, to understand that poverty is the result of “our hands.” Our hands have made poverty, and poverty has causes—social structures and mental categories; for example, the superiority of Western civilization in relation to other areas of humanity or male superiority over women. I am not speaking about a past fact—finished or overcome. The recent movement of liberation theology identified these causes of poverty and initiated a solidarity with the poor. The question that emerged was not “How do we help the poor?” but “How do we fight the causes of poverty?”

The French philosopher, Paul-Michel Foucault, remarked some years before liberation theology, “We are not really with the

My theology is a love letter to the God of my faith, the church, and to my people.

poor, if we are not against poverty.” Are we really committed to the poor if we are only critical of the causes of poverty? We must be more than critical; we must fight against the causes of poverty. Today it is not enough to say this person is very generous with the poor, but to ask what is the position of this person against poverty, against the structures of today.

Another factor which has changed our understanding of poverty is the realization of the complexity of poverty. Poverty has one very clear, important, economic aspect, but it is not the only aspect; poverty is more formidable. In liberation theology, we speak about the poor as the insignificant person: insignificant socially, but not insignificant in front of God before Whom no one is insignificant. And a person could be insignificant for several reasons: for economic reasons, or for the color of a person’s skin, or because these persons are not fluent in the dominant language of a country, or because they are women. For these reasons, and many others, persons are judged insignificant. When we speak about the preferential option for the poor, we take into account these complexities of poverty. In

the Bible, the poor are not only the economic poor, but persons considered inferior, the Samaritans, for example, in the time of Jesus.

Protesting Cultural Death

Poverty is more than a social fact. In an ultimate analysis, poverty means death—death early and unjust—physical death through sickness and through hunger, but also cultural death. The anthropologists like to say culture is life. When we despise a culture, we are killing the persons belonging to this culture. Bartolomé de las Casas and the Dominican missionaries in the sixteenth century protested this cultural death of the indigenous people of Central America. The natives were dying before their time, and this happens today—in Africa and in Haiti people are dying from sicknesses already overcome by humanity because they have no money. You only have to remember the continual struggle of the South Africans to receive treatment for HIV-AIDS. People are dying

before their time—this is poverty. And from our perspective in liberation theology, we resist addressing poverty only as a social fact, as a social difference, or as economic progress. From this historical movement, we learned how *to do theology* by reflecting on our social contexts and social aims, and I believe we need to recuperate this process of theology.

The other process is more ecclesial. In the middle of the twentieth century, the Second Vatican Council deliberated on the question of poverty. Pope John XXIII encouraged the council to recognize that the Church is “the Church of the poor.” We often repeat the expression, “the Church of the poor,” but the expression has a limited context. We must desire a Church of *everyone*, where no one is excluded, especially the poor—what we call the Christian community. This point, however, was not so present in the formal documents of the council but was more present in the corridors of the council. I cannot justify this omission, but I can understand the reasons for the omission because the most important persons in the council—bishops and theologians—came from rich countries where poverty is treated as an abstract social question. Poverty is a human question, a Christian question—because poverty is death; it is inhuman; it is anti-evangelical.

Theologians, among them my friends, will say, “I know you are very concerned with poverty because you are Peruvian.”

I reply, “No my friend, I am concerned because I am Christian.”

Theologies come from the challenges of historical events; modernity is a historical event that was not immediately recognized by the church. You know the name of a great man, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran theologian and martyr. Bonhoeffer questions our ability to speak of God in the modern world because it seems for many contemporary people that we do not need to speak about God. I labor in Bonhoeffer’s question.

In my parish, I was preaching a more hypothetical, theoretical, and familiar message—God loves you. Whether we are speaking about the gospel or a parable, the final answer always is, “God loves you.” We have no other message, and we change it very little because we want the people to come back next week.

One day while preaching from my theoretical hypothesis, a person from my community said, “You know, you are a great humorist because you speak about the love of God, and you are living in our neighborhood; you know our lives—we have no work; we have no food; and you say, ‘Not only does God love you, but you are the first for God.’”

We must try always to be serious in our preaching, and I have no doubt how God loves all of us—I have no doubt—but this is not the question. The question is: What is my commitment to this affirmation of the love of God? I ask myself how can I say to the poor person, “God loves you.” This is the question in the beginning of the reflection of what we call liberation theology.

I am absolutely convinced this question is greater than our capacity to answer. I do not pretend liberation theology has the complete answer to the question; liberation theology is a serious attempt to be coherent in preaching God’s love.

Living Into the Lives of Others

Liberation theology began from a need to define theological reflection: the practice of interpreting the Word of God and proclaiming God’s Kingdom in a language not of heavenly origin but of human. Theology is marked by historical moments captured by human language to help Christian communities proclaim the evangelical message. We must use language appropriate to the problems of the moment, and if we neglect the history of our people—the history of human-

ity—we inhibit our abilities to reflect theologically. As a source of theology, we must live into the daily lives of others.

Although Christ instructs His disciples, in the Gospel of Matthew, to go into the world and make disciples of all nations, we do not have any instructions for going into the

A theology of liberation means a theology of salvation; if poverty is an unjust reality, an anti-evangelical reality in which the ultimate analysis is death, then liberation is the word that is against this reality; to liberate is to give life.

world to do theology. I have never found these words in the Bible, and I have read the Bible many times. My intention here is not to say that all theology is irrelevant—that is not the question—theology is very relevant, but we must locate its place exactly. Theology is a human effort, coming from grace, and involves our going forth to communicate this grace—our receiving the gift of the kingdom and our communicating the kingdom—this is theology. Theology is not a religion of physics; theology is a reflection of life. To follow Jesus is a practice; in praxis, you are following Jesus, not only affirming we need to follow Jesus, but following Him. This is a spirituality; this is following Jesus Christ— theology comes from our following.

One of my teachers, Marie-Dominique Chenu, a French Dominican, wrote a book about this question of theology. He affirms, “If we want to understand a theology, we must go to the spirituality which is behind the theology.” If we want to understand Thomas Aquinas, we must go to Dominic, the founder of the Dominicans. If we want to understand Bonaventure, we must go to Francis. Discovering this approach during my first year of theological studies has led me to understand that the soul of theology is spirituality and that theology is oriented toward the proclamation of the gospel. We affirm this approach very strongly in liberation theology and are criticized for having “a utilitarian view about theology.” We say, “No, theology is useful because the meaning of theology is to help a Christian community announce the Gospel.” Here is the place of theology, located between spirituality and a proclamation of the kingdom. The Kingdom of God is the center of the message of Jesus

Christ, and in the kingdom, according to Scripture, the least are first and must be first—the forgotten persons must be recalled.

Two decades ago, a very humble biblical scholar and friend from France, was visiting countries in Latin America—Chile, Bolivia, Peru—and at one moment, he told me, “You

know, I understand one point; it is impossible to speak about the kingdom of God without speaking about the poor.”

I replied, “My friend, I admire your humility and your discovery, but you have been dealing with the Bible for more than forty years, and this message was not clear to you before now?”

In theology, there also is a question of liberation, and we take the word liberation for two reasons. The Hebrew and Greek words in Scripture, translated as salvation and redemption, may be translated also as liberation. Liberation was a very important word in civil society in Latin America. Several people were speaking about liberation, movements of liberation, and I think it is the duty of contemporary theology to take the language of civil society and to define the word from a theological perspective. Liberation is salvation. A theology of liberation means a theology of salvation; if poverty is an unjust reality, an anti-evangelical reality in which the ultimate analysis is death, then liberation is the word that is against this reality; to liberate is to give life.

Three Dimensions of Liberation

We then speak of three dimensions of liberation; social liberation from unjust structures, personal liberation from prejudices, and spiritual liberation from sin—because in a theological analysis, the root of injustice is sin. Sin is to break our communion with God and to break our communion with other persons. With sociological methods, you cannot arrive at this understanding of sin; however, a theological analysis certainly leads to such an understanding. We speak about one liberation in three dimensions.





STEVE EVANS

Dimension is a geometric expression. This podium from which I speak has three dimensions, but it is only one podium. When attempting to answer the question of God's love for the poor, we identify different aspects of liberation. For example, one aspect is acknowledging that the condition of the poor is *not* the will of God. In my parish, I fought for years against the view, expressed mostly by women: "We are born to suffer." If they are born to suffer, suffering is their destiny. No one is born to suffer, but to be happy. Blessed are the poor in spirit; *happy* are the poor in spirit. And I must recognize a modest success in my fight because women, the poor women of my parish in Lima where I served for twenty-five years, received this destiny from their mothers. It is not enough to say to the poor person that God has not determined your condition of poverty; poverty is a human construction; we have made these conditions.

I would like to recall two main texts from the gospels that are important in liberation theology. In Matthew 25: 31-46, Jesus speaks of the last judgment and says if we give food to the least of our siblings, we give food to Him." This is a very bold affirmation of the gospel writer. In the first testament we have several affirmations close to this, but certainly this text of Matthew is very relevant because Jesus is identified as the least. In the face of the poor, we must discover the face of Jesus Christ. Bartolomé de las Casas discovered the

Liberation theology tries to offer a hermeneutic of hope. Theology is one reflection, trying to find in different moments in history, the reasons to hope.

face of Jesus in the faces of the indigenous people, and he saw the face of Jesus in the faces of the African slaves. None of his contemporaries in Spain made this claim. I think Las Casas had evangelical intuition. He was not seeing in the faces of the indigenous people the faces of non-Christians; he saw the faces of the poor according to the gospel. As a missionary, Las Casas' evangelical intuition was not only to baptize them, but to see them as "the first" just as we should see the poor as "the first" in our colonial society. And another Christian, Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, a sixteenth-century Peruvian, composed a letter of three volumes to the king of Spain in which Guaman Poma described the ill treatment of the Peruvians, his native people, by the Spanish. By also citing Matthew 25, Guaman Poma criticizes the Spaniards when he writes, "You speak about the gospel, but you do not practice the gospel."

Another text important to our understanding of liberation comes from the Gospel of Luke, the narrative of the Samaritan. We have two questions in the beginning of the parable: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" and "Who is my neighbor?" My neigh-

bor—*my* is the possessive of I, the first person. In other words, who around me is my neighbor? But Jesus also asks a question: "Which of these three [the Levite, the Priest, the Samaritan] proved to be a neighbor to the [wounded] man?" You see the shift? Spontaneously, we think the Samaritan was the neighbor, but this is not the lesson of the parable because strictly speaking we "have" no neighbors. When we approach other persons, we are meeting neighbors; we are converting a person to neighbor, and I become, myself, the neighbor of this person.

Now which of these three is the neighbor? The most important neighbor in the parable is the wounded man because we know nothing about his identity, only that a wounded man has become impoverished. We do not know if he is a Jew; we do not know if he is a Samaritan; we do not know. The other persons have identities; we know about their social functions and responsibilities. The

priest and the Levite have responsibilities in the temple; the Samaritan is representative of a people despised by the Jewish

people, and the innkeeper had at least one house for receiving people. Even the robbers have an identifiable function, to rob.

The wounded man is really an anonymous person. The question is: How do we approach the wounded man as neighbor and convert ourselves into neighbors? The parable has no further reference on how to gain eternal life or to enter the kingdom, so I believe the greater lesson is that we are called to approach persons, foremost, because they are in need. When we speak about solidarity with the poor, we are speaking about our relationships with neighbors. The poor are persons, and they are many; the poor are human persons, and among human persons we have very good people and very bad people. We cannot idealize the poor.

The Serious Reasons to Hope

Liberation theology tries to offer a hermeneutic of hope. Theology is one reflection, trying to find in different moments in history, the reasons to hope. When I speak of hope, I am not speaking about easy optimism or illusion, but serious reasons to hope. In the first epistle by Peter, we are reminded that we must be

ready to give reasons for our hope. Theology must be these reasons.

Despite the oppressive political situation in El Salvador, Óscar Romero insisted, "When I preach, I am always preaching hope—hope." It is important to discern in historical events what we refuse and what we accept, and it is important to discern the signs of the times. It seems to me, we have today in the global world, a tendency to eliminate hope from the social poor persons and the poor belonging to poor sectors. Today, people are speaking, for example, "We are living in a postmodern world." Personally, I am not so sure, but maybe it is one manner to be modern, but postmodern, post-industrial, post-capitalist, and postcolonial—people today love to be "post." The consequences are very clear. To say to the poor that their efforts to become agents of their destiny belongs to the past is against hope. Hope does not exist in a moment; we must create hope. Hope is a gift, a grace, and when we receive a gift, it is not for us; it is for our neighbor. To welcome the grace of hope is to create resources in history. Theology must be nothing more than a contribution to say to the poor person, "Your conditions could change, perhaps not tomorrow, but it is possible." We must react against the idea that the poor are destined to live in an endless state of poverty by uniting with them as friends to criticize and to help change their present circumstances.

When we speak about the preferential option for the poor, we are speaking about the "real poor"—those who are materially poor; the preferential option is not an option for the poor in spirit. In the Gospel of Matthew, the poor in spirit are the saints, the good disciples; however, the preferential option is not an option for the saints. The option is for the real poor who live ceaselessly in dehumanizing conditions.

We cannot understand the word "preferential" if we do not take into account the universality of the love of God. By employing the word preferential, we are reminded not only to recall God's love for the poor foremost but to recall God's love for all humanity. Preference does not exclude anyone; preference is only to say that the poor are first—that the love of God is universal and preferential at the same time. If we say, "We only love the poor," or "All persons are equal," we do not understand the Christian message. We must have the courage to confront the tension between universality and prefer-

ence—a tension, not a contradiction. Tension is dynamic and is the meaning of preferential. The word "option" in Spanish differs from its English counterpart by meaning "to make a decision." Option is a substantive word whereas the word optional functions objectively, and we have the custom of saying that there always exists a "non-optional option." Faith is an example of a free option because we live freely as human persons.

The preferential option for the poor may be interpreted as our living and working with the poor, but this interpretation is not complete. The preferential option for the poor has three dimensions: to be committed to the poor in the practice of one's faith and spirituality; to read human history from the perspectives of the poor, or as Walter Benjamin suggests, to read human history against the oppressive grain; and to hear the gospel as the announcement of the just kingdom.

I have been asked many times in my life, "If you were to write a book on liberation theology today, would your approach be the same as in 1971?" I initially said, "No, no." Then people would ask me, "Do you not agree with your book?" I replied, "No, no. I would have written the book in the same way." People responded, "Good, then your theology has not needed to change."

But today I have a different answer to the question. When a polite journalist recently asked the question, I asked him, "My friend, are you married?" He was very surprised because he could not understand the relationship between marriage and liberation theology. He answered, "Yes, I am married." And I asked, "How many years have you been married?" He shrugged, "I don't know, twenty years." I asked him, "Are you able to write a love letter to your wife in the same words from the time when you were her fiancé?" He said, "No." "Well, this is my case, my friend."

Such is my situation. For me to do theology is to write a love letter to the God of my faith, the church, and to my people; my theology is a love letter. I cannot phrase the letter in the same way, but the love is the same.

ART AND ARTICULATION

Observing Love in the Margins

BY JUSTIN TRAVIS OWINGS, MTS1

Among the elective courses in theological studies offered during the 2011 fall semester was the class “Suffering, Politics, and Liberation” taught by Bruce Morrill, S.J. Twenty-six students joined Professor Morrill, the Edward A. Malloy Professor of Catholic Studies, in exploring political and liberation theologies from Europe, South America, and North America. With narrative being a fundamental category of such contextual theological work, the course entailed reading both systematic and biographical texts. Class sessions were largely discussion-oriented while formal written work during the semester challenged students to integrate the theological and biographical material.

*For the final paper, Professor Morrill invited the students to select three models of power in Bernard Cooke’s *Power and the Spirit of God* that both personally spoke to them and could serve to integrate critical insights they had garnered from the entire semester’s readings.*

For our readers, we include the course bibliography, followed by two particularly successful, distinctive final essays.

Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering* (Fortress Press, 1975).

I, Rigoberta Menchu, ed. Elizabeth Burgos-Debray, 2nd ed. (Verso, 2009).

Essential Writings: Gustavo Gutiérrez, ed. James Nickoloff (Orbis Books, 1996).

James Brockman, *Romero: A Life* (Orbis Books, 1989).

Bernard Cooke, *Power and the Spirit of God: Toward an Experience-Based Pneumatology* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

James Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Orbis Books, 1991).

Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Westminster John Knox, 1982/2002).

Nature observes the highest diversity and activity occurring in the space between two biological communities: between fungi and plant, human and plant, or as Wendell Berry describes, between field and forest—the space of margins. Bernard Cooke, in his experience-based pneumatology, *Power and the Spirit of God*, rightly situates our creativity within nature and therefore situates our words and symbols within nature, a nature that seems to preface the marginal spaces. The way humans articulate and observe nature with words and symbols stemming from experience contextualizes human-to-human love (or oppression) and God-to-human love. The difference between correct and incorrect articulation and observation is the difference between human words and God’s work—correct when placed where God is working.

Cooke’s skeletal sketching among nature, creativity, symbol, and the Spirit of God’s creative love invites an exploration of his, Cornel West’s, and Gustavo Gutiérrez’ art and articulation of observing love in the margins.

The attempt is to be articulate. Concision matters, and the connections between the parts of art, observation, marginality, word, Spirit, love and ritual—creative in form—also matter. As the themes have connections, they interact with one other to inspire subtleties in and of themselves. My goal of articulation, then, comes with failures: I do not contain the themes or the connections, but I am contained.

Central to the art and articulation of love is correct observation of and within nature.



Observation implies looking and seeing deeply but also implies an active praxis. To observe is to move—a directed intentional thrust towards attendance, towards service, towards care. Articulation, from the Latin meaning “small connecting part,” connects observations—movement. Art is observation. Observation is art.

Observation occurs in marginal spaces. Diversity, activity, and creativity occupy this marginal space. Cooke argues, “It would be a mistake in studying the culture-changing power of new ideas [read: observations] to overlook the role played by the arts.”

West draws on black artists within the four identified traditions of the Afro-American responses to racism—exceptionalist, assimilationist, marginalist, and humanist—to chronicle exactly these culture-changing observations. Specifically, the marginalist tradition, dealing primarily with the acceptance or rejection of and within Afro-American culture and resonating deeply from a shifted rural identity to an urban identity, posits individuals who are marginal to Afro-American culture and who do not desire assimilation into the American mainstream. The marginalist artist creates “out of no illusions about the self” by “a rebellious act of imagination.” The tradition “serves as an impetus to creativity.”

And Gutiérrez agrees, though in a less formally artistic understanding. His name alone evokes the culture-changing power of

observation from the social margins. But more importantly, he draws from the poor land-working Peruvians. The art of those who work land, especially in Peru, is the creation of culture—land and humanity are the canvas; work is the tool; culture is the goal, never finished.

West and Gutiérrez are observers holding a thematically similar gaze, cast in the modernity of the human project, but utilizing different cameras.

“Go with your love to the fields.”

—Wendell Berry

*“Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front,”
from *The Country of Marriage*, 1973*

Importantly, West rejects, though charitably, the marginalist response by claiming, “The Afro-American marginalist tradition promotes a self-image of both confinement and creativity, restriction and revolt” and “does not provide acute observations on political struggle.” West does concede the marginalist tradition “is important because it grapples with the personal torment endemic to modernity.” The rejection by West is ultimately due to the marginalist “individualistic, alienated, searching for home” mode of being, which for the sake of argument West must reject to maintain democracy as the favored “mode of being.”

The art is of words. Word, as Cooke notes, is an element of the broader category of sym-

bol. Gutiérrez says, “Much of what we now criticize in modern society is due to the fact that we Christians did not know how to be critical and involved in its construction, attentive to what is valid in its demands, and able to share our own message.” For Gutiérrez, the problem is one of articulation when Christian words are not shared, or correctly observed, or worse, possibly suppressed.

Unfortunately, oppression, as an independent, self-acting symbol within the world has historically been articulated—oppression has mastered language. The world has become by oppression. Oppression has most readily been, and continues to be, the human’s dominant art. Christians, when resisting oppression, were not attentive to the connecting parts and did not articulate the meaning or hold the power of words. Cooke states simply, “They who master language have a considerable power to master human life.” In our case, oppression is “they.”

But history is not in want of a clear and viable alternative to oppression. West’s main task is to “articulate an Afro-American philosophy predicated on the notion that black voices—mediated through European languages and American realities—had significant insight for the human quest for wisdom and the struggle for freedom.” In other words, West articulates an alternative observation from the margins.

The art comes from the marginal spaces. Articulation is the inspiring muse. The muse

comes from the margins, from outside the human person, from the Spirit. "Word never functions apart from Spirit," says Cooke. Spirit observes in marginal space to create word and art.

West's prophetic project is centered on Afro-American art. He is observing the historical prophetic articulations of black artists and making them attentive to embodied love. He says, "The black prophetic Christian tradition...exemplifies a courage to hope in the face of undeniably desperate circum-

The art comes from the marginal spaces. Articulation is the inspiring muse. The muse comes from the margins, from outside the human person, from the Spirit.

stances rooted in a love that refuses to lose contact with the humanity of others or one's self. And the black musical tradition—from the spirituals and blues to jazz and hip-hop—embodies a desire for freedom and a search for joy in the face of death-dealing forces in America." A characteristic of West's writing is his deep drawing from history, always from the margins.

To read West, though, I had to "zoom out." For the twenty-fifth anniversary (2002) edition of *Prophesy Deliverance* (original, 1976), he offered a reflective and revealing preface. West's preface is by an older, mature self. By the time of this preface, he has had time to observe further, articulate, and practice his message. He has developed into the Spirit of the message he addresses briefly in the text; the medium has become the message, his art. He is writing, and more importantly, he is *being* the funk, the jazz, and the hip-hop. He is existing as art. He is in love.

I understand Gutiérrez' art in a less traditional way than West's. It is still the observation and articulation from the margins, inspired by God and results in love—embodied art. Gutiérrez meticulously labors over words, especially "preferential," "option," and "poor," contextualized by the reality of land—of fields, forests, mountains, valleys, humans, animals and work. He is claiming meaning for his art. He articulates the mean-

ing of oppression: "The exploited and marginalized are today becoming increasingly conscious of living in a foreign land that is hostile to them, a land of death, a land that has no concern for their most legitimate interests and serves only as a tool for their oppressors, a land that is alien to their hopes and is owned by those who seek to terrorize them." He concedes, "efforts to change the situation can come only from the 'outside'." Oppression impoverishes to death.

Even in his articulation of oppression is

the articulation of his love: "Christian poverty, an expression of love, is solidarity *with the poor* and is a protest *against poverty*." Gutiérrez can articulate the oppression of his neighbors because he is in love. Liberation gifts life. "Poverty is an act of love and liberation." He is art. He is in love.

West and Gutiérrez observe the margins. They have made neighbor of the margins. They have made art. They have "accepted the gift of the Lord's presence." Love is the free gift of God's presence. God is articulated in this love. West's hope is "grounded in Christian love." Love is the Spirit articulating the margins. Referring to Jesus, Cooke connects Spirit, love, acts, experience, the marginalized and sacrament: "It seems undeniable that in his public ministry, he felt himself empowered by God's Spirit, empowered to act lovingly as he did. His parables reflect his awareness that the healing and saving power, God's Spirit, to which he bore witness in word and deed was that of love, unconditional divine love. Furthermore, his compassion and concern for those he encountered, especially for the marginalized, were the sacrament in which he experienced his Abba's love for those people." By including "servanthood," Cooke places power in this love articulated by the Spirit in the margins: "What seems clear is that Jesus' immediate disciples and the first generations that

produced the Christian Scriptures possessed a developed theology of love as power, a theology that focused on God's Spirit and that was expressed in servanthood." Observation is service.

Ritual observance is the combined human and God articulation of Spirit, of divine communication. Ritual is the Spirit's art—the sacrament of observation. Cooke notes the recent development of friendship—that is love—as a sacrament, advancing the "insight that genuine love between humans is the most basic symbol of the presence of a loving God in human life."

Indeed, we must go into the fields at the spatial edges of our cities where the art of hearts freely communicates—changing, and free to change—free, and embodied—always alive, always dying.

When we are appropriately situated, like Gutiérrez and West, we go where they go: to the margins observing love there and in our being. Appropriately situated humans become neighbors, spatially and spiritually—in and at the margins and openly present to nature—contained. The marginal ditch between road and field is occupied by the Samaritan, by us, neighbors to humans, biological communities, and God. West and Gutiérrez articulate to us where the margins are: where God observes, inspires, and loves.

Observation occurs in the margins. Words, a tool of nature, are used to articulate those observations and are inspired by and ritually practiced by God's creative, artistic Spirit of Love.

The essayist earned his baccalaureate in business administration with an emphasis in entrepreneurship from Belmont University and currently serves as an urban grower for The Nashville Food Project.

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THE EXODUS FROM GOD TO GOD

Hell, Fear, and the Power of Images

BY KATRINA ANNA STONE, BA'11, MDV2

I enter into a large, open space that is flanked to the right by a somewhat hidden and vaguely discernible golden double-door gate. The open space is awash and nearly dazzling with a brilliant shade of white. It appears that aside from the gate on the right, the area is surrounded by an unknowable region, a depth, perhaps a great abyss. I have the sense that there are many people, perhaps multitudes, standing around. A conspicuous podium is standing in the center of the room, holding a very large, golden book. Even more conspicuous and still central, though farther behind this podium, is a large golden throne. I cannot see the face of the being who is sitting on the throne—it appears to be an anonymous ruler. I feel no awe, connection, or love for this being—only terror, domination, and threat. Upon entering the room, two figures, which appear somewhat human, though not exactly—they seem to be angels—lead me into the center of this space, and stand me in front of the great book that everyone present knows as the Lamb's Book of Life. My name is called out, and these beings begin leafing through the pages of the book, and once locating a page, search more closely on that page. As I wait, I know I am at the gates of heaven and hell. I know that I have died and am now at that crucial moment of judgment, the result of which has already been determined by whether or not I

was really “saved.” I know that the book before me contains all of the names of the saved. The terrible anxiety surfaces within my own immense uncertainty as to whether I really am saved.

Initially, as I wait, I feel fairly assured that my name is in the book. They will find it. I recall how I fervently prayed the special prayer the preachers called “The Sinner’s Prayer” over and over again. I had encountered the images of hell—the eternal agony of separation from God and the torment wherein even one drop of water would be denied the sufferer immersed in the flames—frequently in the preaching during my visits to my grandparents’ Baptist church. I explicitly remember being taught this prayer one muggy summer evening during Bible School at a Baptist church that I visited with one of my friends when I was in elementary school. The pastor bent down before us in the classroom where we were all sitting and said that if we really wanted to be saved from hell, where our current sinful state destined us after death, we should repeat the words he would pray. I earnestly repeated the words after him, which involved acknowledging that I was a sinner without hope on my own, admitting that although I did not deserve it, I accepted the gift that Jesus gave by dying on the Cross in my place, and asking Jesus to save me. The pastor said that we really had to mean these words we were speaking. I

was not sure what it entailed to mean the words I was repeating, but I tried very hard to do so. When I opened my eyes, I felt different; I had been changed; I had been saved. This feeling faded after a couple of days, leaving me with the gaping question of whether or not I had really been saved. Perhaps the words did not take. I thought I needed to say the words again. And then I said them again and again. The repetition of this prayer continued for months and extended into years, each time, hoping it would save me, as I remained mired in the terror of condemnation hinged upon uncertainty.

The interval passes, and a voice announces to me that my name is not found in the book. A sickening dread pervades me, and I beg them to look again. There must have been a mistake. I know it is there. They look again, and no, I am informed that my name is not in the book. A loud voice pronounces the final judgment, saying: “Depart from me, I never knew you.” I am going to hell. I feel nauseated and frantic, confused, desperately wondering what it was that I did or believed wrongly and what it was that I should have done or believed instead, wondering if I was condemned by God all along, a hopeless case, rejected at creation.

The dream ends, but the effects remain with me. I begin this essay on a confessional note by sharing a dream that I experienced when I was around the age of ten. I include this autobiographical narrative for two main reasons: first, I want to elaborate to the reader the context from which I am writing this essay; second, this dream serves as an attestation to the immense power of images—a power so strong that it becomes rooted within the depths of the psyche, even reappearing in the form of dreams. In his *Power and the Spirit of God: Toward an Experience-Based Pneumatology*, Bernard Cooke elaborates upon the power of images to influence thoughts and actions. Our sense of reality is constructed through images in an ongoing process of ordering and making meaning out of sensory experiences. Insofar as ideological narratives are the threads comprising the fabric of our constructed realities, these narratives are themselves meta-products of the imagining process. As a creative act, imagining is the necessary means by which humans transcend themselves towards a larger reality and sense of meaning. This is particularly pertinent to the way that humans image God and the larger narratives that sustain a sense of ultimate meaning. Given the immense power of images over human life, this power is very easily abused to exercise a dominating control over others. The abuse of the power of images is intricately linked to the power held by fear. Through the creation of images laden with fear, images are manipulated by the powerful in order to control and dominate others.

Images—as well as those who construct them—hold a dual power both to control and dominate as well as to heal and liberate. The power of images that is used in the control and domination of others is nearly always linked to a threat that draws upon the power of fear. The notion of an omnipotent God who punishes sinners in hell is, I argue, an example of such a theologically abusive use of the power of images and fear. Cooke understands power primarily as “the ability to achieve a particular goal.” The motivational force involved with individuals in this task can be either negative or positive. The dominating use of images for control

results in an act of “power over” others through the *negative motivational force* of fear. The alternative that I argue for in this paper is a *positive motivational force*, or as Cooke describes it, an erotic force. This erotic force is an attraction to that which is desirable and finds its culmination in relationships grounded in love.

Cooke’s theory prompts me to consider the fundamental significance of the opposition of retributive justice and gratuitous love. This opposition can be traced to the core of various imagistic and ideological expressions, including hell, that function to exert dominating control over others. A model of punitive acts grounded in retributive justice has no place for the freedom and empowerment that love requires. The best that can be hoped for in such a framework is an obedience that is forged out of terror and domination. It is only within a framework based upon a fundamental gratuitousness, func-

Images—as well as those who construct them—hold a dual power both to control and dominate as well as to heal and liberate.

tioning as a positive motivational force towards the good, that authentic love is possible. This is because love, at its core, requires a radical freedom and openness that does not seek to control the other but rather loves the other enough to let the other freely respond to love’s invitation.

The shift from a framework of retributive justice to one of gratuitous love gestures toward a redefinition of what could be meant by power, love, and redemption. Redemption is the liberation of the human person—and of all creation—through the free response elicited by the attractive power of authentic relationship and love. In the end, what becomes necessary is a salvation from fear for authenticity and love.

HELL AND THEOLOGICAL SADISM

The interrelatedness of the power of images and the power of fear come to a particularly poignant manifestation in the rhetoric found within versions of Christianity that proclaim an all-powerful God who punishes disobe-

dience with suffering, often understood as occurring after death in hell. Vivid fear-instilling images of hell as a place of eternal torment for the disobedient exemplify this effort to manipulate images according to efforts at domination. Popular images of hell abound and involve explicit imageries of hellfire, everlasting torment, suffering amidst terrifying loneliness, scenes of standing before an angry, judging God; however, even more fundamental than these explicit images is the pervasively imagined ideology underlying these images of punishment as retributive justice. There are many expressions of Christianity that do not draw upon such explicit images of hell but share the same view of dominating power and underlying images of God.

My own formative experience within Christianity has been a mixture of predominantly conservative, Evangelical Reformed, and Calvinist Christianity, interspersed with an evangelical, largely conservative Baptist expression of Christianity that pervaded the cultural consciousness of the rural southern Appalachia region in which I was reared. Similar to Dorothee Soelle’s Calvinist background, my context has shown me that more nuanced

versions of the same manipulative fire and brimstone ideas often reside beneath sophisticated theological language—instead of a discourse of vivid imagery about hell, a discourse is often proclaimed of the righteousness, holiness, justice, sovereignty, and, most importantly, wrath of God. As Soelle emphasizes, there is an intractable sadism present within the claims of those “who make the wrath of God their essential motif.” In all of these modes of discourse, God is imaged as an omnipotent, dominant, removed, and inevitably male ruler who can exact punishment on those who do not conform to the accepted standards of belief and behavior. Whether explicit imagery of hell is used or whether this imagery is subsumed under a more dominant imagery of God’s attributes of power and wrath, both perspectives fundamentally assume an ideology of retributive justice rather than a vision founded in the gratuitous love and radical freedom of God.

In his article, “To Hell with Hell,” pastor Kevin DeYoung, for example, speaks for

many Christian leaders when he says “we need the doctrine of eternal punishment. Time and time again in the New Testament we find that understanding divine justice is essential to our sanctification.” He continues by delineating seven reasons why “we need the doctrine of the wrath of God.” Aside from citing this wrath as essential for our ability to forgive, live a holy life, understand mercy, and show compassion towards others, his fourth reason is particularly telling and is worth a more extensive quotation:

We need God’s wrath in order to live holy lives. Paul warns us that God cannot be mocked. We will reap what we sow. *We are spurred on to live a life of purity and good deeds by the promised reward for obedience and the promised curse for disobedience.* If we live to please the flesh, we will reap destruction from God. But if we live to please the Spirit, we will reap eternal life (Galatians 6:6-7). Sometimes ministers balk at the thought of motivating people with the threat of eternal punishment. But wasn’t this Jesus’ approach when he says, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28)? *Sometimes we need literally to scare the hell out of people.*

DeYoung is writing in response to a recent challenge to the idea of eternal hell as punishment within the evangelical community. Pastor Rob Bell’s book, *Love Wins: A Book about Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Has Ever Lived*, has generated a remarkable number of strong and angry responses, including DeYoung’s article. Even more importantly, DeYoung does not speak merely for himself but represents a widespread view that particularly finds a home within conservative reformed expressions of Christianity.

This particular article is posted on the Gospel Coalition website, and as such, presumably represents the views of the many well-educated pastors and scholars who take part in the project. This is not simply fire and brimstone preaching but is an intricate theological system founded upon the central tenets of what Soelle refers to as sadistic theology,

namely: God is omnipotent and sovereign; God is just and acts with clear intent according to a particular reasoning; and following these two premises, “all suffering is punishment for sin.” Whether or not DeYoung and the others would be comfortable saying that “all suffering is punishment for sin,” the fact is that such a radical conclusion is where a theology inevitably leads if it is founded upon a God imaged as sovereign, omnipotent, and possessing a justice that is dependent upon wrath in order to attain satisfaction.

RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE VERSUS GRATUITOUSNESS

The notion of fear as an essential negative motivation for loving God and neighbor is assumed throughout the passage previously cited. Buttressing this view, the framework of retributive justice is the assumed foundation of reality, demanding a specific view of God, humanity, and the death of Jesus as atonement for sin. Gustavo Gutiérrez refers to the retributive justice framework as a “give to me and I will give to you” mentality. This closely corresponds to what Soelle, drawing upon Meister Eckhart, describes as the “business spirit.” Essentially, a worldview of retributive justice hinges upon the assumption of reward and punishment. Along with this, a very specific understanding of justice is applied, wherein if God does not punish the sinner for the offenses committed against God, then God is considered unjust. God must fit within the rules of the preconceived framework. Such is a very common way of exerting control by coercing, enticing, and scaring others to make them do what one wants. Aside from the narrowness of this perspective, it requires one to be so consumed by rewards and punishments that one is forced to miss completely the encounter with God and neighbor for their own sakes. What gets lost is the radical gratuitousness that resides at the center of the Christian faith.

Gutiérrez has elaborated on the distinction between retributive justice and gratuitousness through his interpretation of the Book of Job’s inquiry into suffering. By asserting Job’s innocence, Gutiérrez claims the book challenges a retributive ideology. Job’s encounter with God overthrows “the

doctrine of retribution” by recognizing that “God’s love, like all true love, operates in a world not of cause and effect but of freedom and gratuitousness.” This is a radical way of relating to others that does not calculate rewards and benefits. The other is sought not because of what she can do for me, but rather because of who she is. Cooke extends this understanding by drawing upon a conception of I-Thou relationality, within which there is “no other goal than the union itself.” By situating God’s gratuitousness as the fundamental reality, justice is not abandoned but is rather able to take on entirely new dimensions within a relational encounter for its own sake. Asserting as primary God’s justice, holiness, and sovereignty results in a fundamental contradiction within which the love and mercy of God are at odds with God’s justice. Resolving this contradiction results in various understandings of God’s wrath and in a theology founded upon a basic notion of punishment that finds expression in penal atonement theory and ultimately hell—the just punishment that never ends. If all of this is assumed, then it becomes legitimate to, as DeYoung writes, “to scare the hell out of people.”

But is this act of scaring individuals towards God really encouraging an authentic encounter with the God of life and freedom? Is it really offering redemption? Or is this method of motivating through fear not rather a way of enslaving the consciousness of individuals into forms of psychological and spiritual bondage? Far from redemptive, is not this motivation of fear and eternal punishment instead an abusive, even traumatizing, act of domination? Along with Gutiérrez, Soelle, and Cooke, I argue that there is something fundamentally lacking in a perspective that cannot see beyond “the fence” of punishment, fear, and retributive justice.

A number of factors make the perspective of retributive justice intractably entrenched in historic and contemporary consciousness. Foremost among these is the factor of power. Soelle describes historically what she refers to as mystical theology that has continually come into conflict with traditional theology’s emphasis upon the necessity of reward and punishment by positing a foundational “unconditional love for reality.” Mystics and prophets have continually found themselves

in tension with contemporary powers. One can read this ongoing tension between the lines of the entire Christian tradition. The Bible and the Christian tradition contain many voices and perspectives that continually challenge one another. All too often, the mystical-prophetic voices are silenced, for such voices typically do not belong to those

It is the powerful who have created a God in their own image and as such, have much to lose with any challenges to the dominant, constructed imagery.

in power. However, ironically, it is because of the power within the voices of the powerless that these voices must be silenced. Their silent power poses an unbearable threat to those controlling the existing structures of power. If allowed to speak, these voices would demand changes rupturing the systems of dominance.

It is the powerful who have created a God in their own image and as such, have much to lose with any challenges to the dominant, constructed imagery. Anyone who would challenge the dominant view can be silenced by any number of means, including the discrediting act of labeling one as a heretic—a phenomenon that has forcibly resurfaced again in the wake of Rob Bell's challenges to dominant imagery of an authoritarian God and hell as a place of eternal punishment. Often, such silencing is built into the very structure of the system. Through the power of fear, constructed images of hell and of a punishing God serve to silence many questions that individuals might otherwise pose towards the systems being coercively forced upon them. However, the fear of disobeying God by believing wrongly or by challenging authority, and thus being punished, is enough to keep many people trapped within the system—perhaps most tragically those who so dogmatically proclaim these very doctrines.

An additional factor maintaining the entrenchment of the retributive justice mentality is the claim that a view of gratuitousness operates according to a selective reading of the biblical texts offering an inadequate notion of God grounded in weak ideas of love and acceptance, often reduced to a

kind of positive-thinking pop-psychology. The claim is that this view downplays the many passages that speak of God's justice, wrath, and hell, and that a privileging of God's gratuitous love is not biblical. However, the central narratives of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures—namely the exodus of the oppressed from Egypt and the

exodus of humanity from death and alienation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—are founded upon events that are freely initiated by God and burst the confines of a narrow reward and punishment mentality. Indeed, it is as if these events are God's manner of saying that reality does not work according to the rules of retribution. These events are revelation that God's "freely given, unmerited love is the foundation of the world."

It is within the foundational presence of these events—of gratuitous love and freedom—that God's justice and wrath can be more adequately understood. As Cooke indicates, at times within the Scriptures God's wrath is present, but such wrath is corrective rather than vindictive. Vindictive wrath serves no purpose—it only plunges one deeper into an absurd cycle of violence and hatred. I am not arguing that a notion of hell be disregarded altogether—only hell as punishment; however, it is such an understanding of hell, as retributive punishment, that is often identified as the only possible understanding, resulting in what is regarded as a "doctrine of hell." Rather, I argue that hell, just as heaven, is a metaphor through which we attempt to name and express our experiences. Indeed, hell, better than any other word, describes the agonies and suffering of many people on this earth. If it has any meaning at all, just as heaven, hell is a referent that is first and foremost indicative of present realities that may extend into an imagined future. Within this discourse, the essential point is that God's gratuitous love remains the foundational element of our relational existence.

Shifting to a reality in which gratuitousness is the fundamental grounding factor requires that terms which operate within the retributive justice mentality—especially power and love—be re-conceptualized. Power and love are connected. Only a weak and inadequately conceptualized notion of love could assert that love is weak. Love is, in fact, the most powerful reality. Humans are relational beings, and inherent to relationality is a propensity to form attachments, implying love through the seeking of the desirable. It is through the love of the infant and the mother that humans come into maturity; it is through love that we exist. It is an attestation to the influence of the rhetoric of patriarchal power as force and might that love is often considered weak and unimportant. Indeed, within a system of retribution, power is inevitably understood as a means of force and might. The powerful rule by means of exerting a negative motivational force upon subjects, coercing these subjects to attain the ends set forth by the powerful. Love is then rooted in fear and threat; as such, it is considered weak. On the contrary, if power is re-conceptualized not as power over, but as power *with*, then power functions by means of the good that it contains. A positive motivational force, understood as desire, operates by means of attraction.

THE LIBERATION OF IMAGES

Cooke attempts to re-envision the power of God using the metaphor of the Spirit as divine embrace. This embrace empowers by first affirming the value and worth of the embraced and in so doing, sharing with the embraced God's out-pouring love as an invitation to ever greater levels of freedom. In such an understanding, love is not rooted in a threat of punishment but is a concern for that which is the end of its desire—the I-Thou relationship. As Cooke describes, the fear that is operative in this understanding of love is not a fear of punishment, but rather a fear of losing the good which it desires.

Within a perspective of fundamental gratuitousness, God is fundamentally imaged as a lover that loves the world into being. The image of God as lover, in being founded within a radical gratuitousness, deconstructs oppressive images of God and reality. In the midst of this deconstruction, a space opens

up wherein we are free to re-imagine new ways of conceiving God that empower and liberate, rather than further enslave. This is redemption offered by the gospel. The gospel is about liberation and healing; the gospel is about being freed to live fully and creatively. The Spirit of God does not dominate by force, but calls all to freedom. Such liberation demands an exodus from all dominating uses of power. This liberation gives humans the chance to experience God in new ways and to enter ever deeper into relationship with God.

The circuitous nature of the constructed system of fear-images has kept the dominated paralyzed by forbidding questioning of the very system it has created. Ending this essay with the confessional note upon which I began, I can attest to the power of the circuitous system through which fear is used to keep one from challenging precisely this very fear. It is argued that to question is to disobey God in deed, and even more powerfully, in thought and belief, thus incurring the righteous wrath on those whose sinful-

emerge, often in unconscious ways.

As I have written this essay, the thought has repeatedly entered my mind that perhaps I am wrong; perhaps I am dishonoring the holiness of God; perhaps in writing these very words, I am incurring wrath by promoting an untruth about the nature of God. This is the power of the cycle. In these times, I continue to do what I have done since I first broke free from the cycle—with Job, I do not believe in the God who punishes with fear and domination, the God for whom suffering is always a result of sin. If this means a void of agnosticism, then I wait within the void, listening for the invitation of the God beyond God, the God who will lead an exodus from the land of fear and bondage. I wait and trust that my “advocate before God will be God”.

The Spirit of freedom breaks this cycle of bondage by empowering us to trust, to love, and to create new images of God that attest to the liberating and empowering Spirit of love. The good news is that the Spirit is calling all to freedom, working in silent, hidden and profound ways—even within the void of

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The Spirit of freedom breaks this cycle of bondage by empowering us to trust, to love, and to create new images of God that attest to the liberating and empowering Spirit of love.

ness a holy God cannot tolerate. I can attest that I have been told by some in positions of religious power that if I do not accept their particular views of Scripture that I am, in truth, not accepting God.

This can be extended to any number of dogmatic points. Some religious leaders will argue that if particular images of the atonement as penal substitution or of God as an omnipotent, sovereign, and wrathful ruler are challenged and rejected, then so, too, are the questioners by God. It takes a momentous act of faith—through grace—to break out of the cycle. For that reason, many people do not. The power of this rhetoric and these punitive images, especially if they have been one’s only form of exposure to Christianity, is immense. Even more, once one has taken the leap, one remains haunted by the shadow of these dominating voices. As a traumatic trace, the terrifying images reside deep within the consciousness and repetitively re-

atheism, the space between God and God. Within the embrace, in the midst of our bondage, we are empowered to cry unto God to save us from God. The story of Christianity is the story of liberation—that God hears the cry of the oppressed and loves unto freedom.

The essayist was graduated from Vanderbilt University’s College of Arts and Science where she earned the baccalaureate, magna cum laude, in religious studies and philosophy.

Far From the MADDENING MINISTERIAL *Rush*

BY JANE MYERS HERRING, MDIV'12

Sister Macrina Wiederkehr, author and Benedictine monastic of Saint Scholastica Monastery, writes in A Tree Full of Angels: Seeing the Holy in the Ordinary, "Under the guise of ministering to others I had become alienated from myself." She describes her "maddening ministerial rush" and declares that the hectic pace and lack of respect for her own personal needs for healthy living are a "violence" and "irreverence" to herself.

As I read Sister Macrina's testimony to a group of pastors, the room is suddenly full of nodding heads, and I hear the sighs that bespeak exhaustion.

"When you can lovingly be present to yourself, your presence to others takes on a deeper quality also," Wiederkehr suggests. More and more, the church—across denominations—recognizes the need for clergy renewal, renewal which deepens the quality of life for pastors and for congregations.

Long hours, combined with difficulty of drawing boundaries between work life and personal life, are two recurring stressors on the lives of pastors. These stressors can cause pastors to become alienated from themselves and the passion for God that first brought them into the work of ministry. Mahan Marshall Siler, BA'56, who was ordained in 1957 and who has supported clergy renewal since 1998, observes, "We have bet our vocational lives on a Reality we cannot see or measure or control. When I step back, I find this risk astounding."

No doubt, this great risk and the risk the entire church faces as the bride of Christ in a largely postmodern world add to the particular stresses and strains of a pastor's vocation.

Nashville's Upper Room Ministries, where Vanderbilt Divinity School students may be assigned for their field education practica, has developed a program for clergy

and laity to experience in-depth spiritual practices. The Academy for Spiritual Formation provides the setting for a disciplined, ecumenical, and inclusive Christian community where participants gather for forty days over the course of two years to study the spiritual traditions of the church. Because research has shown that the program has been extremely helpful to clergy seeking to renew and transform their ministries, this program became the model for a similar initiative designed specifically for pastors. Funded by a grant from the Lilly Endowment, Companions in Ministry helps pastors discover strategies for transforming a congregation from "functional" to "formational."

As part of my work with Upper Room Ministries, I worked with pastors representing the second generation of the Companions in Ministry program. They met quarterly at the Oblate Renewal Center in San Antonio, Texas, with the intention of exploring writing as a spiritual discipline and as a means of renewing their spiritual lives and the lives of their ministries. The challenges these "writing pastors" faced were the same as those confronted by pastors of the program's first generation—depression, exhaustion, addiction, and spiritual emptiness. The core challenge, however, was living and working in the truth that ministry comes from God while serving churches that tend

to behave in either rewarding or punishing ways—as if ministry comes from and is about the minister. As one cleric in the writers' group remarked, "The church is just set up to reward unhealthy behavior, and it is hard to stay centered on God when you 'perform' and are 'lifted up' by compliments. The problem is that what goes up must come down. And even if it takes a long time to come down, it's lonely. There aren't many people who understand the peculiar situation in which clergy find themselves."

Writing for these "companions" meant writing for the sake of joy alone, not for the purpose of publication or presentation. The writing took the forms of story, poetry, essay, disjointed journal entries, collections of phrases, and conversations with God and with the Bible. This group shared a particular love of writing and experimented with ways of using words as a spiritual practice in a rhythm of silence, prayer, writing, and discussion. What we experienced was more than writing; what we experienced was renewal.

One of the primary "side-effects" of the renewal experienced at Companions in Ministry was spiritual friendship. Ecumenical friendships were fostered and encouraged. An Episcopal priest and a Methodist pastor may not be able to talk polity in the same language, but they can speak more freely of failures and frustrations with their ministries because they are not invested in the same church politics. Eric, a pastor and writer, describes how the friends in the writing group do not depend on the outward roles of "pastor" to understand one another – that part is understood already. "We can be friends who value who we are, without requiring anything from one another."

Eric's communion with writers who



“value both what you do as a writer and who you are as a person” means that life-giving friendships emerge among “friends who do not require anything from you, which is a rare yet liberating feeling.” Eric’s words on friendship, on being accepted and valued, on being seen and understood, describe the healing that can occur in spiritual friendships. Because pastors understand the demands of their role, they can hold for one another a space in which the pastor can step out of that role and “go deep” to find renewal and comfort in reconnecting with the truth of ministry rather than the politics of the church.

These spiritual friendships seem to occur spontaneously when people come together for a shared spiritual practice, be it writing or any other practice done in a manner to nourish the soul. In the Companions in Ministry program, some clergy meet for daily physical exercise done with the intention of coming home to God within. Others meet to practice *lectio divina* while others give themselves to silence. The writers’ group convened to write and share written meditations

and writing practices.

But what happens when the retreat comes to an end and it is time to go home? As one of the “companion guides,” Mahan Siler believes that pastors who are abundantly and soulfully alive share certain traits: they maintain a daily practice—physical, emotional, or contemplative—and they have a “soul friend” who listens and shares in the joys and sorrows of ministry. Trevor Hudson, an author, activist, and pastor from South Africa, says, “Almost at no stage through my pastoral ministry of thirty-five years have I not been accompanied by a listening presence. My first pastoral supervisor used to say to me, ‘We do not learn from experience; we only learn when we reflect on experience.’ To have someone with whom I can reflect constantly on my life and work has often led to transforming insights and fresh ministry-directions. As pastors, we need all the help we can get in helping each other in this work of reflection. It lies at the heart of what ‘doing theology’ as pastors is all about.”

Perhaps it is, after all, this “doing” of the

ology which is the real work of the pastor and the church. Many pastors cite the years of study in seminaries and divinity schools among the happiest days of their lives. Some come from Bible backgrounds and have known since early in life they wanted further study in Biblical texts and theology, history, and the classical and Biblical languages. Some entered graduate programs on a hunch and found that the education was an unexpected joy. Once out in the world and in the churches, pastors—however they first experienced the calling—must incarnate that theology and help others to incarnate their theology. This is no easy task. The abstract truths that work so beautifully for our intellect do not always bear up under the messiness of pastoral experiences. Living, leading, and working in the ambiguities of life require the ability to hope. Hope seems to require both the resilience to face failure faithfully as well as the optimism that the way will be made clear. Pastors need roots and wings: the rootedness of training and reason, the wings of faith and spiritual nourishment. This is not always part of what the church encourages for its pastors, and so pastors must find their own ways of staying spiritually alive by taking up their own spiritual practices and finding that listener who can share in a spiritual friendship.

During the 2012 commencement exercises at Vanderbilt University Divinity School, the essayist received the Nella May Overby Memorial Award in field education for her service to the Veterans’ Administration Hospital, to the Academy for Spiritual Formation with the United Methodist Board of Discipleship, and to the congregation of Harpeth Presbyterian Church.

LOCKED OUT

For tens of years I have been trying to get back in,
without even knowing I had been locked out.
When the door opened,
I didn't realize it had been shut.
The doorway, an unheard whisper.
Joy and sorrow became easier.

I had locked myself out of the well.
The bucket lowered with no way to raise it.
A threadbare rope still attached.
I suppose it was the hoisting mechanism that shut down,
a good thing at the time.

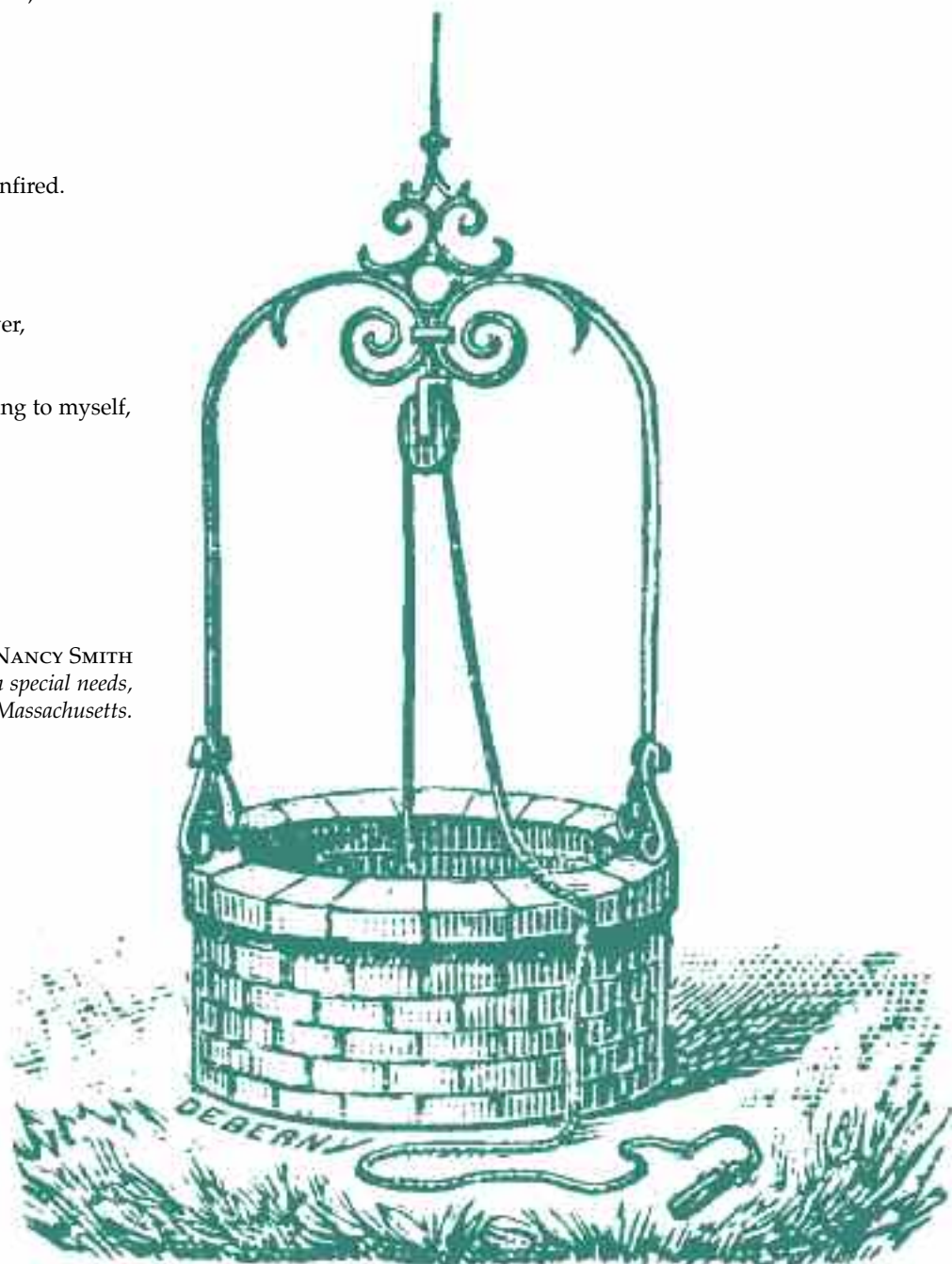
But good things can have shadows and sludge.
They can be warm like sirens.
Evaporation threatened the well.
Minor attempts to raise the bucket failed.
Journals started, abandoned, pots pinched, then left unfired.
I didn't know I had locked myself out.

One day in the car,
not long after stretching the muscles of written word,
I found myself singing songs I had been singing forever,
but to the wrong person.
I had been singing to her, singing to him,
when suddenly and to my astonishment I began singing to myself,
and in that moment of movement the gears cleared,
the bucket accessible to and from the well.

The lowering and raising can still present challenges,
halting, jerking, slipping.
But with a firm hand, and a safe space
I can usually at least get my lips wet.

—NANCY SMITH

*The poet, a retired teacher of children with special needs,
lives and writes in the hills of western Massachusetts.*



gleanings

Alumni/ae Class Notes

Alexander W. Delk, BD'43, who served the Tennessee Conference of The United Methodist Church from 1943-1952 and who retired from the Illinois Public Schools as an educator and administrator, teaches public speaking at Cleveland State Community College, in Cleveland, Tennessee.

Joseph Fred Cloud, BA'44, BDiv'47, DMin'90, received the Lifetime Achievement Award for Human Rights from the National Association of Human Rights Workers during their annual conference in Aurora, Colorado.

James E. Magaw, BD'58, is the coauthor of *A Slice from the Apple*, a compilation of poems from eight colleagues in The Apple Valley Poets.

James D. Clark, BD'59, MDiv'73, was honored by Homewood Cumberland Presbyterian Church with the distinction of pastor *emeritus*. He has served Homewood congregation for twenty-four years and has been a minister for fifty-seven years.

Jerry L. Harber, MDiv'69, DMin'75, has been named the first theologian in residence of Saint Mary's Episcopal Cathedral in Memphis, Tennessee. He has been assigned the task of developing an area wide Christian formation program that will offer classes throughout the academic year.

Richard Alan Bunch, MDiv'70, DD'71, is the author of *Collected Poems 1965-2011*, a volume representing forty-five years of his career as a poet.

Rex D. Edwards, DMin'74, is the author of *An Adventure Into Discovery*, a collection of his experiences from his research at historical Biblical sites.

Lawrence Balleine, MDiv'75, is the author of *Road to Renewal: A Lenten Journey Down U.S. 41*, a spiritual pilgrimage from the Lake Superior shoreline in Michigan's Upper Peninsula to the Atlantic Ocean coast in Miami Beach.

Donald L. Mitchell, DMin'86, has retired from Great Conewago Presbyterian Church

in Hunterstown, Pennsylvania, where he served as pastor for twelve years.

S. John Roth IV, MA'87, PhD'94, was elected to a six-year term as bishop of the Central and Southern Illinois Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Carol Orsborn, MTS'97, PhD'02, has been named executive director of CoroFaith, an institution providing individualized spiritual continuity for the long-term care and aging-in-place communities.

Deanna A. Thompson PhD'98, professor of religion at Hamline University in Saint Paul, Minnesota, is the author of *Hoping for More: Having Cancer, Talking Faith, and Accepting Grace*, published by Cascade Books. The book has been described as providing "a systematic theology enriched by living with cancer."

Brant Pitre, MTS'99, professor of Sacred Scripture at Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans, Louisiana, is the author of *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist: Unlocking the Secrets of the Last Supper*, published by Random House.

Flora Wilson Bridges, PhD'99, is the senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn, New York. She also has been inducted into the Martin Luther King Jr. Board of Preachers at Morehouse College. With her new appointment, she seeks to address "compassion deficit syndrome"—a term she has developed to address the roots of violence, hatred, and intolerance toward those who are marginalized and vulnerable in society.

Loretta Lambert, MTS'03, was honored as one of New Orleans' "40 Under 40" for her leadership in animal welfare in 2010. She served as a first responder for the Louisiana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Kelly Lane Ayer, MDiv'04, was ordained on July 16, 2011, to the priesthood in the Episcopal Church and has been appointed priest-in-charge at Saint John's Episcopal

Church in Mount Morris, New York. She also serves as the director of Zion House, the first transitional residence in New York for homeless female veterans.

Benjamin Miller-Coleman, MTS'06, and **Valerie Miller-Coleman, MDiv'07**, welcomed their first child, a daughter named Lucinda Jane, on August 25, 2010. Benjamin is the assistant attorney general for the State of Kansas, and Valerie has been ordained by the United Churches of Christ and directs Interfaith Hospitality Network which serves families experiencing homelessness in Lawrence, Kansas.

Jim Metzger, PhD'06, is the author of *Dim*, a novel addressing issues of homophobia, racial bigotry, secularism, and Biblical authority. He is currently pursuing a master of arts degree in English at East Carolina University.

Stephen Harrison Baldwin Jr., MDiv'07, pastor of Ronceverte Presbyterian Church, has been elected moderator of the Presbytery of West Virginia and is the youngest person to serve in this role. He also was elected in May 2012 as a representative for the Greenbrier County Board of Education.

Jewly Hight, MTS'08, is the author of *Right by Her Roots: Americana Women and Their Songs*, published by Baylor University Press. The book explores the contributions to Americana music by artists Lucinda Williams, Julie Miller, Victoria Williams, Michelle Shocked, Mary Gauthier, Ruthie Foster, Elizabeth Cook, and Abigail Washburn.

Chad Michael Cunningham, MTS'10, and **Cynthia Carol Savrda**, were married on June 2, 2012, at Saint Michael the Archangel Catholic Church in Auburn, Alabama.

Justin James Reilly, MTS'10, is the regional coordinator for the Office of Justice and Peace in the Catholic Diocese of Richmond's western vicariate. He is responsible for the prison ministries and for managing a grant from Catholic Charities for assisting families whose homes were damaged or destroyed by the effects of the recent tornados in Virginia.

Thomas Brown Richardson, MTS'10, and Hillary Ann Hamblen were married on June 25, 2011, in Benton Chapel. Attending the ceremony were **Wei-erh Chen, MTS'10**, and **Sarah Elizabeth Grove, MTS'10**.

Abdul Rahman Chao, MTS'11, serves as resident scholar and director of adult education at the Islamic Center of Tennessee.

Lindsay Little, MDiv'11, and Dawson Gray were married on May 28, 2011, in Maryville, Tennessee.

Robert Edward McFadden, MTS'11, has completed his first year of doctoral studies in classical literature and patristics at the University of Notre Dame where he has organized a reading group on the canon of Flannery O'Connor. He recently traveled to Milan, Italy, to conduct research at the Biblioteca Ambrosiana on Saint Augustine.

Evan David Johnson, MTS'2, and Laura Eve Wallace were married during an outdoor wedding at sunset on June 2, 2012, with the **Reverend Becca Stevens, MDiv'90**, serving as celebrant.

Obituaries

Oliver Tweedy Foster, BA'41, BD'43, on February 1, 2012, at the age of 98. He served as a pastor for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Alabama, Missouri, Arizona, and California.

George William Wilcher, MDiv'45, on May 12, 2011, at the age of 95. As a retired United Methodist Minister, he was honored by the West Ohio Conference United Methodist Church with the Harry Denman Award for outstanding service in the field of evangelism throughout his forty-eight-year career.

Frederick Burr Clifford, BD'46, on January 6, 2011, at the age of 96. After teaching at Adrian College, he continued his academic career at Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas, where he served as professor of humanities and as dean of the college of arts and sciences.

William Crawford Davis, BDiv'49, on July 3, 2011, at the age of 84. He served many churches throughout northern Alabama and retired from the First United Methodist Church in Florence, Alabama.

Martin Given Frame, MDiv'55, on July 5, 2010, at the age of 84 after a long battle with Parkinson's disease. A veteran of World War II, he served various appointments in the United Methodist Church including minister, district superintendent of the Beckley District, and member and secretary of the Bishop's Cabinet. He also was elected founding president of the Charleston Police Department's Neighborhood Watch Coordinating Committee and served as volunteer chaplain at Thomas Memorial Hospital.

Billy Gene Wright, BD'59, on July 2, 2011, at the age of 83. A Korean War veteran, he served as a United Methodist minister for more than fifty years.

Robert N. Story, BD'60, on June 21, 2011, at the age of 78. He was an activist in the civil rights movement in the 1960s and lead student organized work camps at Jarvis College in Texas. He also served as a minister for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) for more than fifty years.

Gabe Lewis Campbell, BD'61, on February 1, 2012, at the age of 78. He served as a pastor and taught at Chicago Theological Seminary.

Clyde B. Babb, BD'66, on August 27, 2011, at the age of 83. He served as a United Methodist minister for thirty-one years and also taught in elementary education.

Robert L. Ingram, BDiv'68, DMin'72, at the age of 74 due to complications related to Alzheimer's disease. After serving in the United States Air Force and pursuing academic studies, he served as pastor for twenty-eight years to various churches in the United States. He founded and operated Ingram Insurance Agency, Incorporated, and Rollout Express, Incorporated.

Eric L. David, MDiv'74, on February 19, 2011, at the age of 69. After serving as assistant to the pastor at Second New Saint Paul Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., he founded the Victory Baptist Fellowship in Prince George's County.

Kenneth Ray Street, MDiv'75, on December 31, 2010. He served as a minister of the Tennessee Conference of the United Methodist Church and the North Alabama Conference for more than thirty-nine years.

J. Thomas Rousseau, DMin'78, on April 5, 2011, at the age of 78. As a member of the 1978 National Religion in American Life Committee, he was chosen as one of the 100 Outstanding Ministers in America. He served on the board of the Family Services Association and was the president of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) for Mississippi.

Keith Clark, MDiv'80, on March 9, 2012, at the age of 57. Ordained in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in 1981, he served as administrative assistant to the dean of academic affairs at Allen College, was chaplain for Iowa Hospice, as well as a pastor to several congregations.

Joseph Truman Brown Jr., DMin'86, on May 12, 2011. Ordained as a Baptist minister, he served the Baptist Sunday School Board for twenty years and was an ordained chaplain for Baptist Hospital.

Martin Cavert McDaniel, MA'86, PhD'89, on July 16, 2011, at the age of 55. Reverend McDaniel was ordained as a minister in the Presbyterian Church and served congregations in Nashville and Iowa. He also taught religion courses at the University of Nebraska in Omaha for more than a decade.



La Santa Cena

2011

by José Ignacio Fletes Cruz

León, Nicaragua
(born 1952, Managua, Nicaragua)

oil on canvas

20" x 16"

courtesy of the editor

from the exhibition *The Religion, Art, and Politics of Solentiname: Reminiscences and Visions*

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