

Promises, covenant, conduct, instructions, and show help focus these readings upon interior dispositions resulting in exterior conduct. The trick here is avoiding confusing human with divine power and direction. One way of discernment is by juxtaposing truth and politics or power in the matter of fraternal correction. How to Make Friends and Influence People by Andrew Carnegie is a good book, but one with room, but little room, for fraternal correction. The matter of sin not only involves an individual contravening established human dictates, but also involves a matter of accepting those same dictates in the face of God, commanding love—in other words, sin also involves sins of omission.

Jeremiah 33:13-16

verse 14b ... I will fulfill the **promise**

The purpose of keeping the law is not to amass rewards but to find mercy and kindness. A scholar words it, “The steps from embracing the Law as foundational to elitist arrogance and merit-mongering have to do with endemic human weaknesses that make themselves in all religious traditions, in Christianity no less than in Judaism.”¹

verse 15 In those days, in that time,
 I will raise up for David a just shoot;
 He shall do what is right and just in the land.

The verse looks through Advent to Christmas and the Messiah, as part of the **covenant**. A scholar observes that this “*shoot* is from the stump of Jesse (Isa 10:33—11:10; cf. Mic 5:1-5), Jeremiah as a ‘righteous branch’ (Jer 23:5; cf. **33:15**), Ezekiel as a tender cutting from the lofty top of a cedar (Ezek 17:22-25).”² Planting of shoots is particularly pertinent to the Poor Clare Monastery in New Kent County, Virginia where nandina grow. Nandina is an Asian evergreen shrub of the barberry family. The ground cover plant will grow with a winter reddish hue about a foot tall. Nandina spread by extending shoots.

Psalm 25:4-5, 8-9, 10, 14

Up to this point these Notes have systematically used Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., The Spirituality of the Psalms (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002) ISBN 0-

¹ Vincent M. Smiles, “The Concept of “Zeal” in Second-Temple Judaism and Paul’s Critique of It in Romans 10:2,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 2 (April 2002) 292.

² Adrian M. Leske, “Context and Meaning of Zechariah 9:9,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 4 (October 2000) 665.

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8146-2599. From this point on, these Notes begin a systematic use of the trilogy by Hans-Joachim Kraus, Theology of the Psalms, translated by Keith Crim (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1979, 1986, 1992), Psalms 60-150: A Continental Commentary, translated by Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Fortress Press: 1961/1978, 1989, 1993), and Psalms 60-150: A Continental Commentary, translated by Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Fortress Press: 1961/1978, 1989, 1993).

Psalm 25 is a carefully crafted Hebrew alphabetical Acrostic Psalm.³

The Lectionary uses this Psalm at four Sunday liturgies.

Readings	Page in Lectionary	Verses used	
3C	14	4-5, 8-9, 10, 14 (16)	The readings for today.
23B	149	4-5, 6-7, 8-9	(cf. 10) First Sunday of Lent
68B	523	4-5, 6-7, 8-9	(4a) Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
136A	855	4-5, 6-7, 8-9	(6a) Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Funerals also uses this Psalm:

Page	Section	Verses used
224	Responsorial Psalms	13 Funerals for Adults #2 6, 17-18, 20 (16 or cf. #2 and 20)
254	Responsorial Psalms	14 Funerals for Baptized Children 4-6, 20-21 (16)
262	Gospel Readings	15 Funerals for Children who Died before Baptism 4-6, 17 (16 or cf. 2 and 20)
268	Antiphons and Psalms	16 Antiphons and Psalms 1-22 (cf. 18 or ?)

verses 4-5 Your ways, O LORD, make known to me;
teach me your paths,
guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my savior
and for you I wait all the day.

Kraus writes that this post-exilic psalmsinger is a sinner begging God to help him change his ways. The response from God is to the community, rather to the individual.⁴ God will guide the Church.

³ Hanan Eshel and John Strugnell, "Alphabetical Acrostics in Pre-Tannaitic Hebrew," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 3 (July 2000) 443.

⁴ Hans-Joachim Kraus, Psalms 60-150: A Continental Commentary, translated by Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Fortress Press: 1961/1978, 1989, 1993) 320-321.

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verse 8 Good and upright is the LORD;
 thus he shows sinners the way.

God is favoring sinners, showing sinners the way.⁵ The chief sinner in this instance is the psalmsinger and, by extension, the community.

verse 9 He guides the humble to justice,
 and teaches the humble his way.

Kraus uses a different word for *humble*, namely *oppressed*. “He lets the *oppressed* come into judgment and teaches his way to the *oppressed*.”⁶ In a racist-sexist society, *oppressed* carries a different connotation from *humble*.

verse 10 All the paths of the LORD are kindness and constancy
 toward those who keep his **covenant** and his decrees.

verse 14 The friendship of the LORD is with those who fear him
 and his **covenant**, for their **instruction**.

A scholar points out that the reason to keep the **covenant** is mercy and kindness.⁷ Kraus writes, “For those who fear Yahweh, God is a living reality. They look for the self-disclosure of God and are always alert to receive him.”⁸ One might examine one’s conscience in thanksgiving for the self-disclosure of God in the beauty of nature, of people, and of oneself. Failing to find such beauty might then become a cause for penitential sorrow.

⁵ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Continental Commentary*, translated by Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Fortress Press: 1961/1978, 1989, 1993) 321.

⁶ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Continental Commentary*, translated by Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Fortress Press: 1961/1978, 1989, 1993) 317.

⁷ Vincent M. Smiles, “The Concept of “Zeal” in Second-Temple Judaism and Paul’s Critique of It in Romans 10:2,” *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 64, No. 2 (April 2002) 291.

⁸ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, translated by Keith Crim (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1979, 1986, 1992) 157.

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Kraus goes on, in **Psalm 25:10** and **14** Deuteronomic theology uses **covenant** and **commands (testimonies)** synonymously.⁹ The **covenant** involves community, racist and sexist as community may be. Kraus writes, "It is beyond doubt that the concept *** (*hesed*) involves a community relationship and expresses the element of loyalty to community, as is shown with especial clarity by the combination *** ('steadfast love and faithfulness,' **Psalm 25:10**; 40:11; 61:7; 89:14; 138:2 etc.)."¹⁰

Looking for self-disclosure of God in beauty, such an approach to the spiritual life, reminds me of an officemate, who, with a twinkle in his eye, used to encourage me to thank God daily for giving both of us another day in which to excel. In the academic world, I earned a generous livelihood offering fraternal correction in the matter of institutional racism. The high and the haughty were never too glad to see me coming, but they did give me enough room in which to flourish. God bless them.

Fraternal correction is based on the ability to recognize ugliness and to oppose ugliness. In the matter of truth versus politics within a context of racism or sexism, orderliness and beauty apparently reside in the *status quo*. Standing up to misguided but established authority is rarely, if ever, beautiful at the time of objection, even objection made with a loving heart, kindness, and, if possible, without embarrassment.

verse 10 All the paths of the LORD are kindness and *constancy*

The Vulgate (circa 410): CAPH. Universae viae Domini Misericordia et *veritas*

Douay-Rheims (1582-1610): All the ways of the Lord are mercy and *truth*

King James (1611): All the paths of the LORD are mercy and *truth*

Jerusalem (1966): All Yahweh's paths are love and *truth*

New American (1970): All the paths of the LORD are faithful *love*

New Jerusalem (1985): Kindness unfailing and *constancy* mark all Yahweh's paths

Truth, love, and constancy intertwine the translations. Identifying truth with love is helpful for contemporary Christian living. Truth is not only for the scholar, but is also for

⁹ Hans-Joachim Kraus, Theology of the Psalms, translated by Keith Crim (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1979, 1986, 1992) 56.

¹⁰ Since I do not read Hebrew and my computer does not write Hebrew, *** represents Hebrew letters in the following text. Hans-Joachim Kraus, Theology of the Psalms, translated by Keith Crim (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1979, 1986, 1992) 44.

the lover. While love is blind, that blindness is selective. Love includes grounding in reality, namely truth.

verse 14 The friendship of the LORD is with those who fear him,
 and his **covenant** for their **instruction**.

Kraus offers, “Yahweh’s counsel (comes) to those who fear him, and his covenant (becomes known), to teach them.”¹¹ The translation by Kraus offers a greater role for the Faithful than that by the Lectionary. Molding society, whether secular or sacred, to love is an appropriate function for all of the Faithful in all of their many ways.

1 Thessalonians 3:12—4:2

verse 4:1-2 Finally, brothers and sisters,
 we earnestly ask and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that,
 as you received from us
 how you should **conduct** yourselves to please God
 —and as you are **conducting** yourselves—
 you do so even more.
 For you know what **instructions** we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

Here is a development for the First **Covenant** into the New **Covenant** with a new focus on interior disposition over exterior behavior. Both interior and exterior are present in both **covenants**, but the emphasis is different in each.

Psalm 85:8

verse 8 **Show** us, Lord your love;
 and grant us your salvation.

Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

verse 27a And then they will see the *Son of Man*

The Vulgate (circa 410): Et tunc videbunt *Filium hominis*

Douay-Rheims (1582-1610): And then they will see the *Son of Man*

King James (1611): And then shall they see the Son of *man*

¹¹ Hans-Joachim Kraus, Psalms 60-150: A Continental Commentary, translated by Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Fortress Press: 1961/1978, 1989, 1993).

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Jerusalem (1966): And then they will see the *Son of Man*

New American (1970): And then they will see the *Son of Man*

New Jerusalem (1985): And then they will see the *Son of man*

Why *Man* is capitalized in some translations and not in others is a mystery.

verse 28 But when these signs begin to happen,
 stand erect and raise your heads
 because your redemption is at hand.

The grammarian observes that the evangelist describes a slave lifting his head from his chest, because God is redeeming the slave from slavery. The primary slavery the Church has in mind is slavery to sin. If discerning slavery is difficult, so is sin and the human history of both.

Some of the Fathers of the Church have proved not to be very good historians. Let this historian explain what they really mean. By *Jews*, Saint Ambrose (339-397), Confessor, Bishop of Milan, really means the souls of the Faithful. By *Babylon* and *Syria*, he means *sin*. By *Jerusalem*, he means an *individual soul* and by *Judea*, he does mean *Judaism*. The basis of these analogies is the greater stress on Christian interior life than on keeping the Jewish Law. Thus understood, Ambrose writes:

And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon . . . Here is a linked chain of prophecy, and the reason for the mystery why the *Jews*, already twice led captive, to *Babylon* and to *Syria*, will again be captive in all the world: because they have denied Christ; and why *Jerusalem*, as was later seen, was to be laid waste by an invading host, and her people fall by the edge of the sword; and why all that was *Judea* was to be vanquished by the believing nations, by the sword of the spirit, which is the two-edged word of God.¹²

Saint Leo (+461) turns to the stars to write,

. . . perceiving in this that nothing is exempt from the divine commandments, and that all the elements serve through the world of God for our **instruction**, so that by the very turns of

¹² St. Ambrose, "On the Gospel," The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: Volume One: From the First Sunday of Advent to Quinquagesima, tr. and ed. M. F. Toal, D.D. (P.O. Box 612, Swedesboro, NJ 08085: Preservation Press, 1996) 8.

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the earth itself, as by the four Gospels, we learn both that
which we are to proclaim and what we are to do.¹³

Advent is a time of penance and preparation for the coming of the Messiah into the hearts of the Faithful. The readings invite the Faithful to reflect upon their own behavior as part of the direction the **covenant** gives to history. Jeremiah the prophet implicitly reminds the Faithful to listen to things about their conduct they may not want to hear because the Messiah is on his way and the **promise** of His coming is all that matters. The psalmsinger, aware of his own sinfulness, includes the Faithful in not despairing, but in placing hope and trust in the **covenant**. Thessalonians is about receiving **instructions** on how to live in love with one another as an aspect of the **promises**. The Gospel connects the Son of Man with the cosmos, the sun, the moon, and the stars serving God by **instructing** about Divine purposes in history.

For more on sources, besides the footnotes, see the Appendix file.

¹³ St. Leo, Pope and Doctor, "On the Fast of the Tenth Month and on Almsgiving," The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: Volume One: From the First Sunday of Advent to Quinquagesima, tr. and ed. M. F. Toal, D.D. (P.O. Box 612, Swedesboro, NJ 08085: Preservation Press, 1996) 15.