

Personal Notes
031207 Second Sunday of Advent 6C
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This is a good place to begin a less impressionistic and more concrete spirituality based on the readings. **History** serves to ground the spiritual life concretely in time and place. God is active in **history**, but just how is a mystery. That mystery serves as a check on concrete legalistic self-righteousness.

Lincoln said that he was not so much worried about God being on his side as he was about being on the side of God. Rather than a self-righteous concrete approach to **history**, why not an impressionistic approach, but an approach? With good reason, Western Civilization has lost its nerve about its place in **history**. Why not try to renegotiate the relationship between God and Western Civilization? My definition of **history** is the explanation of change through time.

Words to note are **forever**, **eternal**, **will**, **shall**, and **history**. Each of these words references change or lack thereof through time. Each of these words grounds hope in concrete terms. The basic cause for hope resides in the Divine Covenant.

That there are nine versions of the Divine Covenant appears relatively frequently in these Notes. The research for the nine is in Charles H. Talbert, "Paul, Judaism, and the Revisionists," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 63, No. 1 (January 2001) 1-22. In these notes, this article is cited ten times: 021124, 021208, 030316, 030330, 030406, 030608, 030622, 030824, 031026, and 031102. Anyone wanting a copy of all or part of the Notes using "Paul, Judaism, and the Revisionists," please request them from me. My reason for citing the article in the body of these Notes is that these Notes rely so much on the article, that the article itself will not be further cited in the documentation.

The question in these readings is how does Paul relate to nonmessianic Judaism? As overly legalistic? Mistakenly as legalistic? Mistaken in Palestine but not in the broader Hellenistic world? As a people divided among those who believed (1) that all had to follow the law in a legalistic sense; (2) that grace resulted in following the law, and (3) that grace was all that was required? According to Talbert, Paul viewed the Jews in the latter sense, as a people divided. Where Paul argues against legalism, he argues against non-Jewish misperceptions of Judaism. Paul argues as an apostle to the Gentiles.

In these readings, one issue for Pauline theology is the place of the Covenant. Does one gain entrance into the Age to Come simply by living a good life or does so gaining entrance require a relationship to the Covenant? How does Paul relate his polemic against legalism to his love of the law and the Covenant? The answer rests in love as a motivator; love emanating as grace from God through Jesus Christ animating Christians to good works.

When one considers Poor Clare nuns contemplating God, one considers contemplation as a good work. Technically, contemplation is the highest of the good works. Contemplation is not Faith, but a result of Faith. Finding God in creation, such as the

Personal Notes
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monastic garden, and using that finding to raise the heart and soul to the Creator can happen in both a meditative and contemplative mode. The difference is that one contemplating is relaxed and comfortable in the presence of God without much help, whereas one meditating must make more of an effort to find and locate God, with much help, such as the help of a garden.

Is contemplation a good work like the baptism of John, external to the spiritual life? Since both contemplation and the baptism of John can be separated from both love and the Cross, both are external to the spiritual life. The gifts of mysticism are similarly external. Legalism extend from the dietary laws of the Jews to dietary laws of Christians and beyond, even to contemplation. Advent helps counteract self-righteousness based on legalism.

Talbert quotes Kasemann:

Religion always provides man with his most thoroughgoing possibility of confusing an illusion with God. Paul sees this possibility realized in the devout Jew: inasmuch as the announcement of God's will in the law is here misunderstood as a summons to human achievement and therefore as a means to a righteousness of one's own. But that is for him the root of sin ... man, in despairing presumption, erects his own work into the criterion of the universal judgment and God becomes an approving spectator of our doings.

In this Reformation Protestant view of Jewish legalism, one cannot fulfill the law and so trying is an act of idolatry. There stands Paul. More recent, less legalistic views of Middle Judaism and Paul cite lack of acceptance either of Christ or of Gentiles. There stands Paul again in a new theological orthodoxy.

How valid is a parallel between pre- with post-Vatican II Church Magisterium and Middle Judaism with Pauline Christianity? Middle Judaism was optimistic; Paul pessimistic. Was the pre-Vatican II Church Magisterium optimistic; post-Vatican II, pessimistic? The following readings from Baruch are fundamentally optimistic.

Baruch 5:1-9

verse 1b put on the splendor of glory from God **forever**:

verse 2 *wrapped* in the cloak of justice from God,
 bear on your head the mitre
 that displays the glory of the **eternal** name.

Personal Notes
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With specific references to verses 2 and 9 Talbert points out that “being clothed with some aspect of another’s selfhood *empowers* [*sic*] one who is so clothed.”

verse 4 you **will** be named by God **forever**

Baruch wrote as a scribe for Jeremiah. He also wrote his own book, sometime after the 587 B.C. deportation to Babylon. At the time of the final composition of Baruch, in the middle of the first century B.C.,¹ some Jews had returned from their Babylonian exile, but not to the extent that the exile was generally considered over, at least for some. Commoners regarded the exile as still in progress and in need of a messiah, but the educated elite did not. Saint Paul arose from and preached within a context of the educated elite.

Saint Paul, then, had a problem. Were the exile over, then why would there be a messiah? Were the exile not over, then how would the **history** of what had happened be explained? Baruch, by writing in the future tense, implies that the exile is not yet over. Paul also has a view to the future.

verse 3 For God **will** show all the earth your splendor:

Verse 5 is the most telling.

verse 5 Up, Jerusalem! Stand upon the heights;
 look to the east and see *your children*
 gathered from the east and the west
 at the word of the Holy One,
 rejoicing that they are remembered by God.

Your children are the chosen people, whether chosen by grace, by race, or by following the law. Unscrambling which is which is part of gaining insight into these readings. Protestantism with its emphasis on Faith alone looks to grace; Catholicism with its emphasis on Faith and works looks to grace and the law, both. Because of past errors regarding race, speculating on racial choice is beyond the pale of contemporary competency.

verse 6b but God **will** bring them [the exiles] back to you

Jerusalem is analogous to the souls of the Faithful. Christians interpret Baruch as prophesying the Christmas Messiah. The exile is not over, because the non-analogous concrete exile from Jerusalem into Babylon is replaced by the analogous impressionistic

¹ Henry Wansbrough, General Editor, The New Jerusalem Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1985) 1171.

exile of the Faithful from God. Jesus, the Messiah, leads the Faithful back to himself, to his temple in Jerusalem. Love is the means for getting back.

verse 9 for God is leading Israel in joy
 by the light of his glory,
 with his mercy and justice for company.

Psalm 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6 (3)

The Lectionary uses this Psalm in the following places:

<u>Readings</u>	<u>Page in Lectionary</u>	<u>Verses used</u>	
6C	30	1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6 (3)	The readings for today.
36C	229	1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6 (3)	
149B	921	1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6 (3)	

Funerals also uses this Psalm:

<u>Page</u>	<u>Section</u>	<u>Verses used</u>
290	Antiphons and Psalms	16 Antiphons and Psalms 1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6 (3)

Hans-Joachim Kraus offers sometime after 538 B.C. as the **historical** origin of this psalm. Kraus writes,

If the psalm as a whole is to be understood correctly, we must begin with the **historical** situation. ...The God of Israel works in **history** as he bestows salvation in progressive activity. The change to the new state of all things (***) takes place in **history** in the constantly new retrospects, petitions, and hopeful stride of the chosen people.²

verse (3) The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

² Since I do not read Hebrew and my computer does not write Hebrew, *** represents Hebrew letters in the following text. Hans-Joachim Kraus, Psalm 60-150: A Continental Commentary, translated by Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Fortress Press: 1961/1978, 1989, 1993) 449, 451.

This responsorial verse is an **historical** recollection. The relationship is not simply between God and the individual soul but also between God and bodies of people, in particular the Jews. This Psalm was probably written after Baruch died, but within the time of his living memory. The Psalm does look to the future and does not assume that the exile is over.

verse 4 Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
 like the torrents in the southern desert.

Kraus joins Psalms 74 and 80 with **126** to remember past **history** in a plea for a restoration of good fortune.³

verse 5 Those who sow in tears
 shall reap rejoicing.

verse 6 they **shall** come back rejoicing

Verses 5 and 6 influence Matthew 5:4 when Matthew writes “Blessed are those who mourn, for they **shall** be comforted.”⁴

Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11

verse 6 I am confident of this,
 that the one who began a good work in you
 will continue to complete it
 until the day of Christ Jesus.

Talbert writes, “Citing texts like **Phil 1:6**; 2:12-13, and Gal 2:20, [Timo] Laato contends that in Paul, Christians act because it is God who acts in them.”

verse 9 And this is my prayer:
 that your love *may increase* ever more and more
 in knowledge and every kind of perception
verse 10 to discern what is of value,
 so that you *may be* pure and blameless for the day of Christ,
verse 11 filled with the fruit of *righteousness*

³ Hans-Joachim Kraus, Theology of the Psalms, translated by Keith Crim (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1979, 1986, 1992) 67.

⁴ Hans-Joachim Kraus, Theology of the Psalms, translated by Keith Crim (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1979, 1986, 1992) 196.

Personal Notes
031207 Second Sunday of Advent 6C
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that *comes through* Jesus Christ
for the glory and praise of God.

In verse 11, *righteousness* refers to the chosen people, the elect, those who **will** get into the Age to Come.

This is a place to list the covenants and the relationship of Paul to them. Talbert writes as follows. The numbering brackets are my insertions.

Paul makes no mention of the covenants with [1] Noah (Gen 9:8-17), [2] Phinehas (Num 25:10-13), [3] Joshua (Joshua 24), [4] (2 Kings 23), and [5] Ezra (Ezra 9—10). The [6] covenant with David is not central to Paul's thought, although it is echoes in the oral tradition taken up in Rom 1:3-4 ("descended from David according to the flesh") and in the quotation from Isa 11:10 in Rom 15:12 ("The root of Jesse **will** come, he who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him **shall** the Gentiles hope"). If so, Paul would see the promise to David fulfilled in the reign of Jesus after the resurrection (1 Cor 15:20-28). Three covenants of the Scriptures of Israel receive significant attention in Paul's letters: [7] the covenant with Abraham, [8] the Mosaic covenant, and [9] the new covenant of Jeremiah 31.

The covenant with Abraham extends to all the Gentiles through Faith, the Mosaic Law is a temporary expedient, until Christ, as prophesied in Jeremiah 31, where "God himself enables his people's faithfulness to the relationship."

Luke 3:4, 6

verse 3:4 *Prepare* the way of the Lord, make straight his paths

Luke 3:1-6

verse 1a In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar...

verse 2b the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert.

John was just several months older than Jesus was. Verse 26 states that "When he began, Jesus was about thirty years old ..." The first year of the reign of Tiberius was 14 A.D., so that the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberias would be 29 A.D., close enough for *about thirty*. The other well-known problems dating the birth of Jesus, translate *about thirty*, to between thirty-two and thirty-eight years of age when Jesus began his public ministry. The public ministry of John may have lasted some time before the public

Personal Notes
031207 Second Sunday of Advent 6C
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ministry of Jesus, beginning with the baptism of Jesus. Since a Mark D. Smith surmises that Jesus was born in 6 B.C., Jesus would have been thirty-four when he began his public ministry.⁵ Margaret Barker writes that Herod the Great died in 4 B.C.⁶

John the Baptizer is

verse 3b proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,

This verse is similar to Mark 1:4 used for this Second Sunday of Advent in Cycle B. The current Cycle is C.

The baptism of John did not forgive sins, but was a petition for their forgiveness. When the Faithful bless themselves at the holy water fountain or a presider sprinkles them, a similar petition for the forgiveness of sins takes place. Sprinkling with holy water is a rite associated with bringing Holy Communion to the sick.

Neither did righteousness forgive sins. Paul teaches that participation in the life of Christ both enables righteousness and forgives sins. Sins are forgiven through Christ, not through righteousness. Paul rails against self-righteousness of any stripe.

For Paul, grace and obedience have a dependence of nature rather than time. In other words, grace and obedience are not sequential (in another form of legalism), but, rather, hang together like links in a chain, contemporaneously dependent upon one another in a priority of nature, the lower link of good works dependent upon the higher link of grace.

The external rite of baptism by John appears like a “good work,” something external to the spiritual life. Prophecy itself is a good work. Luke continues,

verse 4 As it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah:

A voice of one crying out in the desert:

*’Prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight his paths.*

verse 5 *Every valley **shall** be filled
and every mountain and hill **shall** be made low.
The winding roads **shall** be made straight,
And the rough ways made smooth,*

⁵ Mark D. Smith, “Of Jesus and Quirinius,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 2 (April 2000) 282, 287, 292.

⁶ Margaret Barker, The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 319, footnote 15.

Personal Notes
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verse 6 *and all flesh **shall** see the salvation of God.”*

Advent is a time full of hope for the future that the life of grace in Christ by the Faithful will bring.

In these readings, with a view toward the future, Baruch encourages the Faithful to put on the **eternal-forever** mantle of God. “You **will** be named by God **forever**.” The psalm presents God as an **historical** God, guiding the Faithful into a Covenantal relationship with Himself. Philippians struggles with the relationship between internal and external behavior. With a pessimistic view of human power, Paul looks forward to what **will** happen as time goes on and the activity of God through grace in souls becomes manifest. With Tiberius Caesar, Luke grounds Jesus in time and place. Luke portrays the prophecy of Isaiah as fulfilled in Jesus, a stopping off place in **history** for Covenantal relationships.

Where does the Magisterium fit? Humbly, righteous, without either legalism or self-righteousness both on the part of the Faithful recipients of the Magisterium as well as on the part of the Magisterium itself.

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