Dear Alumni and Friends —

We at the Divinity School have recently made some decisions about the publishing of Criterion that we hope will please you. Starting with this issue, Criterion will now be published twice, instead of three times, a year. This will be reflected in Winter and Summer issues. We hope this change will result in a more substantive and timely publication. Furthermore — and this will come as welcome news — we will no longer charge subscription fees. All paying subscribers may discontinue payment effective immediately.

Opening this Winter issue of Criterion is “Separation versus Accommodation,” the text of a Wednesday Community Lunch delivered on October 12, 2005, by Richard A. Epstein, James Parker Hall Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Director of the Law and Economics Program at the University of Chicago. In this talk, Prof. Epstein addresses some issues raised by the religion clauses in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

Following is a selection of tributes to Langdon Gilkey, Shailer Mathewes Professor Emeritus, who died in November of 2004 at the age of eighty-four. The tributes were delivered at a memorial service held at Bond Chapel on February 12, 2005. Included here are tributes by Professors Wendy Doniger, Donald W. Musser, and Everett J. Tarbox, Jr.

Also included in this issue is an interview with Professor Gilkey by his friend and former student Jeff Pool, who recorded conversations with the theologian in December 2001. Here Gilkey discusses historical and religious dimensions of the global crisis in the wake of the events of September 11, 2001.

This issue concludes with a sermon by Kevin Boyd, preached on March 13, 2005, at Saint Paul and the Redeemer Episcopal Church in Hyde Park. Boyd, a graduate of the Masters of Divinity program, reflects on misfortune, grief, and the possibility of comfort.

Special thanks to Jeremy Biles, Criterion’s editorial assistant and recent Ph.D. from the Divinity School, who served as de facto editor of this publication while I have been on maternity leave.

I hope you enjoy this issue,

Terren Ilana Wein, Editor
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Separation versus Accommodation: Why We Should Favor the Latter

The question that I shall address in this short article has been mooted extensively since the Founding Period, when Jefferson spoke of the creation of the wall of separation between church and state. That enduring image makes strong reference to notions of private property, because of the implicit boundary that it purports to draw between political and religious activities, each relegated to its respective sphere. An apt literary metaphor, appropriate to this side of the Midway, comes from Robert Frost:

Good fences make good neighbors. It is as though the two New England farmers can each prosper the most by doing nothing to interfere with the production of the other.

Buried in this instructive metaphor lies a strong appeal to some version of the minimal or night-watchman state which, while fashionable to some (such as myself), does not represent the current reality in the United States. But before we lament the current state of politics, I think that it is best to go back to the Founding Period to see if we can get some sense of how religion was thought about before the advent of the modern social democratic state. It would be a mistake to regard the views of that critical period as monolithic, for they were surely not. But there are some important tensions that we can identify that help clear the path toward a better understanding of the use and, more importantly, the limitations of Jefferson’s enduring image of the wall of separation.

In earlier times and also today, political theory serves two offices: one is to justify the current state of affairs, and the other is to attack it. In our Constitution, we find a strong, consistent vision of limited government that works off the following paradigm. We begin with the notion that good fences do make good neighbors, and thus with the view that autonomy and private property form the sensible basis for any viable social union. The explanation for the fences is not all that different from Robert Frost’s. The recognition that people have different values, aspirations, talents, temperaments, and, of course, religious beliefs means that a single life plan will not work for large numbers of disparate individuals, but would force all people to make unnecessary compromises that leave them unsatisfied. The idea of property,
there is no obligation to celebrate strict separation as a permanent and desirable state of affairs.

which guarantees the exclusive right to something—most commonly, but not exclusively, land or chattel—embodies that ideal of separation. Once we are liberated from the necessity of making collective choices, then each of us can go his or her own way, so that life plans better match individual temperaments. You may prefer strawberry ice cream while I prefer chocolate; a system of private property means that neither of us has to settle for plain vanilla. You may be Roman Catholic, and I may be Jewish; neither of us has to settle for nondenominational prayer.

There are two critical but friendly qualifications that have to be made in this basic plan. The first is a clarification: Property and autonomy do not imply strict separation; rather, they praise the idea of separation for its role in the delineation of original rights of all individuals who are, in the words of John Locke, “free, equal, and independent” in a state of nature. But there is no obligation to celebrate strict separation as a permanent and desirable state of affairs. This position need not be maintained, as like-minded individuals wish to join forces for one of two reasons. Either they have complementary skills that allow them to achieve more together than working separately, or they have sufficiently similar tastes such that they prefer sociability to isolation. The key insight is that in both these ways gains from trade are still appropriate in all domains of life, temporal and spiritual.

These gains, moreover, can only be achieved through voluntary exchange and cooperation (where the former is a spot exchange like a purchase or lease, and the latter is a more enduring tie, as a partnership or association). The initial strong separation allows us to choose the people we work with, while excluding all others, so that the sorting mechanism increases the odds that the collaborative ventures will work. Without that right to exclude and to choose, the system will be severely compromised because the fit between separate and distinctive persons cannot be maintained. It is a piece of sensible folk wisdom among lawyers that the single most important feature of a contract is not what it says, but who it is with. Choosing good trading partners or collaborators is the key to business and social success, in both secular and religious pursuits. So property and exclusion are not the antithesis for cooperation, but the prerequisite for it.

The second point is not a clarification, but a necessary emendation. The sad truth is that, standing alone, this wholly voluntarist model fails because it cannot sustain itself against the incessant forces of disorder. The social contract theory fills this gap by postulating a situation whereby each person surrenders some portion of his liberty and property to the state in exchange for the provision of greater security for the rest. There is in the end no total separation, because some collective endeavor is needed to make sure that the voluntary ones work well. The questions of constitutionalism within this framework simply ask what set of institutions is most likely to confine state power to its proper sphere—that is, to making the old model of separation plus voluntary exchange work. That in turn leads quickly into a discussion about the preservation of property and liberty, and restrictions on the power to tax (chiefly in the form of a flat tax over various forms of income) and a requirement of compensation for property that is taken when private owners resist the sale of strategically located land.

Enter Accommodation

In light of these opening remarks, one way to look at this approach to political theory is as a set of collective accommodations that start off from a separatist base. The system stood in the Founding Period, moreover, in sharp opposition to the common view that the cooperation between church and state led to some highly distasteful practices. The most obvious of these was religious persecution by state authorities at the instigation of the dominant religion. That was often joined by the view that persons or groups (such as Native American tribes) outside the faith could not get compensation when stripped of their lands. Judged by that baseline, impositions of explicit religious qualifications for public office were instances that cried out for some degree of separation between church and state, for example, by the basic constitutional norm that precluded religious tests for service in public office. This form of favoritism led to an uneasiness with an “established church,” that is, one that receives the support of all through public exactions, even though it represents the will of only some segment of the population. Note that the litany of complaints is effectively neutralized by a system of strict separation even before we start to speak of the modern concern with the accommodation...
As the need for cooperation across various activities increases, the separation principle becomes less fit for the challenges that lie ahead.

of religious beliefs in a secular state. But it should not be thought that the modern defense of accommodation would allow any of these practices to flourish either. On the contrary, the sensible theory of accommodation has no truck with any practice that seeks to advance one religion at the expense of its rivals, or indeed all religions at the expense of nonbelievers. Rather, it only makes this modest proposal: Knock down the wall of separation for those cases in which all individuals, regardless of religious persuasion or affiliation, or lack thereof, will prosper. In other words, accommodations will pass muster only if they meet the relatively stringent test for a social contract: a set of exactions that improves the lot of all individuals relative to their previous state of well-being in equal proportion; that is, without altering the balance of advantage among them.

Why Accommodate?

Within this basic framework, the question then is which of these two visions — separation or accommodation — works best in addressing the full range of problems that arise in the modern welfare state. The point here is not to denigrate the achievements that the principle of strict separation made in dealing with the political abuses of earlier times. But circumstances have changed in two ways: The major abuses of previous times have been curbed, while the consistent expansion of state activities requires a level of coordination between secular and religious activity that the separationist doctrine will not allow. These changes in our political constitution do not justify relaxing our vigilance with regard to two forms of incursion that should remain off limits: religious institutions taking advantage of secular institutions and, conversely, secular institutions taking advantage of religious ones.

No one can claim that the choice between accommodation and separation is clear cut; if it were, a social consensus on these power relationships would have been reached long ago. But, while caution is always needed, the basic point remains true. As the need for cooperation across various activities increases, the separation principle becomes less fit for the challenges that lie ahead. So let us acknowledge that the separationist view is simpler to administer, and thus less subject to erosion by the set of political forces that constantly seek to undermine it. That said, it has, in my opinion, the greater disadvantage in that it prevents the use of state power to increase the welfare of all in the same proportions — something that the accommodationist view allows for, though at the cost of a more delicate system of administrative oversight of the permitted forms of cooperation.

There is, moreover, a powerful asymmetry between church and state that drives us toward accommodation even within the framework of classical political theory, once we get past the initial set of abuses that drove the separationist impulse. The enduring relationship between church and state is not one of equal but divided power, as was the relationship between two Roman consuls. The state has the monopoly of force within the jurisdiction, and all other residual rights (such as self-help or self-defense) are subject to its oversight. That includes the use of force by religious groups, even in their self-protection. The United States has many police forces — local and state, with the FBI thrown in for good measure — and no religious police forces. The system of separation cannot prohibit any of our established police forces from providing services to religious institutions. The United States also has lots of roads and infrastructure, but no principle of separation could make it illegal to allow religious vans on public roads or to keep religious materials from the U.S. Post Office — itself a regrettable monopoly.

Thus we reach our first critical junction. If religious institutions are part of the social contract, then they cannot be left out in the cold with respect to the two fundamental obligations of the small state: protection and access to infrastructure and other essential facilities. But here the risk moves in the opposite direction: No longer is the concern that one religion will gain huge influence and preferences because of its alliance with national, state, or local government. Now the tables are turned: Once it is determined that the service must be supplied, religious institutions should not be reduced to second-class status.

In some cases, the application of the problem takes care of itself. Just use the same tolls on public roads, collect the same gas taxes, and use the standard rate structure for public utilities. The key here is that a principle of accommodation allows the state to furnish these essential facilities to religious
The key insight here is that all businesses must have in their internal operations a greater degree of latitude than regulators have in overseeing the economy.

organizations, but requires that they pay for them under the same rate structure as everyone else. The principle of strict separation is thus replaced by a nondiscrimination rule similar to that which assures that citizens of one state are able to do business in another state on equal terms with local residents.

The situation, however, becomes more difficult when services are not priced separately, as is often the case with real estate taxes that are used to fund a full range of government services, from schools to sewers. The current view allows for the exemption of religious institutions from these local taxes on grounds that are troublesome, to say the least. Conventional thinking tells us to lump them in with other forms of charity and fraternal organizations, and that they are not singled out for advantage. Even so, the power of religious institutions (from which only some benefit) is increased relative to that of their nonreligious competitors who need not get the same subsidy. But here the taxes are often a substitute for direct services, and if you do not pay for them, then someone else must. The separationist position would not allow the provision of the service. The accommodation position requires the provision of the service but demands the elimination of the subsidy. We thus find that it resonates with the standard appeal to limited government. You can and should mix church and state subject to one condition: no cross subsidies.

The question then is how all this plays out. In the earlier times, once the problem of corruption and favoritism in appointment to public office was overcome, the residual tensions would be far less than they are today, when the state injects itself into every area of social life. We do not have to deal with the role of religion in public schools, for example, if we do not have public schools in the first place. Quite simply, the fewer the activities that the government undertakes, the less the pressure on church-state relationships. Yet all is not so easy, even in the smallest of states. As a general matter, the state works in two separate fashions. In the first, it taxes and regulates in order to maintain social order. In this regard, the correct position is one that includes religious organizations in the mix, but on terms that do not (to the extent that it is possible with human institutions) alter the relative strength of religious versus nonreligious groups. Nor should state intervention alter the balance among different religious groups.

Greater difficulties arise, however, with the second side of the coin. Even in small states the government does more than regulate. At minimum, it must hire employees to operate its various systems. In addition, it necessarily supplies infrastructure (such as roads) and public spaces (such as squares and parks), all of which are open to all people on terms of equal access. The question here is how it ought to manage these operations and these spaces. Both require more work than does a system of regulation and taxation, because now all levels of government discharge highly complex and sensitive management functions. The situation only gets more complicated with education. Let us consider representative cases from these three areas.

Employment

Consider a simple example. Suppose that a Jewish military chaplain wants to wear a keaphah during working hours when a general and neutral military regulation, adopted for other reasons (uniformity within the armed forces) prohibits the use of all headwear. We have a liberal system that now seeks to obey the tenets of both prongs of the religion clauses, intended to preserve the free exercise of religion on the one hand, without establishing any religion on the other. Walking this tightrope is not easy. First, the conscientious government wishes (in line with the minimal state) to minimize the interference of the state in the religious affairs of its citizens. Second, that government wants to avoid any establishment of religion that is introduced when cross subsidies are given to religious groups or individuals. We thus have a tough situation. To restrict the use of the keaphah is to pose a limit on religious liberties; this does not comport with the usual prohibitions against the use of force and fraud that are the hallmarks of the small state. But to allow the wearing of the keaphah is to give this person some advantage over other individuals who are not allowed to wear headwear of their choice, be it a turban or a baseball cap. And the problem becomes no easier if we allow the keaphah but ban the turban, which is more likely to pose additional administrative hazards.

The key insight here is that all businesses must have in their internal operations a greater degree of latitude than regulators have in overseeing the economy. Running a business
means making soft and debatable judgments about who gets along with whom, and under what circumstances. Those judgments necessarily require some degree of managerial discretion. In my view, this argument is so powerful that we should never allow the government to oversee the hiring or firing of any individuals in private firms. Voluntary sorting in labor markets will outperform any effort to impose either a strict antidiscrimination norm or an affirmative action program, or elements of both. But the state organization cannot be allowed that degree of freedom, given that it operates with public funds and has genuine coercive powers. It could not, without upsetting the political balance, exclude members of certain religions from military service altogether. So all this results in some lower standard of judicial review for the military.

When faced with this problem in Goldman v. Weinberger (1986), the Supreme Court opted in favor of discretion on the grounds that “neutral rules” were the best way to navigate the delicate line between the free exercise and establishment clauses. The simple recitation of the clause helps illumine the issues at stake: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” The tension between these two clauses quickly becomes apparent. Any restriction on the personal liberties of religious persons runs into the free exercise clause. Any special protection of religious liberty runs into the establishment clause. In this case, the Court threw up its hands in frustration, and took the position that Congress had to decide whether to veer too far in one direction or the other, so that the constitutional challenge failed. I tend to think that the Court was wrong in this conclusion, because this was one instance in which a rule that was neutral on its face exerted a disparate impact on religious individuals. Most people could care less about the rules on headwear, but an observant Jew does not have the luxury of that indifference. Rather than rest on the neutrality principle, I would follow the commonly held view that the restriction should be struck down in the absence of some specific demonstration of why this restriction was needed to maintain military efficiency or discipline in an office setting. (In truth, the whole matter could have been averted by a more sensible commanding officer.) Deciding when to force the state to give and when not will require courts to show some discretion in deciding which accommodations to require and which to resist. But the strong neutrality principle, like any principle of strict separation, cuts too deeply into the exercise of religious liberty. The implicit test that I use to break the impasse is this: If private employers have some discretion, would a solid majority of them take the position that wearing the keepah is acceptable, or would they push hard to ban all headwear? My causal empiricism says that the keepah will be allowed in office settings. Battlefield conditions may well require different answers, but it should be relatively easy to explain why various forms of headwear and the like should not be used. In other words, the lenient standard of review seems appropriate here, but it is not without teeth.

Public Spaces

Our second collective example involves the use of public spaces by religious organizations. The basic nondiscrimination principle takes care of this problem without difficulty when, for example, religious groups just want to drive their vans along the public highways. But the situation becomes much more difficult when religious groups seek to use public spaces for their own expressive functions, that is, to present their own worldviews to the public at large. The questions that arise are numerous. For example: May religious organizations rent public spaces for their own events? May they mount displays of religious exhibits in public spaces?

In dealing with these issues, the strict separationist is inclined to answer these questions in the negative. In their view, there are plenty of private places in which such activities could take place — so why bring religious activities into public spaces? The other side argues that this exclusion amounts to discrimination against religious groups, which are prohibited from using facilities routinely made available to other private groups for private purposes. Hence, their view is that the activities should be allowed to proceed on the same terms and conditions that apply to other parties. A litmus test analogous to the one above would put the question this way: How could a conscientious owner of private space respond to these different pressures? More specifically, would ordinary sectarian private schools, for example, ban
When it is hard to find the ideal intellectual balance, some respect should be paid to the use of tradition as a stabilizing force.

all religious songs on their premises, or would they have to allow participation in some carefully regulated setting of religious activities, such as a lobby sing that included songs from all represented religious groups? Here there is no single answer, for some thoughtful teachers, parents, and students would opt for the strict separationist approach. On balance, I think that most would choose the “all in,” as opposed to the “all out,” approach on the grounds that it allows for richer experiences for all concerned. At that point, the concern is with balance and restraint in representation on the one hand, and with the protection of the rights of those individuals who wish not to participate in these activities on the other.

My sense is that these guidelines, blurry as they are, work best in public places. They would allow both the crèche and the menorah to be located outside city hall, rather than demanding that the holiday season pass in silence. And they would allow all groups with proper permits to conduct services in public places, subject to the usual restraints. But there are limits, which are well captured in two recent Supreme Court cases, Van Orden v. Perry (2005) and McCreary County v. ACLU (2005), both of which were decided by 5-to-4 votes—in opposite directions. Van Orden raised the question of whether the establishment clause prevented the inclusion of a six-foot monolith of the Ten Commandments in a display before the Texas state capital, which contained a wide assortment of monuments and historical markers that had been in place for about forty years. A single citizen who encountered the monument on his trip to the site sought to have the monolith removed, on the grounds that it was a violation of the establishment clause.

I think that the decision to let that exhibit stand was correct. Four members of the Court (Rehnquist, Scalia, Kennedy, and Thomas) supported this decision on broad grounds of the key role of religion in public life. I prefer the approach of Justice Breyer, who supplied that critical fifth vote on narrower grounds. All establishment clause cases are tricky when a single citizen tries to upset a strong community consensus in the opposite direction. And the inclusion of religion along with other influences in American life does not seem to pose the threat of religious domination of public institutions. Even if one might be uneasy about the initial decision to mount the original exhibit, some respect for settled expectations should allow an exhibit that has been on display for over 40 years to stay there. When it is hard to find the ideal intellectual balance, some respect should be paid to the use of tradition as a stabilizing force.

I also think that Breyer was correct, in McCreary County, to join with the four dissenters from the Van Orden case (Stevens, O’Connor, Souter, and Ginsburg) to strike down displays of the Ten Commandments in Kentucky county courthouses. It was quite clear that this exhibit had been pushed hard by religious groups. Their original efforts to have only the Ten Commandments on display was aborted because of obvious establishment clause concerns: Putting a source of law in a courthouse does suggest that it has disproportionate influence over judicial deliberations—and that result was not sanitized by a new installation surrounding the Ten Commandments of other symbols of American life, such as a copy of the Star-Spangled Banner, to conceal the original motivation.

In cases like this it is easy to see why grounds of distinction between the two exhibits in public spaces are hard to defend, and hence it is easy to praise the stout consistency of the eight justices who voted either up or down in both cases. But in the end, since the issue does count as one of balance, the Breyer approach offers about the right compromise in an area that will always require some measure of judgment and discretion. No one thinks that the establishment clause concerns are stronger in Van Orden than in McCreary County. Why not draw the line between them?

Education

O ur last problem area involves education, and here there are two very different forms of concern. One is whether individual students should be allowed to opt out of the public system of education in order to enroll in private religious schools or whether the state may force them to remain in it. On this point, the separationists are in general happy to see the creation of private religious schools, because it helps cordon off the influences of religion in public space. The accommodationists think that opting out of public institutions is a way to correct against the dangers of a state monopoly in education. Thus the easy
If we are to have public education at all, then a somewhat messy accommodation seems better than a rule of strict separation . . .

position is one that protects the ability of all individuals to obtain private schooling as a right, in either religious or nonreligious institutions.

But this is just where the difficulties begin — for what should be done to respect religious liberties of students who remain within the public system? Here the first round of litigation involved the question of whether Jehovah's Witnesses should be required to recite the Pledge of Allegiance, when it conflicted with their religious beliefs. After some false starts the right conclusion was reached: Respect for religious liberty meant that these students could stand silently aside during the ceremony and not be forced to participate against their conscience.

The harder question arose more recently in connection with the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance. Here the question was whether the use of these words in school counted as an establishment of religion. In the end, the question is a difficult matter of balance, where parallels to the Ten Commandments cases are striking. There is no doubt that the state could not put its force behind a pledge that asked individuals to swear allegiance to a state "under Jesus." But the words "under God" are less specific and more inclusive, and have in any event been around for over fifty years. At this point, the great danger of establishment-clause litigation is that a single outlier in the general population might determine which educational institutions are operated — too high a price to pay in a democratic system charged with operating public institutions. So the words should stay in the pledge, and those who choose not to recite it can stand aside, just as in the Jehovah's Witnesses cases.

A second issue that arises with education is that of public funding for various activities, such as remedial education, that are undertaken in both public and religious schools. Here the strict separationist line says that public funds can be spent only for education supplied in public schools, which cuts the private religious schools out of these programs. I think that this line of argument is in general a mistake, because it is clear that parents of religious students have to contribute to the public schools to which they choose on principle not to send their children. Some form of opt-out from general taxation is not really feasible, if only because the school taxes are imposed on all sorts of people and businesses with no children of school age. So the better solution is to allow the participation of religious schools and students in these programs on equal terms with those children in public schools. I would also allow this education to be supplied in religious schools proper. It is too costly in terms of time, money, and emotional wear and tear to ship students around from school to school for special education. It is relatively easy to make sure that moneys are not funneled into purely religious activities. If we are to have public education at all, then a somewhat messy accommodation seems better than a rule of strict separation that puts religious institutions at a serious disadvantage with regard both to public schools and private religious schools.

A Sober Conclusion

This analysis of church and state reveals several main points. First, we Americans should take some pride in having organized both public and private institutions in ways that have defused the abuses of church-state relationships that were common earlier in our history. But the rhetoric of separation that proved so effective in those settings does not quite work in more modern times, when the expectations for state involvement in all areas of life are so much greater than in earlier times. Perforce we have to move from separation to accommodation, along the lines that I have set out. This principle works well in easy cases of police protection and highway use, and less well with respect to government employment, the management of public spaces, and public education. But it is important not to despair at the messy judgments at the margins and the deep-seated divisions on these issues. When one steps back from the grubby particulars, the overall structure looks about right where it now is. On matters like these, we can only rely on our general sensitivity to the strong claims on both sides to steer a steady course through treacherous shoals. To be forewarned is to be forearmed, the old saying goes. It certainly applies to the vexed topic of church and state relations. ✗
Langdon Gilkey, one of the most influential American Christian theologians of the twentieth century, died on November 19, 2004, in Charlottesville, Virginia, at the age of 85. He was raised not far from the University of Chicago, where his father, the Reverend Charles Gilkey, was chaplain. He earned his B.A. from Harvard University in 1940 before heading to China, where he taught English at Yenching University and was interned as a prisoner of war from 1943 to 1945. Gilkey attended Union Theological Seminary, where he studied with prominent twentieth-century Protestant theologians Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich. After receiving his M.A. (1949) and Ph.D. (1954) from Union, he went on to teach theology at Vassar College and Vanderbilt University Divinity School before settling, in 1963, at the University of Chicago Divinity School, where he taught until his retirement in 1989.

Gilkey's early books and articles demonstrated the existential power of his experiences, as in his widely-read *Shantung Compound: The Story of Men and Women Under Pressure* (1968), in which he narrates his departure from the liberal Protestant belief system during his internment in China during World War II.

Celebrated in academic circles for his work on Niebuhr and Tillich, he was more popularly known for his writings on science and religion, fighting on two fronts: against Christian fundamentalist attacks on science, and against secularist attacks on religious meaning and truth. In *Creationism on Trial: Evolution and God at Little Rock* (1985), he recounted his experience as an expert witness for the American Civil Liberties Union as it challenged the constitutionality of an article passed by the Arkansas State Legislature mandating that creationist views be taught alongside evolutionary theory in high schools. There, in what was called a “modern day version of the Scopes Monkey Trial,” he argued against Christian fundamentalist claims that “creation-science” was a science, and not merely religion cloaked as science.

Gilkey’s new theology of history — based on a rethinking of the questions of free will and grace, providence and fate, and eschatology and secular history — is his most important strictly theological work. In his later years he became a leading proponent of interreligious and pluralist dialogue for Christian theology.

Approximately 150 former students, faculty colleagues, and friends of Langdon gathered at a memorial service in his honor in Bond Chapel on Saturday, February 12, 2005. Among the tributes delivered on that occasion were three reprinted here, by Langdon’s colleague Wendy Doniger and by his former students Donald Musser and Everett Tarbox, Jr. Following these tributes are excerpts from an interview with Langdon conducted by another of his students, Jeff Pool, Ph.D. 1994, after the events of September 11, 2001. This interview appears in full, with invited responses, in the November/December 2005 Religion and Culture Web Forum at the Martin Marty Center website (http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/webforum/index.shtml).

Memories of Langdon Gilkey

Wendy Doniger

Long, long ago, when Joseph Kitagawa was dean of the Divinity School, and Jimmy Carter was president, and peace reigned in the land, Dean Kitagawa set out to persuade me, a dyed-in-the-wool New Yorker, to come to Chicago, so very far from the ocean. And the first thing he did to win me over was to fly me to Chicago and introduce me, at lunch, to Langdon Gilkey. Joe was, as always, right. I was immediately persuaded that Chicago would be a great place for me to do my work. Here was a blue-blooded, second-generation Christian theologian (and what did I know from Christian theologians in those days? I assumed they would all be obscure, judgmental, austere) who was urbane, suave, handsome (oh those piercing blue eyes), charming, with long hair, an elegant shirt as well as beads and a beautiful silk cravat neatly tied at the neck.

He appeared to be a cross between Whitehead, the Dalai Lama, and David Niven. He was also genuinely interested in, and disarmingly learned about, an amazing range of topics. He seemed to know all about everything he knew about — religion, science, European philosophy — but also all about everything that I knew about — Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Confucianism. He had written a beautiful book about the time when he had been imprisoned during World War II (Shantung Compound: The Story of Men and Women Under Pressure), which gave him an added aura of adventure and worldliness and danger and excitement. As if that were not enough, he had read my books, always a direct line to my heart. We talked and talked and talked, and Joe had to give a long series of signals (clearing his throat, coughing, pushing his coffee cup away, and finally simply standing up) to get us to stop.

Lunch ended, but we never did stop talking. That lunch gave me the courage to begin to do my work in an environment that I had until then feared as a terra incognita. Now I knew that some, at least, of the natives would be downright friendly.

Langdon remained for me, and, more importantly, for so many students, an indispensable bridge between the world of history of religions — more precisely that aspect of it that deals with the study of religions other than Christianity and Judaism — and the world of Christian theology and philosophy. His teaching and writing effortlessly, almost unconsciously, integrated insights into the base on which he officially stood — Christian theology — from all the other religious traditions that he had encountered and absorbed, several of them through first-hand, on-the-ground life encounters. It was this lived richness that so inspired his students and delighted his colleagues.

The house that he and Sonja and Amos and Frouwkje lived in on Harper Avenue was a magic place, filled with mysterious masks and statues and paintings and plants and tapestries and hangings, but also filled with even more mysterious people: not just university people, and not just artists from Sonja’s world, but wild people, crazy people, famous people, brilliant people, gorgeous people. And yet there was always a quiet corner where you could sit and have a serious, Chicago-style talk about your research, with an old friend or with someone you had just met there. For years after they had decamped for Virginia, I would still often go out of my way to walk my dog at night past what will always be, to
A Reading from *Creationism on Trial*

Donald W. Musser

Langdon’s essay on “The Theology of Nature” in *Blue Twilight*, a 2001 volume named after a musical composition of his son, Amos, begins with the following question and answer: “If I were asked what are the biggest changes in theology since the first half of the twentieth century, . . . I would mention, first, the concern for the issue of the pluralism of religions, and second, the deep, and very new, theological concern with nature” (p. 3).

With great vigor Langdon has helped us to understand these two concerns — the dynamics of a free society that is continually threatened, and the ambiguities of the sciences of nature — often when the pertinent issues were unclear to us.

For example, against the intellectual snobbery that caricatured and trivialized the burgeoning creationist movement, he consented, to the amazement of many of his theological peers, to become the chief theological witness for the ACLU in the 1981 trial in Little Rock, popularly known as “Scopes II.”

Why did he agree to engage a fringe pseudo-science habituated by rabid fundamentalists? He answered this way in *Creationism on Trial*:

During reflection on the law [he is here referring to Arkansas Act 590, which was “an act to require balanced treatment of creation-science and evolution-science in public schools”], I came to the conclusion that this law and ones similar to it are . . . dangerous to the health of our society; and that through its wide enactment it would represent a disaster to our common life, especially our religious life. . . . This was to me . . . the most important issue at stake. There can be, I believe, no healthy, creative, or significant religious faith in a modern society unless . . . the forms of that faith are free. A politically enforced or supported religious faith becomes corrupt, dead, and oppressive, encouraging inevitably in reaction a deep personal distaste and moral disdain at such spiritual imperialism. Enforced religion breeds precisely what it most fears: rebellion against religion, cynicism about religion, skepticism about its claims, and, as a consequence, indifference at best and outright antipathy at worst. The First Amendment is important not only to guarantee the rights of alternative religions and of non-religious persons in society; it is also important in setting the only possible legal and social conditions for the creative health of serious religion itself. This my own tradition — the Baptist (as well as that of the Quaker and the Unitarian) — has held from its own early beginnings on this continent (pp. 10–11).

Although written a quarter century ago, these sentences remain a sentinel as we continue to face the destructive forces of heteronomous ideas, often in the sheep’s clothing of religion.

Having become convinced that he must testify as a matter of civic responsibility and theological integrity, Langdon met with Tony Sciano, an ACLU lawyer with the firm Skadden, Arps in New York City. As they talked, Langdon perceived a highly personal challenge to being a credible witness. He sheepishly mused about it:

During this discussion, I noticed as I spoke that Tony was looking me carefully and systematically up and down, over and across, somewhat (I should imagine) the way one of the late Bear Bryant’s assistants might size up, down to the smallest detail, a prospective tight end or linebacker. And I became suddenly conscious of what I must look like to this dapper New York lawyer: with my longish hair, white beard, open shirt collar, scarf, and beads, and strangest of all, the earring in
my left ear. So as I was outlining my argument, there was an accompanying stream-of-consciousness somewhat like this: “Since 1970, when I put it on . . . , I have never taken that earring off, even for the most formal lectures and stiff receptions, or ever considered doing so, nor ever worn a necktie. But, to my surprise (I was saying to myself), I think I would in this case. How could I be a persuasive ‘expert in theology,’ a witness helpful to our common cause in Little Rock — or most anywhere else — if I kept it on?”

Having reached that decision, I found another [voice] immediately jostling my consciousness for attention: “But I’m too proud to tell this guy that at this point. Let him wonder about it for now, and if they do choose me, then I’ll tell him that the earring will come off and the tie go on” (pp. 6–7).

So, with a naked ear and neck noosed with a tie borrowed from his student Joe Price, Langdon took the witness stand in Little Rock. There, at the crescendo of the trial, he astounded the court by accusing the orthodox creationists of rank heresy. With passion he declared:

They have in their presentation of the case come very close, yes, very close indeed, to the first, and worst, Christian heresy . . . precisely the early heresy of Marcion and the Gnostics . . . who said that there were in fact two Gods, one a blind, cruel, but powerful God of creation (the God of the Old Testament), and the other a good, loving God of redemption (the God of the New Testament). . . . This heresy was, of course, condemned at once by all the churches; it denied monotheism, it blasphemed the Old Testament and the God of Genesis, and it reduced in power and glory the God of Jesus Christ to the status and role of a second God. It was because of this controversy in about 150 that the first article of the [Apostle's] Creed was written as it was: “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in His only Son, Jesus Christ our Lord”—God is one, creator and redeemer, the only true God. . . . The Lord who creates is also the Lord who redeems. Without that main article about God, Christianity, as well as Judaism, is quite empty and meaningless. This concept of creation by God is not only religious; it is very near to the center of the Christian and Jewish religions (pp. 104–05).

Langdon then reflected:

As is evident, I had become downright evangelical in saying all of this, all of which I thoroughly believed, and which I could, therefore, with no trouble, sing out forcefully and clearly.

As these words came forth there were clear and fervent responses from the back benches. I could hear a good deal of muttered agreement and even an “Amen!” or two. As the level of feeling in that courtroom, it was clear that at least one witness could have a very transcendent, even “orthodox,” view of God and yet believe in evolution — which was what I intended to communicate.

The judge brought me to my senses with his first question: “Professor Gilkey, for the sake of my notes, how do you spell the names of those heretics you mentioned, Marcion and the Gnostics?” (p. 105)

It is an honor for me to have shared these readings of my teacher, mentor, and friend of three decades. In the light of these readings I believe we all honor his memory when we foster the free expression of belief, or unbelief, and when we testify against the dangerous wrongs of those who so blindly see themselves as religiously right. ×

To Langdon with Gratitude

Everett J. Tarbox, Jr.

Nancy and I arrived at the Divinity School in the fall of 1963, accompanied by four small children. We had left Texas with mixed feelings, aware that our decision to come to Chicago would seriously impact our future. I knew only one professor prior to coming, Langdon Gilkey, and was happy to find that he and Sonja were also moving to Chicago that fall.

After surviving the initiation rite known as the “comps,” I began my studies as a major in systematic theology. During
His lectures were enormously popular and were eagerly anticipated each year, especially his lectures on science and religion . . .

my first term I enrolled in Langdon's course on St. Augustine. I quickly came to appreciate Langdon's exceptional ability as a lecturer—both his comprehensive understanding of his subject matter and his way of presenting very complicated subjects in an understandable way. He taught me that St. Augustine was in Florida and St. Augustine was in heaven. I took at least one course per quarter from Langdon for the next two years, including the courses which led to the writing of Naming the Whirlwind.

When Langdon became chair of the department of systematic theology, he asked me to be the first field secretary, a new position created to help bring order to the chaos. To our surprise, we discovered that over seventy students were registered as majors in systematic theology, many of whom could not be found or at least were not in residence. Langdon and I began a methodical examination of the records and we began to explore ways of facilitating our majors, with a goal to graduate in a reasonable time, i.e. under seventeen years. As you may recall, the Divinity School was famous for having one of the longest residencies prior to the awarding of the Ph.D. Upon completion of my exams, Langdon agreed to be my dissertation advisor and suffered through the agonies of nursing me through a two-year period of writing. After my particularly difficult and stressful dissertation defense, Langdon and Charles Long took me to the Quadrangle Club for a drink. Langdon described his defense at Union. He was especially fearful of questioning by John Randall, Jr. At the beginning of the exam Randall mused that he was grateful to have the opportunity to discuss creation with Langdon, since he thought that there were no witnesses. Then Randall immediately went to sleep, waking only at the end to comment on the very fruitful session.

Upon leaving Chicago I took a position at Indiana State University, where Langdon visited us regularly while lecturing on campus and to the Midwest Region of the American Academy of Religion. One of my favorite memories is taking Langdon to the airport in Indianapolis. He was concerned that Frouwkje, his vegetarian daughter, would discover that I had led him astray by serving him a Texas dinner of beefsteak and bourbon. We met regularly at the annual AAR meetings and renewed our friendship over dinner and drinks. I have especially warm memories of dinner with Langdon and Sonja at 1789, a wonderful restaurant in Georgetown.

Upon my retirement we moved to Highlands, North Carolina, where I established a public lectureship as part of the Highlands Institute for American Religious and Philosophical Thought. Langdon was invited to lecture in the second year of the series and continued every summer through 2004. Langdon was crucial to our lectureship, lending it credibility through his reputation as one of America’s leading theologians. His lectures were enormously popular and were eagerly anticipated each year, especially his lectures on science and religion and his testimony at the Arkansas trial in Little Rock.

In 2004, the Highlands Institute received a grant from the Templeton Foundation and began planning a celebration of Langdon’s life and thought to be held in June of 2005. Sonja and I sought to keep this a secret from Langdon in order to surprise him. However, I received a call from Langdon asking me what we were up to. In hindsight I am happy he discovered our “secret plan” prior to his illness. He was particularly pleased when I told him that we received a matching grant from Guy and Jean Hammond. Guy was a student of Langdon’s at Vanderbilt and is a member of the Highlands Institute.

Nancy and I have especially cherished Langdon’s visits with us each summer and feel privileged to have shared his life. Sonja was able to accompany him on at least one occasion. One of my most treasured mementos is a pencil sketch Langdon did of our home in 2003. We used the sketch for our Christmas cards and have made note cards as well.

Today we are paying tribute to Langdon, and I wish to thank him for sharing his life with us. His friendship enriched Nancy’s and my life. I would like to conclude by saying to Sonja, Amos, Frouwkje, and the family present that I appreciate this opportunity to participate in this memorial tribute to Langdon. ×
On December 3, 2001, I traveled to Charlottesville, Virginia, where I visited Langdon and Sonja Gilkey in their home. Professor Gilkey and I had the following conversations, largely oriented around the then-recent events of September 11th and their immediate aftermath, while sitting at the Gilkeys’ kitchen table. I am grateful for the time that Professor Gilkey took to share his theological observations and insights with me, but regret that they have come to publication only after his death. I thank Ms. Gilkey for her gracious hospitality during that visit.

Eagle of Power, Raven of Guilt: Historical and Religious Dimensions of the Current Global Crisis

JBP: Professor Gilkey, I would like to focus our conversations primarily through one central issue: the contemporary global crisis that has manifested itself through the events of September 11th and their aftermath. Because people in the U.S., but also all around the world, genuinely find themselves confused, even bewildered and frightened, about the present global crisis, they are searching for practical wisdom to understand these troubled and frightening times—precisely that which you have to offer through our conversation. . . .

In light of your own theology of culture, . . . how would you characterize the present global and religious situation, and what major categories of this present situation manifest themselves most prominently and urgently in light of the horrific events of September 11th and their continuing aftermath? . . .

LG: I must admit that I’ve been thinking mostly historically about these events and the situation, although the premise of all of these discussions is that the historical

The full text of this interview is available in the November/December 2005 Religion and Culture Web Forum at the Martin Marty Center website (http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/webforum/index.shtml).
We should resist [terrorism], but we should be humble in our resistance.

is also the theological. But I’m inclined to get at it in my own mind, first, by asking historically, “what does this represent?” My own view has slowly developed since September 11th — though, I must say, most of it lies back a long time in my whole life experience.

It seems to me that the major thing to note, without giving a political, social, and economic history of the last 500 years, is the expansion and tremendous power of the western European nations as the major aspect of what was happening in the globe. . . . Then, one must not forget by any means, though most of us were inclined to do so, the very great development of Islamic culture after 622 C.E. in a remarkably fast way. . . . And so that’s not what we remember: We remember the Roman Empire, the collapse of the Roman Empire; and we remember the growth of Europe slowly. Also, some of us remember the Crusades — although I’m not sure that George W. Bush knew the historical reference of that word; but, maybe he did. . . .

The most important issue involved here is the tremendous global expansion of the West, which whirlwind we have been reaping since the aftermath of the First World War. I have some feeling for this, because a reaction of hatred, cruelty, and expansion lay behind and caused the Japanese explosion of the 1930s to free Asia from the grip — and a relatively benevolent grip let us say, but nevertheless a grip — of the French, the Dutch, and above all the British. . . . The Europeans certainly dominated Japan and ruled the rest of Asia in one way or another. . . .

JBP: Add to that the Americas.

LG: Exactly, one can add to that the Americas. The globe was painted in European colors and there’s no doubt about that. Beginning in 1601, through 1900, through and until the middle of the twentieth century, this was the global situation. . . .

In all of this, we’ve forgotten, and I’ve forgotten and don’t know that much about, that another great empire (the Islamic Empire), besides the Chinese and the Japanese and so on, with its own memories of glory, had been pushed to the side, humiliated, ruled in effect, and left with uncreative, absolutist — and relatively corrupt — kinds of govern-
As I’ve said many times, when the eagle of power sits on your right shoulder, the raven of guilt sits on your left shoulder . . .

Now, the big difference between the two of them — and I don’t mean that this makes either of them better — is that Falwell and Robertson found the causes of this to be in the evils of our own culture. As far as I heard Osama, he found the causes of these events to be in our culture, the other culture for him. I didn’t hear, I don’t hear much repentance on the part of Osama bin Laden; of course, I don’t feel there was any repentance on the part of Falwell or Robertson.

JBP: No.

LG: No, other people were doing these horrible things, not they themselves; and I think that’s an error. That’s non-biblical from beginning to end.

JBP: The evaluation and repentance should start with the church first.

LG: Yes, start with yourself. Fundamentalist analyses — and these two [Falwell and Bin Laden] illustrations of fundamentalism are good — always are too darned concrete and very unprofound in what they find the Lord to be doing. . . . The first sermon that I ever preached was in China, when the [Second World War] had started. I pointed out that the Allied cause, while just, was as ambiguous as anything. We had empires that were ruling the world: We had better remember that and, in this sense, repent and be humble, and be willing to forgive the Japanese. . . . I suppose I’m here a child of Reinhold Niebuhr: I don’t want to take credit for any of this.

JBP: At this point in our history, Reinhold Niebuhr is particularly significant.

LG: I think so. Now, the blessed Paul Tillich could very easily have said this kind of thing. . . . Tillich’s insight into the decline of culture that he identifies in his analysis of late nineteenth-century European culture is a very persuasive one. The culture, at that point, was certainly chewing itself to bits. I think it recovered, but recovered largely through the good services of America, and I thank God for Woodrow Wilson who taught F.D.R. about the kind of peace that would be created; and I think we should give F.D.R. credit for that point, both the resistance and the thoughts of a new kind of peace which he passed on and wasn’t able to implement. But the peace treaty of both, in Europe and in Japan, were the seeds of the creative growth for the rest of the twentieth century. As I’ve said many times, when the eagle of power sits on your right shoulder, the raven of guilt sits on your left shoulder, and this was true of Europe. As power left the Greek city states and moved to Macedonia and to Rome, so power left the European states and moved to the United States and of course to Russia, after the Second World War. The reality of ambiguity, let’s not say sin, though I think sin lies back of all of these things, in the role of the powerful is a character of history, and it’s a character of twentieth-century history. And you pay for that.

JBP: So are you saying that limits, which you would describe as tragic, rather than evil per se, would afflict all powers, whether or not those powers are involved in sinful social injustices?

LG: Yes, you can begin to catalog their sins, but they’re not the cause; and, certainly, I would have a different list than brothers Falwell and Robertson. But that’s to be expected: I have a different list than the Republicans probably.

JBP: Perhaps the list [of sins] that you and I would make would include some things that they would consider the highest values of the European culture.

LG: Yes, exactly. When I was going to Europe in 1939, a junior in college at the time, I found a Britisher on the boat going over; and I hounded that poor guy — I think with objectionable enthusiasm — about how evil the British Empire was. And I remember that the poor guy was running around the deck, and I’d follow him. Then, during the Vietnam War, when I was in Toronto, a Canadian came up to me and sat down while I was having coffee: he worked me over, in exactly the same way. I remember smiling to myself, as I held up my arms to withstand the blast, thinking of my innocent self-righteousness in 1939—because we
Islamic people and Islamic scholars are justified in saying that the recent extremism is not characteristic of all Islam.

[the United States] didn’t exercise power in 1939. That’s when I developed the thesis that the eagle of power has a buddy, the raven of guilt. . . .

I think that the Palestinian-Israeli situation represents one of the subservient causes for the events of September 11th and serves for Muslims as a powerful symbol of the fact that Western powers are anti-Islamic. And another fact, which apparently was the initial one for Osama, was that there were infidel troops in Islamic sacred spaces. Certainly, the relation of the Islamic empire, even in its declining years, to Christians was not as antithetical as Osama; that is, Muslims, Christians, and Jews were intertwined in Islamic culture. At that point, I think that Islamic people and Islamic scholars are justified in saying that the recent extremism is not characteristic of all Islam. I’m inclined to say that, for Islam, theocracy is one of the natural implications of the religion as such, in a way that is not the case for Buddhism — though there’s been a history of this in Buddhism and Hinduism and Christianity. All of them, however, have a prophetic stance against the nation, and even a sacred nation, even the chosen nation, a prophetic stance that makes a theocratic nationalism or nationalistic theocracy something rare and difficult within either the Jewish religion or the Christian religion.

JBP: The drive toward a theocratic nation does seem to be something, though, that the Christian fundamentalists hold in common with Islamic fundamentalists?

LG: Yes, I know; to make it “Christian America” would be to go very closely to the kind of thing that Islam represents. At that point, though, the Saudis, the Iranians, the ruling group in Afghanistan, and Osama particularly, are certainly examples of the purifying, clarifying wave in the history of Islam against corruption, a drive toward getting back to the basics. I’m just glad that this hasn’t been so characteristic of Judaism, though it’s there in Judaism in the right-wing of Israel. There’s no question about it, and it’s there in our own fundamentalist groups in the U.S. As you rightly say, if they unpack their whole agenda, this would certainly be the case with the creationists who believed that they were going to take over the Republican party in the 1990s, and, when they did, they would make the U.S. into “Christian America”. . . .

JBP: Your thoughts about the principle of tolerance within liberal theology raises another question. In your thoughts about justice and culture, you have also developed and used the category of “the intolerable,” in reference to dangerous cultural and political expressions, such as the theocratic aims
North American fundamentalism is as it is partly because of the benevolent presence of . . . the Constitution, the separation of church and state.

of various religious groups like the Christian “Religious Right” in the U.S. and the Islamic extremists in Iran and Afghanistan, which is relevant to our conversation about the events of September 11th. In light of both your understanding of the “rough parity” of all religions, and your commitment not merely to tolerating other religious communities and traditions but also even to encouraging openness to revelation that comes through religious traditions that differ from one’s own religious tradition, how do you explain an application of the category of “the intolerable” to certain values, practices, and aims of extremist or fundamentalist religious communities? Would you describe what you mean by the notion of the intolerable in culture, particularly as different religions encounter one another—especially in the extreme forms about which you have already spoken? In other words, what are some of the ambiguities, paradoxes, or contradictions latent within the diversity of the rough parity among the many religions?

LG: That’s a good way of putting it. I was thinking of fundamentalist Christianity in the United States and creationism. North American fundamentalism is as it is partly because of the benevolent presence of mother law in this country and the Constitution, the separation of church and state. The fundamentalists’ adherence to that presence is an interesting question, but that’s what has to happen. Therefore, there is a certain tolerance on their part, necessary for other forms of Christianity, other churches, Jews, and the Islamic people in our midst; I don’t really know how much their leaders believe in that as well as accept it. I don’t have any idea of what Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, or any other leaders of that movement, think about that. They talk about “Christian America.” The implication of second-class citizenship is undoubted for anybody who is not a “born-again Christian” and so on. I don’t think that the genuine dialogue of listening to the other would be characteristic of them.

The current vitality of fundamentalist Christianity in this country raises an interesting issue. In the 1920s and ’30s, we understood fundamentalist religion to have a very short future. That conclusion could now be made about the future of liberal Christian religion, though I expect that liberal Judaism has a pretty good future. . . .

JBP: Niebuhr’s prophetic perspective has emerged again as extremely relevant in our situation.

LG: Oh yes, I think so, and my remarks today almost reproduce my own statements in the sermon that I preached in China and to which I referred earlier, which grew out of
Our own sin creates the need for repentance, remorse, efforts to change it.

the shocking experience at the fall of France. And hearing Niebuhr the next week, suddenly finding a way of looking at that, I found settling, grounding. Up to that point, and I’ve said this in my book on Niebuhr, the ambiguity which Americans felt was very much a part of our upbringing. I don’t mean to blame this on the generation after the First World War; they were not pacifists. But they didn’t want anything to do with war. . . . The two values of justice and peace seemed to oppose one another. The demands of justice were that you go fight; the demands of peace were that you don’t go fight.

In Niebuhr’s thought, I saw how that universe could be resolved. You have God who transcends all our values. Now, how good that is in the long look or in God’s eyes I don’t know, but it helped the problem there. Humility, repentance, and resistance became possibilities that made sense—and I gobbled up Niebuhr’s books. And I still find that tremendously helpful. . . .

JBP: Niebuhr helped you to negotiate the conflict between the aspiration to peace, on one hand, and the aspiration for justice, on the other. But you began to see this conflict early in your life.

LG: That conflict arises from the ambiguity of liberalism.

JBP: The notion of “the intolerable,” in your later theological work, seems to be another way that you try to negotiate this kind of conflict.

LG: Well it’s trying to get a name for why you say, “yes, we should be repentant, we should be humble and obviously do all we can to overcome what has caused this thing; but we have to resist.” Now, that was the experience of the fall of France, of Hitler, the Japanese empire. I remember when I arrived in Peking, I looked around and thought, “If I were Chinese, I would take up arms; I would go West and fight the Japanese.” Resistance was important, but Pearl Harbor had not occurred and had not brought me to that conclusion: As far as I was concerned, it was the experience of Peking. “The intolerable,” and that’s the experience—now you must name the thing that makes you resist, right? And the category of “the intolerable” is my attempt to name what creates that. Our own sin creates the need for repentance, remorse, efforts to change it. If you ask why is it that you find you have to resist, however, it is that something is intolerable. The first thing on that list was Adolf Hitler; the second was the Japanese Empire. I finally had to name that experience.

The situation to which I addressed the concept of “the intolerable” was the idea of a militant Christian America which would be intolerable—intolerable to you and to me, as well as to others outside of the United States, to which we would become a resistance movement. Now that’s the source of the word “intolerable”. . . .

I hesitate to use words like “outrage,” “self-righteous,” and so forth, because I think a very clear sense of the ambiguity of our role must accompany all such resistance.

JBP: This ambiguity appears in a variety of ways. Commitment to the parity of religions does raise a serious issue, because religious traditions (like Christian fundamentalism or Islamic extremism) do exist that include very restrictive societies as very much part of their worldviews. So, on the one side, serious aspects of the intolerable appear to us in some religious communities, thus eliciting our commitment to resistance; and, on the other side, we remain committed to religious parity as well as to the toleration and dialogue implied in that commitment. The conjunction of these two commitments constitutes quite an ambiguous situation for us.

LG: Absolutely. Actually, with the notion of religious parity, we’re thinking of Judaism, Buddhism, a benevolent Hinduism, and so forth. It’s a little harder to get Islam into that; and I must say I hope that I’m not prejudiced. . . .

JBP: When theocratic forms of religion appear, the real questions begin to emerge.

LG: That’s the intolerable. In all these theocratic cases that I’m speaking about, these are essentially ideological struggles—including explicitly anti-religious political and cultural movements, such as Stalinism. Not even Stalinism,
... both the creativity and the sins of the past led to our present situation ... 

However, was the kind of personal threat that fascism and fundamentalism were—though it's exactly the same thing. I mean Stalinist ideology, as Reinhold Niebuhr rightly said, is religion. ... The Taliban are a religious example of the same kind of thing, a theocratic government by an ideology. Whether religious or secular, it is an ideology, a worldview, and a commitment. And that means that the way to handle this thing is infinitely tricky. There are no politics without some kind of a worldview, without some kind of a commitment, without an ideology. ... 

JBP: You have stated in a number of publications that you came from a Baptist family. Your background is Baptist, of the formerly Northern Baptist Convention, now the American Baptist Churches/USA, not of the Southern Baptist Convention.

LG: My mother was Congregationalist.

JBP: And your father served as Pastor of Hyde Park Baptist Church, a church affiliated with the former Northern Baptist Convention.

LG: Those were the two leading liberal groups in the northeast. Now they [American Baptist Churches/USA] have fundamentalists in there too. There was always a struggle in there, but [the liberals] kept winning. ... 

JBP: ... How would you assess the influence of those particular features of the Baptist heritage, thoughts, and vision on your own theological method and maybe even on the content of your theological interpretations of Christian doctrines?

LG: I'm inclined to think that what you believe is largely determined by where the evil seems to lie. And, in that sense, I think that liberalism at its best felt the encroaching authority of communities of faith and doctrine, of class, of state, as their major enemies. That's what this is, and it had tremendously creative results; there's no doubt about it. But it's one side of the story.

The reality of the world from which the liberals originated and which they resisted was the reality of communal authorities. The reality of our world is of community-less individuals, where the hope for community, family, and church is felt very deeply by the otherwise empty individual. The individual without a community is empty and subject to all kinds of absolutisms. The breakup of community in Germany after the First World War, the breakup of all the various systems of authority, allowed absolutism to rush into that vacuum. Fundamentalism grows in America because the natural and social communities of life have been threatened by economic, political, and social developments. The one place where a community appears is in their evangelical groups. They have a saving character to them. There's no doubt that fundamentalism is a real community, a community of, at its best, confession and acceptance. And such communities can become demonic. Hitler offered community to the German people, and they were very glad to have it. The Japanese Empire offered community to a disrupted Japan, disrupted by the flood of Western things on it, and that's the same in Islam. Religions that have grown up in the U.S. in the post-1950s world are religions that offer in some sense community to people as well as their own spiritual autonomy. In that sense, you have to add community too, which raises some issues about the Baptist emphasis on the competence of the individual before God.

JBP: In light of these issues, what major tasks face Christian churches and Christian theologians in our present global situation? What guidelines would you offer for addressing this present situation?

LG: Looking at the roots of the situation in our own ambiguity, whether we're talking about the fall of France or about September 11th, both the creativity and the sins of the past led to our present situation: and we all share in both of those. There are new possibilities, but also possibilities of sin in the next moment, and that's the structure of the sermon, let us say. ...
Roll Away the Stone

I left church recently reflecting upon the portion of our gospel reading where the disciples encounter a man blind from birth, and they ask Jesus, Who sinned, this man or his parents? Jesus refuses to engage their question on the level of causality, instead stating that a healing good can be brought forth from all things, even this man’s affliction. What I find particularly striking about the disciples’ question is that we still ask it today—“What did I do to deserve this?” This question presupposes a God who is intimately involved in sending every misfortune our way. It is God as the heavenly banker, one who closely manages our “spiritual savings account,” ensuring that the balance is always even, and meeting each of our withdrawals with a deposit of retribution. This is a God of the “if - then” statement: If you misbehave, then I will directly punish you. And behind that I find a tit-for-tat pettiness that I am reluctant to attribute to God. I was troubled by the disciples’ question.

Since deep thinking usually gives me a headache, I soon found myself in front of the television, watching the movie Hannibal. I thought back to Silence of the Lambs, about how Dr. Lecter interacted with young Clarice Starling, the FBI cadet with such a haunted past. It was a give and take, summed up in the Latin phrase “quid pro quo”—this for that. Basically, Lecter would give Clarice information about her case in turn for her revealing painful childhood memories. In their climactic meeting, Lecter gives Clarice her final clue, and in exchange she is forced to tell him her most terrible memory, a story about the slaughter of spring lambs. At the end of this brilliant scene, Clarice is in tears, totally exposed and emotionally stripped. In that moment Lecter has broken her. Quid pro quo can be a dangerous thing. And then it dawned on me: God as the heavenly banker, tit for tat, was also the God of quid pro quo, this for that.

I’ll never forget the day I showed up to work at the

The author preached this sermon on March 13, 2005, at Saint Paul and the Redeemer Episcopal Church in Hyde Park.
Risk yourself, open yourself to the work of God, and there you will find healing.

hospital and was told that there was a young mother in the emergency room. In the middle of the night her new baby had suddenly stopped breathing. I talked to her for hours, and yet felt like I’d said nothing. I was reminded of Jeremiah 31:15: “Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.” Finally the mother looked at me and said, “I just can’t figure out what I did wrong.” I knew that she had done nothing wrong, and I told her that. She said, “No, I mean I must have done something terrible for God to punish me like this.” I replied, “Is that what you really believe, that God has killed your child as a punishment?” In response she uttered what have become for me the most painful, the most profound, and the most agonizing words I’ve ever heard. “No, but I just need a reason for this happening.” A reason. Who sinned — this baby or her mother — that the baby should have to die? The God of the quid pro quo gives a reason. But is it a reason worthy of God, and if so, is that a God worthy of worship?

Think about today’s gospel. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” These too are great and terrible words — a statement, an accusation, and also a “why.”

This story is a powerful symbol for the manner in which we relate to God in times of crisis. How many times have we — like the disciples, like Martha and Mary, like the young mother I met — posed that same question to God? Where were you? Why did this happen?

Nowhere is God promised to be preventive medicine. Nowhere does the Bible, the traditions, or the teachings of the Church promise a life without crisis. Likewise, the tradition and even the various texts within the Bible itself caution us against thinking in terms of direct causality. Yet we always seek an answer to the question “why?” I believe this is a fundamental human inclination. However, we are not offered an answer to this question; we are offered something else: healing and release from the pain of tragedy. Look at the response Jesus of Nazareth offers in the gospel. When Jesus saw Mary weeping, “he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.” Some translators — an interesting minority for sure — have argued that the Greek used here is meant to suggest that Jesus was angry, that he was inwardly raging.

I can’t help but be curious as to whether Jesus was experiencing that same, perhaps irrational, anger that we have all experienced — the anger that someone so young had died, that someone had to endure suffering — the anger over why God did not save this person, this one who needed to live. Jesus was angry about the destructive forces in creation that killed Lazarus. He was mad at death. This was the same story in which Jesus said, “I have come to bring life and to bring it in abundance.” Death was and is the enemy to Jesus. On this side of the kingdom, however, people still die. But Jesus refuses to engage the question of causality. He was a man always more inclined toward action. And so Jesus wept. He was overcome with emotion. At the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus wept tears of indignation. Instead of assuming he knew what Mary and Martha felt, Jesus chose to experience how they felt, by sharing the pain, the hurt, and the loss of a brother and a friend.

But the story continues. Jesus approaches the tomb and commands the stone be rolled away. This is the metaphor for the true act of healing. Mary, Martha, and indeed that entire community had placed all their hurt and pain inside that tomb with Lazarus, along with all their fond memories and laughter, and then they rolled the heaviest stone they could find in front of it to lock it up tight. It would be shut up there, where it would stay forever. But hurt, when buried like that, will live forever. And here is where the work of God begins, symbolized through the actions of Jesus as the Christ. It is a simple, yet profound statement: “Take away the stone.” This is the promise in the witness of scripture. Risk yourself, open yourself to the work of God, and there you will find healing.

I can recall visiting with an elderly woman in the hospital who was obviously upset about something much more than her impending back surgery. When I asked her about it she began to tell me the tale of her son, who had recently been murdered. Unsure what to do next, I asked her to tell me more about her son, and she began to cry. She cried for the next thirty minutes as she continued to tell me about him — his childhood, his friends, his job — but mostly about how proud she was of him and how much she loved him. When she finished I thought to myself that I must be the worst chaplain in history; I was getting ready to apolo-
Remember the Rachels of this world, and comfort them.

gize when she beat me to the punch and said, “Thank you. You don’t know how much I needed to do that.” You see, she had entombed the memories of her son, had placed them in that same dark place with Lazarus. She shut her pain behind that same great stone, and all her friends and family were too scared to talk about it, and so they sat outside weeping and mourning.

I am beginning to feel that there’s little use in saying, “Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.” It suggests a question with no answer. Remember the Rachels of this world, and comfort them. Looking within ourselves and at our neighbors we should cry out, “Lord, we are weary and in pain; help us to remove this weight.” When we do this the response can be, “Roll away the stone and show me your hurt; I will help you bear that burden. Lazarus, come forth.” Instead of shutting out our pain behind that great burial stone, we must open the door which leads to the very ground of our beings—and there, like Lazarus, we can be renewed by the power of God.
PAUL DEKRAR, M.A. 1973, Ph.D. 1978, recently published Creating the Beloved Community: A Journey with the Fellowship of Reconciliation (from Cascadia Publishing House). Dekar is the Niswonger Professor of Evangelism and Missions at Memphis Theological Seminary and Adjunct Professor at the University of Memphis.

RICHARD HUTCH, M.A. 1971, Ph.D. 1974, has been appointed Head of the School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics of the University of Queensland for a three-year term commencing August, 2005. Hutch served as Director of Studies, Faculty of Arts, for the past four years.

DAVIDSON LOEHR, M.A. 1981, Ph.D. 1988, has published America, Fascism, and God: Sermons from a Heretical Preacher. He is Senior Minister of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Austin in Austin, Texas.

NICK PATRICCA, M.A. 1969, Ph.D. 1972, professor emeritus at Loyola University Chicago, saw his new radio play, “An Uncertain Hour,” produced in July, broadcast from the Virginia Holocaust Museum. Dr. Patricca is also playwright-in-residence at Victory Gardens Theater, and artistic associate at Bailiwick Repertory, both in Chicago.

GARY PELUSO-VERDEND, Ph.D. 1991, has started a new position at Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa, Oklahoma. As of July 1, he is the Vice President of Stewardship and Associate Professor of Practical Theology. In addition, the Alban Institute recently published his book, Paying Attention: Focusing Your Congregation on What Matters.

ROBERT L. POTTER, Ph.D. 1991, has moved to Portland, Oregon. A retired physician and bioethicist, he is volunteer-teaching medical students in the areas of ethics and professionalism at Oregon Health and Science University.

MAC LINSCLOTT RICKETTS, M.A. 1962, Ph.D. 1964, is Professor Emeritus at Louisburg College, Virginia. His two recent publications are both concerned with Mircea Eliade. He is co-editor of Encounters with Mircea Eliade (2005) and author of the two-volume Radacinile romanesti ale lui Mircea Eliade (2004).

JAMIE S. SCOTT, Ph.D. 1990, was promoted to full Professor in the Programme in Religious Studies at York University (Toronto) in 2004 and is having two essay collections published: Canadian Missionaries, Indigenous Peoples:
EMILIE M. TOWNES, M.A. 1977, D.Min. 1982, professor of African American Religion and Theology at Yale University Divinity School, has been appointed the first Andrew W. Mellon Professor of African American Religion and Theology at Yale University.

REV. WILLIAM J. WASSNER, A.M.R.S. 1982, D.Min. 1985, continues to serve as pastor of St. Peter’s UCC in South Bend, Indiana. He is also teaching (The Divine Dialogue, New Age Ethics, and Critical Thinking) at DePaul University’s School for New Learning as well as serving as a chaplain with the Indiana State Police on the Toll Road.

LOSSES

PETER D’AGOSTINO, M.A. 1987, Ph.D. 1993, was killed near his home in Oak Park, Illinois, on June 22, 2005. A respected associate professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago, in the Department of History & Catholic Studies Program, D’Agostino received an American Society of Church History award for his 2004 book, Rome in America. While at the Divinity School he was a 1991-1992 Junior Fellow at the Institute for the Advanced Study of Religion.

His extended family has established a trust fund to aid his wife, Mary Mapes, also a history instructor and author, and the couple’s infant daughter.

Contributions can be made through the Northern Trust Company. Interested parties can make their checks payable to the D’Agostino/Mapes Family Trust and send them to: The Northern Trust Company, 50 South LaSalle Street, B-10, Chicago, Illinois 60675. Attention: Andrea L. Pasch, Trust Officer.

The police investigation is ongoing.

THOMAS OVERHOLT, M.A. 1963, Ph.D. 1967, died of complications of leukemia on August 8, 2005. A retired University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (UW-SP) professor of religious studies, Overholt earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Chicago Theological Seminary and the University

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For information on alumni giving and volunteering opportunities, please contact Molly Bartlett, associate dean for external relations, at 773-702-8248 or mbartlett@uchicago.edu.
of Chicago Divinity School, where he also studied for his doctorate in Old Testament. He ended his career at UW-SP as chair of the Philosophy Department, retiring in 1999. The author of four books, he was an active participant in national professional organizations and conducted research that led to publications on the topics of biblical philosophy, the cross-cultural comparison of prophesy, and, to a lesser extent, native American religions.

After retirement he was actively involved in environmental causes, with the Aldo Leopold Audubon Society and the North Central Conservancy Trust. He served two terms as president of Audubon and was both vice president and secretary of the land trust.

Survivors include his wife, Sarah L. Overholt; two sons, Mike (Kim) and Pete (Gail); one brother, Robert (Donna); and five grandchildren.


Dr. Spohn was born in Washington, D.C. He received a B.A. from Gonzaga University (1968); an M.A. (1969) and Ph.D. (1978) from the University of Chicago; and an M.Div. (1974) and S.T.L. (1981) from the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley. Well known for his work in the fields of scripture and ethics, Roman Catholic moral theology, and American philosophy and theology, he served on the faculties of the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley (1979-1992) and Santa Clara University, where he was director of the Bannan Center for Jesuit Education (1998-2004) and held the Augustin Cardinal Bea chair in theology and Christian ethics.


Dr. Spohn is survived by his wife, Dr. Martha Stortz. Condolences may be mailed to 2770 Marin Ave., Berkeley, California 94708.

Campus photography by Dan Dry on pages 27, 28, and 30.
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