Truth and Hope

Essays for a Perilous Age

WALTER BRUEGGEMANN

Compiled, Edited, and with
a Foreword by Louis Stulman

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Foreword

During the past fifty years, Walter Brueggemann has emerged as one of the most influential figures in biblical studies and U.S. Protestant Christianity. This impact is not limited to his distinguished writing career, which includes a repertoire of well over one hundred books; it is also the upshot of his passionate work in the seminary classroom (at Eden Theological Seminary and Columbia Theological Seminary) as well as hundreds of lectures and sermons given at churches, universities, and conferences across the United States and abroad. A recent conversation at Baltimore-Washington Airport reminded me of Walter's enormous impact. While waiting for my flight to Detroit, I lent a hand to a person carrying three massive bags. He had spent two months in the Northwest Pacific Wilderness and was now traveling to Baltimore to visit a grandchild teaching at Johns Hopkins. When he learned I was a religious studies teacher, he told me his partner had taken a doctoral class in Atlanta on the book of Jeremiah. "I'm not sure if you're familiar with the instructor, Walter Brueggemann, but this extraordinary individual almost singlehandedly revolutionized the way the U.S. church interprets the Bible." This serendipitous meeting only reinforced my conviction that Walter Brueggemann—preacher, teacher, scholar, social critic, organic intellectual—has indeed played a formative role in the church and the academy.

This book may conclude Walter Brueggemann's publishing career. If so, take special note. As we have come to expect from Walter, *Truth and Hope* is rich in insight, subversion, and imagination. It inspires, disturbs, and pulsates with astonishing clarity. It relishes interpretive complexity, acknowledges a multiplicity of textual voices, and never tires of dialogue over monologue. And like a good number of his books, it is markedly wide-ranging, as if to address as many pressing issues as possible under one cover: public faith, consumerism, intolerance, drifts toward fascism, immigration, loss of wonder, hegemony—all, of course, through the interpretive lens of Christian Scripture. The present book

parses Hebrew texts on prayer and justice, inclusion, hope, truth-telling, stewardship, generosity, and fidelity, as well as greed and fear. Like every other work of Walter's, it moves briskly and organically into contemporaneity, refusing to relegate biblical texts to antiquity and never shrinking from the most pressing issues of our time. Accordingly, it is not only a robust reading of the Bible and a biting social critique; it is also rich theological engagement, which, I think, is its distinguishing mark. Put directly, this book is unabashedly theological. Whether tackling religion and higher education, homiletics, modern reductionism, or neighborly materiality, Walter, as is his custom, enters the fray and broaches questions of transcendence. He dares to speak of God, even though it is increasingly difficult to do so with intellectual integrity. Kathleen O'Connor reminded me recently that people don't talk much about God these days. And I thought to myself, "That's right, and for good reason."

God hasn't been getting high marks in the polls of late. Church attendance is on the decline. The number of religious "nones" and "religiously unaffiliated" is on the rise. According to the Barna Group, "Substantial majorities of millennials who don't go to church say they see Christians as judgmental (87%), hypocritical (85%), anti-homosexual (91%), and insensitive to others (70%)."[1] The devout are center stage for acting out unseemly behavior. In God's name, believers are disparaging immigrants, supporting white privilege, and championing various forms of extremism. Clearly not the best track record!

This bad behavior was on display in the 2016 U.S. election cycle. Prominent Christian leaders leveraged positions of power and privilege over civility and the common good. Some deployed sacred texts and theological language to sanction male aggression and disparaging rhetoric against the poor and vulnerable. This demeaning language was even leveled against victims of one of the worst humanitarian crises of our time, the Syrian civil war. In this conflict over 400,000 people have died. Seven million people have been internally displaced. Over five million Syrians are now refugees,[2] more than half of whom are children.[3] The face of Omran Daqneesh, the traumatized child from Aleppo, embodied the catastrophe.

You would think such a tragedy would have generated an outpouring of sympathy, but instead it incited a frenzy of fear. The presidential campaign of Donald Trump provided a platform for this intense xenophobia. The presumptive Republican nominee had no qualms in telling Syrian refugee children, "You can't come here." "We don't know where their parents come from. They have no documentation whatsoever. . . . There's absolutely no way of saying where *these people* [my emphasis] come from. They may be from Syria, they may be ISIS, they may be ISIS-related."[4]

This harsh language alongside "promises" to purge the U.S. of "illegals," ban Muslims, and build a "great wall to our south" appealed to our worst selves, not to the people we truly desire to be. Pope Francis understood this immediately and responded, "A person who thinks only about building walls, wherever they may be, and not building bridges, is not Christian. This is not the Gospel."[5]

Ideologies of exclusion and rhetoric against "others" may calm the fears of some, but they do little to address the biblical mandate to improve the lives of many in need. They do little to unite us in authentic ways with the rest of humanity.

Unfortunately and disconcertingly, millions of Christians supported this vitriolic campaign, support that hasn't waned since the election, as the sign of one enthusiast indicates, "Thank you Lord Jesus for President Trump," or as Jerry Falwell Jr. exclaimed, "I think Evangelicals have found their dream president" (April 29, 2017). [6]Apparently, 75 to 80 percent of white evangelical voters ignored accusations of aggravated sexual harassment and contempt for those with disabilities, people of color, Mexicans, and other minorities. Those who cherish a sacred text that champions the dignity of all people and identifies with the broken and vulnerable, "the least of these" (Matt. 25:31–46), more than tolerated ideologies rooted in xenophobia and bigotry. The reasons for such support are no doubt complex and well beyond the scope of this foreword,[7] but I can't help wonder if the incongruence did not lie in part with the lure of power and influence.[8] Regardless, the alignment of large cross-sections of the church with such ideologies was and continues to be a tragedy of massive proportion.

Not unrelated, and complicating theological discourse even more, we are currently witnessing seismic shifts in cultural, political, and religious landscapes. The litany of damage is nothing less than staggering:

- Deepening fissures in American culture, unprecedented in our lifetime
- The rejection of democratic norms
- The rise of authoritarianism and ethnic tribalism
- Disturbing signs of despotic leadership in the United States and Europe
- The resurgence of white nationalism
- The dismantling of civic discourse and civil society
- A greater tolerance of racial bigotry
- Horrifying gun violence in schools
- Dehumanization of immigrants, even the seizure of children from parents at the border
- Increasing economic disparities
- Assaults against woman's rights, environmental protections, the judiciary, and the free press
- Contempt for truth
- Disturbing alliances of Christian communions with autocratic political systems
- The long and dangerous reach of ideologies of power and transactional ethics in the guise of Christian faith
- Deep disruptions in theological education, including the closing, merging, and relocations of seminaries
- Disillusionment with long-standing forms of religious life, especially among millennials
- Resultant widespread despair and palpable cynicism

Put succinctly by a group of our elders, including Walter, "We are living through perilous and polarizing times as a nation, with a dangerous crisis of moral and political leadership at the highest levels of our government and in our churches. We believe the soul of the nation and the integrity of faith are now at stake."[9]

Not all is bleak, though. Already emerging from the wreckage are signs of resistance, creativity, and empowerment. We are witnessing grassroots movements with renewed commitments to the teachings of Jesus, communities confronting animus toward Muslims, sexual violence, and the dehumanization of refugees and minorities. In this fight for "the soul of the nation and the integrity of faith," a number of community leaders are confronting "the resurgence of white nationalism, racism, and xenophobia; misogyny; attacks on immigrants, refugees, and the poor; the regular purveying of falsehoods and consistent lying by the nation's highest leaders; and moves toward autocratic political leadership and authoritarian rule."[10] In all, we can discern a fresh openness to the Spirit, a commitment to reflection and action, and the audacity to reembrace biblical faith, hope, and love, expressed in manifestos that say yes to life, yes to others, yes to compassion, and no to injustice and intolerance.

Walter Brueggemann is a lead voice in this chorus. The present collection is a case in point. Even though it developed over a period of years, it still, uncannily, speaks to our particular crisis in history. It is faithful to the witness of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, attentive to contemporary exigencies, alert to the value of inclusion and empathy, and audacious enough to believe that God still speaks through and to the fractures of the current mélange. The present volume attends to the central concerns and theological constructions that emerge from pain-filled and dislocated spaces, including land seizure, exile, injustice, shame, and confinement. It explores theological strategies for survival and resistance as well as gestures of hospitality to the outsider whose defender is the divine stranger: "Don't mistreat or oppress an immigrant, because you were once immigrants in the land of Egypt. Don't treat any widow or orphan badly. If you treat them badly and they cry out to me, you can be sure that I'll hear their cry" (Exod. 22:21–22 CEB). Along the way, it pays close attention to fractures in culture and faith, while listening to voices of despair and hope, domination and hegemony, and to an alien God who enters the fray to address the concrete needs of wounded people—then and now.

No wonder so many are reluctant to talk about God today. In settings such as ours, theological dialogue is scandalous, not because it dares to enter a secular terrain but because it is so easily misconstrued as power brokerage and opportunism. Yet to relinquish this engagement comes at great cost, for theological discourse not only shapes personal piety but also collective imagination. What is at stake, or more precisely *who* is at stake, is the divine and human Other, the Stranger, the Guest, the Poor,[11] who are often the victims of market-driven religions of certitude, or what Jean Vanier, the founder of L'Arche, has called

elsewhere the 'religion of winning . . . which "leave[s] behind those who are weaker."[12]

We are grateful, indeed indebted, Walter, for your audacity to take, bless, break, and give the word of life, rich in meaning and mercy, resistant to closure and certitude, laden with dialogical possibility, ever new and transformative, yet wounded and vulnerable, and always aligned with the disempowered and marginalized. Thanks for the chutzpah to speak of God in such challenging times.

Louis Stulman

Preface

I have taken my title for this collection from one of these essays that was a presentation to the Wisconsin Council of Churches. In that presentation, I began with an appeal to three contemporary Christian confessions: Barmen, Kairos, and Martin Luther King's "Letter from the Birmingham Jail." On the first page, I suggested that our general social situation is not unlike that of German National Socialism. That judgment turned out to be an anticipation of the more recent Christian confession, "Reclaiming Jesus," a statement that is intentionally patterned after the Barmen Declaration. Or as Jim Wallis, the principle author of "Reclaiming Jesus," avers, "This is our Bonhoeffer moment." In that presentation a bit ago, I suggested that these confessions, after the manner of the long prophetic trajectory of the Bible, focus characteristically on the two acts of truth-telling and hope-telling.

There is no doubt that the prophetic tradition regularly engages in truth-telling, in order to expose social reality as a systemic act of "falseness" that contradicts the purposes of God. The prophetic tradition of Jeremiah, for instance, is preoccupied with truth-telling that exposes "falseness."

> For from the least to the greatest of them,
> everyone is greedy for unjust gain,
> and from prophet to priest,
> everyone deals falsely.
> 6:13; see also 8:10

> This is your lot,
> the portion I have measured out to you, says the LORD,
> because you have forgotten me and trusted in lies.
> 13:25

> They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds. (14:14)

The prophet exposes the deceit of dominant culture. That same prophetic tradition (like many others) turns eventually to the work of hope-telling:

> For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. (29:11)

> For I will restore health to you,
> and your wounds I will heal, says the LORD.
> 30:17

> For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land. (32:15)

Such hope does not doubt that the faithful God can create futures, a way out of no way. The sequence from truth to hope in the book of Jeremiah is characteristic of the prophetic books of the Old Testament. These several prophetic voices (that gave canonical shape to the prophetic books) knew that this sequence is definingly important. There can be no hope until truth is told. Our temptation, of course, is to do the work of hope without the prior work of truth.

This sequenced work of truth and hope is theologically rooted. Truth-telling is grounded in the God who will not be mocked by our illusions. Hope is God-grounded in the conviction that even our wayward resistance does not negate God's good resolve for fidelity in the creation of futures. Without that God-groundedness, truth-telling can readily become nothing more than harping, and hope-telling only wishful thinking.

In Christian tradition, that sequence of truth and hope is given dramatic articulation in the Friday and the Sunday of the life of Jesus. The Friday crucifixion of Jesus amounts to truth-telling against the Roman Empire—namely, that the lethal capacity of Rome can do its work, but it is not enough and will not bring well-being. And so Sunday is a dramatic embodiment of hope for the power of life over the scandal of death. And of course in church practice we would like to do the hope of Easter without the truth of Good Friday, as witnessed in the contrast in church attendance on those days.

As this dual God-grounded work is voiced in the prophets and performed in the life of Jesus, so now our work in the church is the same: to tell the truth about the way in which our dominant way of consumer militarism (under the guise of American exceptionalism) will fail, because it contradicts the purposes of God, and to tell the hope that God is at work for an alternative world of peace with justice. These two accents dominate the confessions I have named, not least the most recent, "Reclaiming Jesus." These themes variously permeate these essays and indeed all of my work. As early as *The Prophetic Imagination* (1978),

I had identified these two tasks. I hope the essays collected here usefully extend the exposition of these themes that are so urgent for our faithful practice.

These essays are varied; some are recent, some are not. Almost all of them are keyed to a specific occasion, most of them by invitation. In sum, they are an extended exposition of a variety of biblical texts, most often to connect to our contemporary realities of faith and life.

My finish is with gratitude in so many directions that I cannot begin to name them. Obviously, I am grateful to my dear friend, Louis Stulman, for helping me get this collection into a manuscript and providing a generous foreword. I am grateful, as always, to the folk at Westminster John Knox Press for their good and careful work, notably David Dobson and Julie Tonini. Most of all now, I am grateful to Tia, who knows my toils and snares of completing one of my final collection of essays.

Walter Brueggemann

Chapter 1

Holiness as Ground for Knowing Mercy

I want to consider resources and guidance that may be found in the book of Daniel as we think about our response to the gospel for the sake of the world.

I.

The book of Daniel is most often disregarded among us because of its bizarre, enigmatic "apocalyptic" dimension. But the first half of the book, my focus, offers narratives that are not apocalyptic but are dramatically alive in agonistic ways. The antagonist for Daniel in this narrative is Nebuchadnezzar, a reference point that situates Daniel in the Babylonian Empire, where Jews were displaced and required to sing the songs of Zion in a strange land. In what is a litmus test for critical scholarship, the book of Daniel is commonly placed in the period of Antiochus, the Syrian heir to Alexander the Great, who brought with him an aggressive Hellenistic perspective that sought to override local traditions, including the traditions of Judaism. In that context, the book of Daniel offers a mode of faith that is aware of the violent effort of the Maccabees, who are dismissed in the book of Daniel as a "little help" (Dan. 11:34). Whether we take the proposed

Babylonian context for the narratives or the critical Hellenistic context, either way the Daniel narratives concern a crisis of Judaism when Jews were marginalized, and when the peculiar tradition and identity of Judaism were under assault from a large, hegemonic power. The wonder of the Daniel narrative is that this threatened Jew and his company did not withdraw from hegemonic society in order to nurture and maintain an alternative distinct identity. Rather, Daniel is perforce a quite public man in the narrative, boldly playing an assertive part in maintaining a particular presence in the affairs of that hegemonic society.

John Collins concludes that the purpose of such a diaspora hero as Daniel is to offer sustaining literature in order

> (1) to remind the Jews that their monotheistic religion is a glorious heritage infinitely superior to the paganism with its gross idol worship; (2) to encourage the Jews to remain loyal to that heritage like the outstanding protagonists of the book who were willing to risk their social, economic, and political status and even their lives by steadfastly refusing to compromise their faith, and (3) to show dramatically and imaginatively that the God of Israel comes to the rescue and delivers those who believe in him despite even the severest reverses, including death by martyrdom.[1]

Concerning faith lived in the diaspora, Daniel Smith concludes,

> If Daniel, Esther, and Joseph are examples of exilic hero stories, designed didactically to advise a "lifestyle for the diaspora," then the hero, as Abrahams, Meinhold, and Collins emphasized, is a focus for a group: one in whom hopes are placed and one who provides an example as well. It is significant that the result of virtually all the diaspora hero stories is a change of condition, either implied or explicitly stated, for the Jewish people as a whole. Thus, Jewish diaspora hero stories become deliverer stories as well.[2]

Smith, following the work of N. H. H. Graburn, proposes that displaced people, those who are powerless in their own land, are living in "the Fourth World," in order to maintain identity when the dominant culture is bent on marginalizing—if not crushing—that identity:

> The alternative worldview presented in this study could be called a "Fourth World" perspective. In modern sociological literature, exiled peoples have come to be included among those otherwise collectively known as "the Fourth World." Graburn's definition of the Fourth World provides a helpful beginning:
>
> > All aboriginal or native peoples whose lands fall within the national boundaries and techno-bureaucratic administrations of the countries of the first, second, and third worlds. As such, they are peoples without countries of their own, peoples who are usually in the minority, and without the power to direct the course of their collective lives.[3]

In what follows, I propose, mutatis mutandis, that the Daniel narrative may be a resource for the church in the midst of the national security state in the

United States. I am aware that that is a huge mutatis mutandis, but I believe it is an accurate description of our situation of faith and ministry. For all the religious talk among us, it is the case that the dominant ideology of our culture, which I term "military consumerism"—an ideology that totalizes much of the imagination of both conservatives and liberals—is profoundly inimical to the primal claims of the gospel. Thus, our context is not unlike that of the early church in the book of Acts wherein proclamation of resurrection was a sufficient reason to be summoned before the authorities. I will work with that analogue, even though one must not press it too far. I believe that a faithful response to the gospel for the sake of the world may begin in a recognition of our true place in that world. And I judge that our evangelical claims are in deep contradiction to the claims of the global empire that is our societal habitat.

Thus, I propose this analogue: Daniel's work is to practice his Jewish identity in generative ways in an alien hegemony, to protect that identity, and to impinge upon that hegemony in transformative ways. The church's work is to practice our baptismal identity in generative ways in an alien hegemony, to protect our baptismal identity, and to impinge upon that hegemony in transformative ways.

II.

I will consider three narratives of confrontation in the book of Daniel, with particular attention to the third one. I will be partly interested in the conduct and utterance of Daniel, because he is the key "Fourth World" figure amid the dominant world wherein he finds himself.

1. In the long narrative of Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar, a cipher for the ancient and for the contemporary national security state, has a disturbing dream that is propelled by the impingement of the holy truth upon an otherwise hermetically sealed system. The "magicians" of the empire, the intelligence community, are required by Nebuchadnezzar not only to interpret the dream but to tell the dream. But they cannot! In his frustration with his own intelligence apparatus, Nebuchadnezzar decrees that all of them should be executed.

In the midst of a hegemonic violent rage comes Daniel, carrier of a distinct faith identity, a man with "prudence and discretion." In preparation for his work, Daniel

- urges his companions to pray for mercy for himself and for the imperial wise men (v. 17);
- offers a doxology to the God of heaven, praise to God for sovereign power and wisdom (vv. 20–23); and
- urges that the lives of the imperial magicians be spared (v. 24).

These three actions taken altogether amount to a vigorous intervention in the world of Nebuchadnezzar and reflect deep rootage in Jewish tradition concerning mercy, wisdom, and divine power.

In verses 25–45, Daniel reiterates the dream and gives its interpretation. It is about the rise and fall of great empires, including that of Nebuchadnezzar. This is a formidable philosophy of history that reflects the world of the late Persian and early Hellenistic periods, all of which pertains to YHWH's rule. Daniel allows himself two claims for his distinct faith. First, he asserts that it is the God of heaven who knows the mysteries that he is about to disclose:

> There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has disclosed to King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen at the end of days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed were these. . . . But as for me, this mystery has not been revealed to me because of any wisdom that I have more than any other living being, but in order that the interpretation may be known to the king and that you may understand the thoughts of your mind. (Dan. 2:28, 30)

The coming course of events is beyond the ken of the empire that imagined its own unchallengeable sovereignty. There is a plan beyond worldly power that is carried by Daniel. Second, there is coming a rule that will supersede all human pretensions:

> And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall this kingdom be left to another people. It shall crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever. (2:44)

The upshot of this narrative is a remarkable one. Given such assurance, Nebuchadnezzar turns out to be benign. Daniel has tamed the violent rage of the empire with his larger perspective on the coming governance of the God of heaven. Nebuchadnezzar for an instant issues a doxology to the God of Daniel:

> The king said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery!" (2:47)

And Daniel himself, as response to his exhibit of bold courage, is presented to the king and given many gifts. Without interpretive comment, the narrative has shown how it is that Daniel the Jew emerges, by his bold wisdom, with transformative impact on the empire. And his God is praised by the empire!

2. In the second narrative, chapter 3, the relationship of Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar—that is, Jew to empire, local identity in the face of hegemonic power—is much more aggressive and violent. In this narrative, Nebuchadnezzar now has the self-aggrandizing statue before which all shall bow down. The action to follow is situated in appropriate state liturgy:

> Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble, all the peoples, nations,

> and languages fell down and worshiped the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. (3:7)

All of that worked smoothly, and it was in any case just liturgy. But such a hegemonic power has an immense and effective surveillance system. It did not take long before Nebuchadnezzar got a report: "Certain Chaldeans came forward and denounced the Jews" (v. 8):

> There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These pay no heed to you, O King. They do not serve your gods and they do not worship the golden statue that you have set up. (3:12)

It mattered in that ancient world, as now, in what liturgy one participates. After all, even back in Egypt, all that was asked was "Let my people go that they may worship me." The management of a liturgical system is a life-and-death matter for the maintenance of public power. For that reason, Jewish passive resistance to imperial liturgy immediately evoked imperial aggressiveness:

> Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought in; so they brought those men before the king. . . . "Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble to fall down and worship the statue that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire, and who is the god that will deliver you out of my hands?" (3:13, 15)

It seemed innocuous enough. Join the liturgy, and then go home and be an absent Jew. But these Jews could not hide their particular identity. They could not withdraw to safe practice. And so the Jews respond to hegemonic power with a simple but comprehensive refusal:

> Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present a defense to you in this matter. If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up." (3:16–18)

The answer is a double "if" concerning both eventualities:

> If we are delivered . . .
>
> If we are not delivered . . .

Either way, we will not worship. We will not serve. We will not concede our identity. A great deal is staked on the delivering power of "our God." But not

everything is staked on divine intervention. The rest is staked on Jewish stubbornness, on Jewish identity even when miracles are lacking. The remarkable statement is a profound act of defiance. And the threat of the furnace surely draws an allusion back to the exodus deliverance in Deuteronomy 4:20:

> But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron-smelter, out of Egypt, to become a people of his very own possession, as you are now. (Deut. 4:20)

This has all happened before, and we are ready and resolved as it happens this time.

The rest of the narrative is history, or legend, or imagination, or whatever. Nebuchadnezzar is yet again in a rage (Dan. 3:19). The maintenance of absolute power that lacks any persuasive legitimacy keeps people edgy, nervous, and prone to violence. The furnace is heated up seven times (3:19). In an oppressive hegemony, every act must be performed in hyperbole. How else to implement "shock and awe"? But as we expect, the courageous, defiant friends are endorsed by the God of all asbestos:

> And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men; the hair of their heads was not singed, their tunics were not harmed, and not even the smell of fire came from them. (Dan. 3:27)

And even Nebuchadnezzar, slow learner that he is, gets the point and breaks out yet again in doxology:

> Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him. They disobeyed the king's command and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. (3:28)

Nebuchadnezzar sees exactly what has happened. Not unlike Pharaoh, he is a late learner. But he learns. By courageous defiance and testimony, so the narrator attests, even hegemonic power can come to see the truth that subverts all phony claims to authority. The outcome is a decree that the God of Jews must not be disregarded:

> Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that utters blasphemy against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins; for there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way. (3:29)

There is no other God who is able to deliver in this way. That is the judgment of the empire! It is no wonder that the Jews are promoted in the imperial government (v. 38).

3. The third narrative, chapter 4, moves in the same pattern, again featuring Nebuchadnezzar versus Daniel in a way that subverts the absolute claims of the global reach of Babylon. As this narrative goes, Nebuchadnezzar is in a better mood. He sings to the Most High God (vv. 2–3). Not unlike the psalmist—"I shall not be moved" (Ps. 30:6)—he declares his prosperous ease: "I, Nebuchadnezzar, was living at ease in my home and prospering in my palace" (Dan. 4:4). But the prosperity only belongs to the daylight. At night, when one's guard is down, other stuff happens to Nebuchadnezzar beyond his favorite construal: "I saw a dream that frightened me; my fantasies in bed and the visions of my head terrified me" (Dan. 4:5).

Nebuchadnezzar now knows what to do, having learned from the events recounted in chapter 2. His own interpreters failed, but he knows about the Jews who can probe the mysteries:

> At last Daniel came in before me—he who was named Belteshazzar after the name of my god, and who is endowed with a spirit of the holy gods—and I told him the dream. (Dan. 4:8)

Nebuchadnezzar even recognizes Daniel's special gifts from God and asks these interpretive gifts to serve the empire:

> O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that you are endowed with a spirit of the holy gods and that no mystery is too difficult for you. Hear the dream that I saw; tell me its interpretation. (4:9)

Nebuchadnezzar then tells the dream to Daniel; in contrast to chapter 2, Daniel does not need to recount the dream, only provide the interpretation. The dream is about a luxurious tree that fails. Mindful of the risk he takes in truth-telling, Daniel proceeds in a way not unlike that of Nathan before David: "It is you, O king" (v. 32). It is you who will be brought low, made to eat grass, humiliated, made powerless, "until you have learned that the Most High has sovereignty over the kingdom of mortals, and gives it to whom he will" (Dan. 4:25). It is the "until" that debunks Nebuchadnezzar's hegemony and that exhibits it as a fragile penultimate power arrangement that cannot prevail. Nebuchadnezzar's big learning yet to come is that "heaven is sovereign" (v. 26).

But then in verse 27, Daniel makes a move beyond interpretation. He dares to follow dream and interpretation with a policy proposal. This celebrated but uncredentialed Jew speaks Jewish truth to hegemonic power:

> Therefore, O king, may my counsel be acceptable to you; atone for your sins with righteousness, and your iniquities with mercy to the oppressed, so that your prosperity may be prolonged. (4:27)

Righteousness and mercy! Righteousness, which is to practice communitarian economics and ethics between haves and have-nots, and mercy, which is to yield

to the neighbor in need. The outcome of these two practices is in order that your prosperity may be prolonged. The calculus is simple: the practice of mercy will lead to prosperity. The calculus is as old as the book of Deuteronomy. But what is old and steady in Jewish horizon must have been a stunner to hegemonic power. It is a stunner because hegemonic power does not major in righteousness and does not specialize in mercy. Indeed, Daniel may have read Second Isaiah, in which Babylon is condemned for its treatment of Israel:

> I was angry with my people,
> I profaned my heritage;
> I gave them into your hand,
> you showed them no mercy;
> on the aged you made your yoke
> exceedingly heavy.
> Isa. 47:6

The proposal of Daniel to his overlord is that the crown may open its settled imperial truth to the counter-truth that has been kept and nourished in this local tradition of Torah.

When Daniel finished speaking, the narrative tersely reports, "all this came upon Nebuchadnezzar" (Dan. 4:28). All this dream came upon him. All this dream of deconstruction and humiliation. All this dream came because Nebuchadnezzar had not grasped the Jewish "until," had not understood that his power was penultimate and held to account. All this came upon him, but none of it would have surprised any serious Jew. Nebuchadnezzar is presented as still being buoyantly full of himself:

> The king said, "Is this not magnificent Babylon, which I have built as a royal capital by my mighty power and for my glorious majesty?" (Dan. 4:30)

But, says the narrator,

> while the words were still in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven: "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: The kingdom has departed from you!" (4:31)

The drama of self-sufficiency is interrupted by another voice, this one the transcendent voice of heaven beyond the reach of the superpower. This interrupting voice is the same one that will sound again in the parable of the Rich Fool in Luke 12:

> God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" (Luke 12:20)

It is the big hovering question that is always asked of absolute power. That voice to Nebuchadnezzar lays out the dismantling and then reiterates "until you have

learned that the Most High has sovereignty over the kingdom of mortals and gives it to whom he will" (Dan. 4:32).

The turn in the narrative occurs in verse 34, when Nebuchadnezzar himself attests, "My reason returns to me." He had been, he now acknowledges, unreasonable. Indeed, he had been insane. Absolute power, in its mix of anxiety and self-sufficiency, does indeed become insane. It becomes insane in acquisitiveness, in aggressive violence, in the seizure of goods that belong to others, in its craving disregard of local traditions. And when reason returns to the dominant culture, it issues in doxology (vv. 34–35). This is not an idle "praise hymn," but a genuine acknowledgment and ceding over of authority. Nebuchadnezzar has finally, under the tutelage of Daniel, arrived at the inescapable "until" of penultimacy, where he never could have arrived himself without this Jewish witness. The narrative ends with restoration, on the other side of yielding:

> At that time my reason returned to me; and my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom. My counselors and my lords sought me out, I was re-established over my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me. (Dan. 4:36)

But the reiteration is grounded in an acknowledgment:

> Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the king of heaven,
>
> for all his works are truth,
> and his ways are justice;
> and he is able to bring low
> those who walk in pride.
>
> (4:37)

Truth and justice, not deception and exploitation. Not falseness and injustice. Nebuchadnezzar is sobered by his situation before the God of heaven.

That is as far as I will go now in the narrative of the hegemonic power of Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel. Here are three narratives of confrontation in which an exemplar Jew responds out of his saving tradition for the sake of the empire. I suggest these are three narrative pictures that pertain to our theme of response to the gospel for the sake of the world.

1. In chapter 2, Daniel, unlike the magicians of the empire, knows "the mysteries." He knows them for the sake of Nebuchadnezzar:

> But as for me, this mystery has not been revealed to me because of any wisdom that I have more than any other living being, but in order that the interpretation may be known to the king and that you may understand the thoughts of your mind. (Dan. 2:30)

It is important that this king should come to know, but he can only know by submitting to the truth entrusted to Daniel. There is a long tradition in biblical narrative of turning to this unlikely source:

- In Exodus 12:32, Pharaoh at long last comes to Moses and says, "And bring a blessing on me too."
- In Jeremiah 21:2, Zedekiah pleads with Jeremiah for the sake of Jerusalem: "Please inquire of the LORD on our behalf, for King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon is making war against us; perhaps the LORD will perform a wonderful deed for us, as he has often done, and will make him withdraw from us" (Jer. 21:2)
- In John 18:38, the governor asks Jesus, "What is truth?"

In the biblical horizon, the world of power and control does not know the mystery that makes life possible. It is this mystery that has been entrusted to the unassimilated people of God. In Christian confession, that mystery is this:

> Christ has died.
> Christ is risen.
> Christ will come again.

In Jewish tradition, that mystery is that you cannot circumvent the requirement of righteousness and mercy. It is the same mystery. It is the truth that raw power and brutal control cannot generate the safety, well-being, or joy for which creaturely life is destined. The church, as an heir to Daniel, has frittered most of its authority away on lesser matters. But here it is. It is the great "until" that Moses and Jeremiah and Jesus all know so well.

2. In chapter 3, Daniel and the three young Jews are so clear and so sure of their identity and destiny as the people of God that they refuse to bow down to the icons of hegemony. They refuse to credit, even for an instant, that the exhibition of power and glory by Nebuchadnezzar holds any gift for the future. Refusing to bow down is an act of bold defiance; Daniel and these courageous Jews refuse to entertain the thought that Nebuchadnezzar has in his power to make any claim on their life. This either/or defiance is, as we know, not the whole of Scripture. There are models of accommodation, not least in the Joseph narrative that in some ways is a counterpoint to the Daniel narrative. Thus, the Daniel narrative may not be our last, best word on the matter. But it is a word that we may ponder for a season in order to ask how to recover nerve for the hope that has been entrusted to us, for without such recovered nerve we likely cannot act "for the sake of the world."

3. In chapter 4, it is clear that Daniel and the three young Jews' defiance in chapter 3 is not just stubbornness. It is, rather, stubbornness as a way of making distinctions and maintaining distance from which to articulate an alternative. It is clear that Daniel's defiance is "for the sake of the world," that is, for the sake of the empire. Daniel very much wants Nebuchadnezzar to embrace the "until." That is why in verse 27 he offers the double imperative of the road back to security. It is, in a proper theological sense, crazy to practice high-handed, aggressive, acquisitive ultimacy at the expense of the rule of the God of heaven. The news on the lips

of the Jew is that there is an alternative to the lethal system of Nebuchadnezzar. There is a road back to well-being and even back to authority. It is a conversion from exploitation to righteousness. It is a transformation from arrogance to mercy.

The news is that there is an alternative to the mad pursuit of commodity; it is the maintenance of the neighbor. There is an alternative to aggressive consumerism; it is the sharing of resources. There is an alternative to imperial militarism; it is to yield ultimacy in the interest of a peaceable order. The issue is articulated in the narrative as addressed to high worldly power. But the same news is offered to every person who is bewitched by the ideology of autonomy that lies just beneath the surface of conservative starchiness and liberal accommodation.

So imagine this Daniel,

- entrusted with the life to which Nebuchadnezzar has no claim;
- empowered in boldness to defiance for the sake of an alternative destiny;
- Knowledgeable about the conversion whereby the world may come to well-being;
- Knowledgeable as a practical theologian.

He is indeed a person of faith for the sake of the world.

III.

Here is a man of faith *entrusted, empowered,* and *knowledgeable* who has an immense impact upon the world because of his faith. The narrative is surely intended as a model to Jews of faith about life in the world. Such models of courageous faith, moreover, are offered as a model for Christian courage:

> And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. (Heb. 11:32–34)

To be sure, in that list the models come from an earlier period and Daniel is not named. But the phrases fit Daniel as well: "administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire." My question now is this: How did Daniel become equipped for such a life of courageous witness? Or for that matter, any of those named in the recital of Hebrews 11 become so equipped? While most of us have no inclination for such heroism, we might learn from them how to be better equipped for such risk.The question is: How did Daniel come to this calling? I propose that the answer to the question is offered in Daniel 1, even though I am aware that the narratives have only incidental connection to each other. Perhaps there is a reason that chapter 1 comes

in the book before chapters 2–4. In chapter 1, we learn of the reach of the empire into the Jewish community to equip suitable Jewish agents for civil service in the empire. To seek such Jews who are handsome, without physical defect, knowledgeable, insightful, and competent makes sense to me. It is rather like a government "out East" seeking good Midwesterners because they are reliable, or corporate executives preferring upper Midwestern Lutherans because people from Lake Wobegon are without guile and trustworthy. They knew that about Jews in the empire, and so they recruited young Jews for their imperial training program in service to the empire. The ones selected had to leave their Jewish families to enter the training program. To help them move from their Jewish rootage to the horizon of the empire, they received imperial names; Belteshazzar used to be Daniel, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are known in the narrative only by their imperial names, and not their old Jewish names of Hananiah, Mishael, or Azariah. Perhaps even our reading of them is already saturated in the reality of hegemony.

The pivot point of the training program and of the narrative is the training table at the imperial boot camp:

> The king assigned them a daily portion of the royal rations of food and wine. They were to be educated for three years, so that at the end of that time they could be stationed in the king's court. (Dan. 1:5)

But get this:

> But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the royal rations of food and wine; so he asked the palace master to allow him not to defile himself. (1:8)

"Resolved"—set it upon his heart. Daniel refused the diet of the training table, an act that ordinarily would have gotten him dismissed from the program. It might be like training for IBM but insisting that your work will be done on an abacus. From his loyalty to Jewish perception, Daniel concluded that such alien imperial food would defile him and render him a disqualified Jew.

He asked the palace master, the director of recruits, to be given permission to eat other food. The palace master was not unsympathetic to Daniel but declared that if he gave permission and Daniel was seen to be unhealthy in any way, it would be his head. Interestingly, the narrative does not report what the palace master decided, but apparently he said to this stubborn Jew, "You work it out with your guard, but don't tell me about it." So Daniel's business is now with the guard who has charge over Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. It is telling that midway through the narrative, the four are called by their Jewish names and not their new imperial names. The narrator trusts his implied audience to notice: still Jews! Because of the proposal to depart from the official rules of engagement at the training table, the guard agrees to extend the experiment. Ten days of Jewish vegetables and Jewish water contrasted with the rich royal

rations. At the end of the ten-day experiment, the guard saw that the Jewish boys were "better and fatter" than all the others in the program. As a result, the guard, and perhaps the palace master as well, though he is not mentioned here, judged that there was no risk for them in the alternative, no risk for their jobs or for their lives. The Jewish proposal was free of such risk. Consequently, the guard permitted the four Jews an alternative for the three-year training program. No royal rations for them. And then, we are told,

> To these four young men God gave knowledge and skill in every aspect of literature and wisdom; Daniel also had insight into all visions and dreams. (1:17)

It worked! They are still Jews!

At the end of the three-year program, at the graduation ceremony, Nebuchadnezzar came for the awarding of prizes and diplomas and did not find other recruits to compare with the blessed four:

> In every matter of wisdom and understanding concerning which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. (1:20)

Imagine that—ten times better! The narrative carries us stage by stage so that you can see the tension thicken:

> The recruitment . . .
>
> The offer and the refusal . . .
>
> The palace master . . .
>
> The guard and the ten-day experiment . . .
>
> The three-year training session . . .
>
> The verdict: ten times better.

Voila! Daniel is qualified and commended for service to the empire, but he has not compromised his Jewishness. It is his identity in faith that gives him a way to be in the world for the sake of the world.

Here is my thesis. It is Daniel's refusal to be "defiled" that gives him the power, the courage, and the authority in chapters 2, 3, and 4 to make a difference in the empire. So I dwell on the term "defile." The term used twice here is, in the Old Testament, found only in the following literature:

- In Zephaniah 3:1, the term is juxtaposed to oppression and autonomy; the defiled city "accepted no correction."
- In Lamentations 4:14, the city is defiled with blood, that is, murder.
- In Isaiah 59:3, it is defiled by blood (murder), inequity, and lies.

- In Isaiah 63:3, it is "stained" by blood.
- In Malachi 1:7, 12, it is defiled by polluted offerings and profanation of the Lord's Table.
- In Ezra 2:62 it is defiled by impure genealogy for priests, so also Nehemiah 7:64 and 39:29.

That is the sum of all the uses of the term. The various occurrences of the term cluster around ritual and social activity that violate Torah and compromise Jewish identity. A strong tilt of the term is toward ritual contamination, though the references to murder are social rather than ritual. But if we take the term in context, according to this word usage, Daniel refused to engage in a diet that would violate his purity, thus offering a usage related to a ritual disqualification.

We can gain a fuller picture of the issue at stake if we push behind this later word *ga'al* to the more common word *timai'* attested frequently in what is likely earlier usage. All of these usages of the term in Leviticus cluster around the defining mandate in Leviticus 19:2: "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy." The summons is to practice holiness, but the laws include a number of prohibitions, notably on homosexuality in Leviticus 18 and 20. While the tradition focuses on the negative, the mandate of Leviticus 19:2 is itself a positive invitation in that Leviticus 19 is preoccupied with concern for the poor and for the alien (Lev 19:9–10, 15–17, 32–34). The tradition liberally mixes ritual and social mandates. Now I am aware of how odd or perhaps repulsive the holiness traditions are to many of us, most especially to those of us whose theological tradition focuses upon grace without these punctilious requirements. I am aware, moreover, that Jesus joins issue with the matter of defilement with his dismissal of such regulations about defilement:

> Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile." . . . He said to them, "Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And he said, "It is what comes out of a person that defiles. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." (Mark 7:14–15, 18–23)

Specifically, the dismissal of food regulations by Jesus in verse 19, surely echoed in Peter's dream in Acts 10, extrapolates from David's sacrifice. (See 1 Sam. 21:1–6.) Perhaps my focus on this verse in Daniel 1 concerning defilement and my general consideration of the Daniel narrative is misguided.

But I return to the issue because I believe that the Daniel text and the holiness tradition may have a good word for us if we focus on the main point

and are not distracted by the specificity of the requirements about which it is easy to take exception. If we consider defilement and pollution as a compromise of faithful identity, then holiness requires a distancing from the compromises offered by culture that erode identity, that subvert courage, and that ease resolve into accommodation. Clearly we do not know what lay behind the punctiliousness of Leviticus and, clearly, the countervision of Acts 10 means to reach beyond a holiness community that is too sure and exclusionary in its practices. That much is clear, and it is long clear in my theological tradition. But I take it in most mainline Protestant churches in the United States that the deep problem for response to the gospel is *not excessive punctiliousness*, though it may be in some quarters. Rather, the crisis is one of *easy cultural accommodation* so that the sharp edge of discipline is nearly lost—any form of discipleship being too readily slotted in legalism and moralism and narrowness. If the danger to the church's testimony is the loss of missional passion for response to the gospel, then I want to entertain the thought that we have something to learn from the Daniel traditions.

Another Daniel, Daniel Smith-Christopher, has suggested that the practice of purity is a mode of resistance to empire in that ancient Jewish tradition. Daniel's attention to dietary practice is not because he is a legalist, but because he is ready to engage in resistance against imperial hegemony for which Nebuchadnezzar is the cipher in the narrative. Daniel's dietary refusal is as much an act of defiance as the later refusal to bow down in chapter 3, even if the refusal to bow down is more dramatic and a compromise on food would have been no big deal. What Daniel does in this narrative is to refuse the junk food of the empire that would render him compromised and without standing ground in his identity. He refuses junk food and instead settles for Jewish health food (vegetables and water), which not only nourish his body in strength but nourish his faith identity in resolve. Thus, against the teaching of Mark 7 for an instant I entertained the thought that what goes in may defile, if defilement means the compromise of faith identity.

IV.

Thus I propose—with what you may think are too many doubtful interpretive nuances—that we may learn from the Daniel narrative that the capacity for faithful response to the gospel for the sake of the world begins in a disciplined practice of holiness that refuses junk food that compromises an evangelical identity. The empire always wants the faithful community to believe that its junk food is at least harmless and, at best, good for you.

At the first level such junk food is indeed "junk food," the offer of artificial foods that contain nothing of what is needed for health.[4] The politicization of the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta is an indication of how much the food and drug industry wants to distort habits of usage in the interest of making money.

But at a second level, the real junk food that is offered by dominant ideology is the ideology of insecurity and anxiety that assumes that more commodities—more sex or beer or oil—can contribute to health and well-being and youth.

That commoditization of human possibility is fostered by the wonders of electronic liturgy: cell phones, email, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and all of the existing models of communication that lead to dumbing down and fake community. One does not need to be a Luddite—and I am not one—to see that the offers of a virtual society are a feeble substitute for serious human engagement that requires critical thought and genuine care. I do not want to defend all the rules and regulations of Leviticus and all of the attempts to regulate holiness into a sacerdotal system. And I do not want to applaud Daniel's resistance to the empire if it is to be understood as a thin moralism that simply wants to honor a code. But I believe that Daniel's resistance is not a regimented sacerdotal system or thin moralism. It is, rather, a knowing, intentional act of self-consciousness that a distinction must be made between the risky offers of Nebuchadnezzar and the realities of faith. That discipline did not cause Daniel to withdraw from Nebuchadnezzar's system of civil service. Indeed, verse 21 attests that Daniel continued in the service of Nebuchadnezzar until the first year of Cyrus the Persian.

Daniel was able to make a distinction that is grounded in the decree of Exodus 9 concerning the pestilence that will come upon Egypt:

> But the LORD will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing shall die of all that belongs to the Israelites. . . . And on the next day the LORD did so; all the livestock of the Egyptians died, but of the livestock of the Israelites not one died. (Exod. 9:4, 6)

That distinction is mostly lost among us. And the outcome, I suggest, is at best an anemic capacity to respond to the gospel for the sake of the world.

V.

So consider Daniel as a man *undefiled, unseduced* by empire, *uncompromised* in faith. He is just a model and not more. I understand that none of us and none of our parishioners are ready for that kind of heroic distinction, because it smacks too much of self-righteousness self-justification. But it would not hurt to raise the question about what kind of food the empire offers:

> Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal. (John 6:27)[5]

Or what kind of water gives life:

> Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty.

> The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." (4:13–14)

It is no wonder that the crowd said of his bread, "Sir, give us this bread always" (John 6:34). And on that occasion the woman said of the water, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water" (4:15). Thus, undefiled Daniel had no appetite for the junk food of Nebuchadnezzar:

- It is this Daniel who in chapter 2 knew the mystery that would let the empire receive true teaching about its future.
- It was Daniel's friend who in chapter 3 refused to bow down and in the end evoked a doxology for his God on the lips of the empire.
- It is this Daniel who in chapter 4 could instruct the king in the ways of righteousness and mercy, who permitted the empire to cover its sanctity by yielding its ultimacy to the God of heaven.

I am not sure that chapter 1 is the trigger in the book of Daniel for chapters 2, 3, and 4, but I suspect so. One last thought on this connection: After the vision in Acts 10 of eating what used to be unclean, the meeting in Acts 15 reached a conclusion that included the verdict of James:

> Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood. (Acts 15:19–20)

Do not "trouble." The early church was invited to watch out for food polluted by idols:

> For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell. (15:28–29)

If this analysis is credible and the avoidance of defilement was urgent for the courage of faith amid the empire, then the pastoral teaching in the church must do the hard imaginative work of identifying *food that defiles*. The intent is not a community preoccupied with excessive disciplines. It is, rather, a community clear enough in its identity that it can bear witness precisely to the truth entrusted to it. What better than holy disciplines, whereby we, with Nebuchadnezzar, may recover the sanity of faith and sing songs of praise:

> For all his works are truth,
> and his ways are justice;
> and he is able to bring low
> those who walk in pride.
> Dan. 4:37