

JESUS — THE MANIFOLD WISDOM OF GOD

Thomas Yoder Neufeld

October 15, 2009

Saskatoon, Mennonite Brethren Board of Faith and Life sponsored Study Conference

Introduction

I wish to begin by sharing an experience. I was recently invited to participate in a gathering of some twenty five Mennonites, a majority of them scholars, to share our “journeys with Jesus.” Rather than take issue with each others’ ideas and positions, we were only to share our own personal journey with Jesus. As we came to the end of our time together we sat in a circle and attempted, each of us in our own words, to answer Jesus’ question to his disciples on the road to Caesarea Philippi: “Who do you say that I am?” Not all of us found the courage to do so in the second person: “Jesus, you are....” Some of us could only muster: “I guess what I would say,...” But we all wrestled with answering Jesus’ question as honestly as we could, with a consciousness of doing so together with our sisters and brothers in the very presence of Jesus.

It was a most remarkable moment. Had we addressed the question of what a Mennonite or Anabaptist Christology should look like, we would have found allies and adversaries, and most assuredly a basis for argument. There is certainly a place and a time for that. But in this case we listened differently to each other. We were listening in on a conversation in which the primary conversation partners were Jesus and the person answering his question to her or him. I found it to be a profoundly different way of engaging within the community of faith the question of Christology and of our confessing Jesus. In such a setting all the big questions are still there; everything matters every bit as much, if not more. But we consciously answer Jesus’ question in his presence, knowing that Jesus has a relationship with my sister and brother no less than with me, including the sister and brother with whose opinions I have huge difficulties. And we’ll surely ask Jesus, like Peter does at the end of John’s gospel, about the disciple Jesus loved: “What about him?” And to us Jesus will say as he did to Peter, “What’s it to you? Follow me!” (John 21:22).

I invite us to think of ourselves here as a circle of Jesus’ friends and followers, wanting to answer the hardest and the most important question any of us will ever face: “Who do you say that I am? Who will you confess me to be?” I offer my comments as my attempt to respond to Jesus, inviting you to listen in. And I look forward to hearing back from you who too are Jesus’ friends and followers.

Christ, the manifold wisdom of God

Peter famously answered Jesus’ question with “You are the Messiah! You are the Christ!” Peter was absolutely right, and Jesus let him know (Matt 16:17-19). It turns out that Peter’s understanding of his answer was dead wrong, however, and brought on the harshest scolding any will ever get from Jesus: “Get behind me, Satan!” — a stark reminder that even our most right answers, our most inspired ones can be as wrong as they get. More on that in our last session together.

I want to focus this time not on Peter's answer, but on another answer early believers gave, one we glean especially from the songs and poems emerging in the early decades of the church. Ephesians 3:10 tells us that the calling and mission of the church is to make known to the highest rulers and authorities the "manifold wisdom of God". It is quite clear that this refers to the what is earlier called "the boundless riches of Christ." One answer to Jesus was thus: "You are the Wisdom of God!" The conviction has grown in me over the past years that this set of answers is particularly relevant to us in our time.

Wisdom tradition

The wisdom tradition of Israel quickly brings to mind Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and also many of the psalms we know as "wisdom psalms." It's an exceedingly rich tradition, one which reaches beyond the canon of Scripture and into the time of Jesus. It contains familiar instructions about how to live, how to raise children, how to treat friends and enemies, how not to waste time with fools and why not to associate with sinners. We also recall the way the psalms celebrate God's wisdom bringing about and pervading a good and generous creation, or how Torah expresses God's wisdom for the human community (e.g., Psalm 119). But we also associate Wisdom with bleak reflections on the vanity of life, or on the incomprehensibility of suffering, as in the case of Job. These traditions speak to an exceedingly wide range of human experience, in our day probed as much by scientists, philosophers, and ethicists, as by theologians.

In the Wisdom tradition Israel had the windows open to the world, letting the winds of wisdom blow in and out. Not surprisingly, we discover in Israel's traditions the wisdom of the cultures around, whether Egyptian, Babylonian, or Greek—and why not? Is it not the same God who in wisdom created the whole of the world?

In both Hebrew and Greek "wisdom" is a feminine noun, in Hebrew *Hochma*, in Greek *Sophia*. We may be less familiar with the way in which God's wisdom in creation and Torah is creatively, perhaps playfully, "personified" in Wisdom texts as God's companion, daughter, indeed as God's "architect" in creation. At other times Wisdom is God's law, guiding, instructing, and befriending humanity with God. She is a demanding teacher, and at the same time an enticing companion and generous host.

This aspect of Israel's wisdom is enormously important for giving our forbears in the faith the means by which to express their gratitude, wonder, and devotion to Jesus, that is, to confess Jesus. Let me illustrate just briefly, inviting you to listen with an ear open for echoes of what is said and confessed of Jesus in the New Testament:

I begin with a just few excerpts from Proverbs 8

Does not wisdom call,
and does not understanding raise her voice?

² On the heights, beside the way,

³ ...
beside the gates in front of the town,
at the entrance of the portals she cries out:

⁴ "To you, O people, I call,
and my cry is to all that live.

- ...
- ⁸ All the words of my mouth are righteous;
there is nothing twisted or crooked in them.
- ²² The LORD created me at (or as) the beginning of his way
- ...
- ²³ Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
- ²⁴ When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.
...
- ²⁷ When he established the heavens, I was there,
...
- ³⁰ when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
³⁰ then I was beside him, like an “architect”
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
³¹ rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the human race.
...
- ³⁵ whoever finds me finds life
and obtains favor from the LORD;
....

Can you hear the echoes in the great Christological hymn or poem in John 1?

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.
All things came into being through him,
and without him not one thing came into being.
What has come into being in him was life,
and the life was the light of all people. John 1:1-4

You will of course have noticed that the term is “Word” not “Wisdom,” the masculine *Logos*, not the feminine *Sophia*. Perhaps that is because the poet intended this poem or hymn to introduce the story of the man from Galilee, Jesus, and that that would be easier with a masculine noun. Regardless, there is no mistaking that *Logos* (word) and *Sophia* (wisdom) are virtually interchangeable. Just try it; replace *Logos* with *Sophia*, Word with Wisdom, and you might think you are reading a paraphrase of Proverbs 8; you are meant to).

Still in Proverbs, listen to the first verses of chapter 9:

- ^{9¹} Wisdom has built her house,
she has hewn her seven pillars.

- ² She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine,
she has also set her table.
- ³ She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls
from the highest places in the town,
- ⁴ “You that are simple, turn in here!”
To those without sense she says,
- ⁵ “Come, eat of my bread
and drink of the wine I have mixed.

Can we miss the resonance in this text with the way in which Jesus' ministry is described in the gospels as proclamation, invitation, and food, or with the way bread and wine have come to symbolize our feasting with Christ?

Let me add to Proverbs a few sentences from the Wisdom of Solomon, penned within a century of Jesus. You will find it in the Apocrypha of the Old Testament. I quote the following words not because I wish to imply anything about their canonical status, but because they illustrate the richness of the wisdom tradition in the time shortly before the New Testament writings were penned. In Wisdom 7, in words highly reminiscent of what we just read in Proverbs 8, we read this:

Wisdom, the fashioner of all things, taught me (v. 22)
[“Solomon” goes on to describe her as a fantastic
science teacher. And then this]...
For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation
of the glory of the Almighty; ...
For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the
working of God, and an image of his goodness.
... in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes
them friends of God, and prophets; for God loves nothing so
much as the person who lives with wisdom (7:25-28; compare
also 6:12-20).

Did you notice that Wisdom is identified as the image (*icon*) of God's goodness? Listen to the beautiful hymn in Colossians 1, which takes up what we already saw in Proverbs 8:

¹⁵ [Christ] is the image (Gk *eikon*) of the invisible God,
the firstborn of all creation;
¹⁶ for in [by] him all things were created,
in heaven and on earth,
things visible and invisible,
whether thrones or dominions
or rulers or powers
—all things have been created through him and for him.
¹⁷ He himself is before all things,
and in [by] him all things hold together.

To round out this all-too-brief sketch of Wisdom, let me read just a few words from Wisdom of another Jesus, this one named Jesus ben Sirach (6:24-30), written some two centuries prior to Jesus, which stresses above all the close connection between Wisdom and Torah (this too is found in the Apocrypha also as *Ecclesiasticus*):

Put your feet into her [Wisdom's] fetters,
and your neck into her collar.

...
Come to her with all your soul,
and keep her ways with all your might.
Search out and seek, and she will become known to you;

...
For at last you will find the rest she gives,
and she will be changed into joy for you.

It is startling now to read the words of Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30.

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying
heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke
upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble
in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke
is easy and my burden is light.” Matt 11:28-30

I might note that just a few sentences earlier in Matt 11, Jesus explicitly identifies himself as Wisdom: “for Wisdom is justified by all her works”.

We can see in this brief sampling of poetry that the figure of Wisdom serves to express in a most creative fashion God’s engagement with creation as creator, sustainer, and saviour. Wisdom becomes a way of showing how God not only touches down, as it were, with the human community, but the way human beings can connect with God.

Should we be surprised any longer that our forbears would find in this tradition of theirs a most fitting way of confessing their faith in and devotion to Jesus? But it was not only the language and metaphors they found so fitting. They also emulated the creativity, the artistry of the wisdom tradition, employing exuberant poetry, ecstatic hymnody, as the great hymns in John 1, Colossians 1, and Philippians 2 illustrate. They intended to confess thereby as much as they possibly could about Jesus. In the process, their confession became as broad and as comprehensive as it gets.

Wisdom of the Cross

This confession is all the more astonishing when we take note of the fact that the one they make this claim about is not in any obvious way the creator of the universe, the sustainer of all that is good and wise and life-giving. No, this confession is about none other than the humble and property-less man from Galilee, whom they followed, whose often puzzling wisdom they listened to with furrowed brow, with whom they ate, often uneasily together with whores and money-launderers, and whom, as they themselves admit, they abandoned at the time of his own horrible death.

But they came to see this fragile and wondrous life as the vulnerability of God's Wisdom in the face of callous power, sinful rebellion, and just plain blind ignorance. Here we see the Word becoming touchable flesh, entering his own home, but not finding reception. Here we see darkness resisting the light. Here we see Christ emptying himself and taking on the form of a slave, to the point of death.

And to an even greater surprise, our ancestors in the faith came to understand that exactly at the point of greatest rejection Wisdom showed the depth and the unfathomable resourcefulness of her—of God's love. When in word and deed Christ's message of God's gracious and world transforming kingdom was rebuffed, when the imperial and religious powers were driven mad with rage to the point of torturing and executing him, exactly there his followers glimpsed the unsearchable depth of Christ's love for his creation.

This is a profoundly strange wisdom, one the wise of this world consider idiocy, as Paul puts it in the first chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians:

¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.
 ... Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³ but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, ***Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.***

It looks like Paul is disparaging wisdom in favour of the foolishness of liberation through a crucified messiah. But is he? Is he saying no to Wisdom and yes to the crucified messiah?

On one hand Paul is indeed insisting that the cross is a *scandalon*, a stone of stumbling in the eyes of the wise of his day, as of ours. At the same time, as a Jew steeped in his own traditions, Paul knows that to utter the confessional phrase “Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God,” is to identify Jesus the Messiah with the very wisdom that brought this world into being. This wisdom is truly “manifold,” as Eph 3:10 puts it—a manifoldness that has surprise and mystery at its loving core. At the end of his rehearsal of the saving ways of God in the letter to the Romans, Paul comes to a climactic and resounding crescendo: “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”

Paul identifies precisely this unanticipated and quite literally scandalous twist in the story of God's saving ways—namely the death of the Messiah by crucifixion—with what is already known of wisdom, insisting that Jesus' self-giving to the point of his death for humanity, including his enemies, is the very wisdom that fuels the sun, that enlivens and sustains the universe, that inhabits the people of God, that inscribes the Law into and onto the very hearts of the believers, Jews and Gentiles alike.

Only poetry, only hymnody, only worship can begin to capture such manifoldness. The hymns in Colossians 1, Philippians 2, or John 1 bring together the world-friendly wisdom that has her windows open to the world—one that is curious about how her creation works, one that is fascinated by all of the wonder and mystery of

life on this planet, that is hospitable to the world in its breathtaking diversity—with the scandalous, shocking means by which God makes peace with that world through the death of Jesus on the cross. Both are the same divine wisdom, because both are a way of speaking of God's presence in the world, one God has created, and one God wishes to save.

Why focus on Wisdom in this exploration of confessing Jesus?

In urging us to consider Wisdom as an essential component of our confession of Jesus, I in no way wish to tone down the relevance of confessing Jesus as Lord. That appellation confronts us like no other with where our loyalties lie, with the question of whom we will follow, whom we will worship. Nor am I wishing to downplay the relevance of Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. It is no accident that "Christ" or "Messiah" became the most common name for Jesus, witnessing to his role as God's agent of liberation.

But I am aware that the deep roots our confession has in the wisdom traditions of Israel is too often neglected in our Christology. We are thus too little conscious that Wisdom is arguably the chief source of our highest Christological confessional claims. I am also convinced that in the acclamation of Jesus as Wisdom we have been given an essential point of orientation of how and with what disposition we confess Jesus in our own time and place. How so?

Pluralistic world

We live in a pluralistic world in which there are not only many competing claims to truth, but perhaps more troubling, a devaluation of ultimate claims to truth. We struggle to know what to make of our faith when it is less and less the reigning paradigm in Canada (if it ever really was). We might celebrate diversity, even pluralism, but we're uneasy with a relativism that relegates us to one of the ethnic food tents at the local multiculturalism fair. Pluralism spooks us. We become unsure of our confession, unsure of whether our confession of Jesus is more than just "our thing." So, our confession runs the risk of sounding anxiously shrill, or anxiously tenuous.

We should remember that in its pluralism our world is more and more like the world in which our faith was confessed two millennia ago—a world of competing philosophies and an ever growing pantheon of gods, and an empire that demanded the loyalty of its subjects, typically co-opting the religious devotion of the people to that end. Sounds familiar, not? The wisdom tradition was born within the context of growing awareness of the world around, in all its diversity, and the challenges that presented for those wishing to confess the God of Abraham and his Christ.

Wisdom's response

There are a number of dimensions of the wisdom tradition that has relevance to our own confession in our own time.

The Lord our God is ONE

In and over against this world our Jewish forebears insisted that it was the God whom they had come to know as wise creator, as demanding judge and gracious liberator, who was THE god, the ONE god, not only of Jews but of all people—and they recited that affirmation daily in their prayer. They were not afraid to confess this before the wise and powerful in the academies, temples, and palaces of Babylon, Athens, and Rome, claiming that ONE God to be the wisdom that birthed this world and pervades it. So, like the first followers of Jesus who joined that joyous, confident, and even rebellious tradition, we too confess Jesus as the crucified and risen Lord *of all*, the wisdom that created this wondrous world in all its manifold diversity—all of it.

Open windows on the world

This does not, however, settle matters. As the wisdom tradition reminds us again and again, this opens the windows wide. So, instead of responding to our world with fear or hostility, to confess Jesus to be the wisdom that brought this world into being is to look on the world *as it is* with curiosity, expectancy, and hospitality—in short, with love. This is, after all, “our Father’s world,” as our well known hymn has it, who is, as Ephesians 3:15 puts it, father of *every* family in heaven and earth.

We should thus expect to see the evidence of Wisdom’s breath/of Christ’s Spirit in the world even in the most unexpected persons and places. We should celebrate when we find persons, groups, or even institutions that sustain life, that promote justice and peace, that teach and practice love, that nurture life, that care for creation. These are not anomalies, not “outliers,” but rather fully expectable implications of our confession that Jesus is the Wisdom of God. We need not dismiss as counterfeit the yearning and hunger for connection with God as expressed in other religions or spiritualities. Signs of such spiritual yearning should spur us rather to invite the hungry to Wisdom’s feast, to Christ’s banquet. These are what in the great hymn *Strong Son of God, immortal Love* the poet Alfred Lord Tennyson called “broken lights of thee.” I am reminded of the evocative words of another poet, Leonard Cohen, who in his poem *Anthem* utters these remarkable words: “There is a *crack* in everything / That’s how the *light* gets in.” Broken, perhaps, but light, nonetheless, evidence of God’s wisdom pervading creation. It does not diminish our confession of Jesus as Lord, Messiah, and Wisdom to celebrate when we see even the broken and refracted bits of light. Rather, to notice their presence is exactly what our confession should help us anticipate!

Humility and hospitality

Does this answer all the hard questions? Hardly. To identify Jesus with Wisdom is sometimes not an answer as it is an invitation to wrestle with the hard questions that emerge in our encounter with other faiths, other world views, other life experiences, with not only confidence and gratitude, but with a disposition of humility and hospitality. We enter these encounters with attentiveness, curiosity, and a disposition of openness to learn. But we do so as those who know this is God’s world, one God loves beyond measure, whose Wisdom pervades it, even if sometimes in refracted and broken fashion.

We enter such encounters with confidence that the one we confess is the one through whom, in that unforgettable phrase in Eph 1:10, God is “gathering up all things, everything, in heaven and earth.” To confess that Jesus is God’s Wisdom is to express in the fullest possible way his singularity, but a singularity that lies precisely in this breathtaking comprehensiveness.

That needs to take hold of our imaginations, our dispositions, the very way we look at our world and Christ’s place within it. I struggle with this a great deal. My mind wishes again and again to reach for closure, for an elusive certainty that has, I suspect, more to do with fear than with confidence.

[A brief personal note]

When I was on my way to grad school about 40 years ago, I was in a state of considerable anxiety about my faith. My name is not Thomas for nothing. In fact, doubt, more than faith, characterized my disposition. I was headed for Harvard to study theology. Some around me expressed their anxiety that it would destroy my faith, while others were sure that my decision to go was evidence that I already had.

En route I participated in a conference, at which God met me in a most unexpected fashion, at which God tackled me from the blind side, or took me into the boards from behind (whatever your favourite sport image might be). I did not expect it, nor did I think it fair, because it did not result in having all of my questions answered. Instead, I came away with a sense that God was beckoning from the future, inviting me to come explore, not to know ahead of time where I might meet God, what I might find in this or that drawer of experience and learning. The resulting years of study were often hard, but that experience gave me the confidence to enter into new learning, new experiences with both confidence and trust, and genuine openness and hospitality.

I have to retell that story to myself repeatedly when I feel threatened by competing claims to truth, when I want to bring closure, when I want to shut the windows and pull down the blinds.

I think the wisdom tradition, and most especially confessing Jesus to be that Wisdom of God, is God’s gift to us in order that we might approach the world around us with both that conviction in heart, soul, and mind, with an openness to be surprised by a God who created, sustains, and loves this world too much not to reclaim, save, and restore it—in all its manifoldness.

Preaching Wisdom crucified

To confess is to proclaim. Now, precisely because of that love for the world, our confession of Jesus must, for all its generous hospitality, for all its curiosity and wonder, never flinch at telling the truth about this world, about the way Wisdom’s work of art in creation is being corrupted by greed and violence—sin. Nor dare we ever mute the scandal of the cross.

But we have a problem—several, in fact. For one, too often we have reduced the passionate loving creativity of God to formulas and definitions, as if we’re analyzing chemical reactions intended to produce certain results, rather than attempting to trace the ingenuity of God’s love in the face of human rebellion and sin. We need to pray for the

wisdom to confess this in a way that expresses the wonder, surprise, and inscrutability of God's wisdom in saving humanity through the death and resurrection of Jesus, modeled for us by those 1st century poets whose hymns we have been bringing to mind again and again.

Two, and this is related, when Jesus' followers first confessed him to be Messiah, Lord, and Wisdom, they found language and metaphors in their ancient traditions that addressed their own world in forceful, even dangerous ways. They confessed from the margins, to be sure, but in a way that threatened and destabilized the centers of power, just as Jesus had.

In our present moment in time our confession—our language, our metaphors—has been held captive by a culture of power and privilege for so long that our confession not only does not threaten and destabilize the centres of power, but has become identified with empire and privilege. Our confession of Jesus is not resisted—we must be honest about this—because it is socially and spiritually transforming, not because it challenges entrenched political and economic structures, not because it holds out a radical alternative to the hostilities and enmities of our age, not because it emerges out of a transforming love for God's creation, in all its diversity, but because it is too often identified in the public imagination with combining an easy spiritual and moral fix with an unquestioning acceptance and sometimes even enthusiastic support for militarism and materialism.

But it is our task not to fall silent in confusion and shame, but to confess—in both the sense of expressing our sorrow, and in the sense of speaking anew of who we know Jesus to be—asking the Holy Spirit to enlighten us, to give us language that is fresh, words and metaphors that bring our confession to life, that give our witness force. Then we shall be Wisdom's messengers, Christ's envoys of peace, poets of the new creation.

Poetry

Let me return to a point I have been making repeatedly: the church answered Jesus' question: who do you say that I am? with poetry. They expressed their confession in art! Let me suggest that we ethically and doctrinally fixated Anabaptists might take that as a confessional challenge. Some of us just fall silent; others of us use words to nail down and secure truth. The poets of the Bible saw words less as nails and fasteners than as verbal IEDs, improvised explosive devices, intended to engage our and others' imaginations, speaking of hope, liberation, and restoration in all its manifold richness and diversity.

To use poetry to confess Jesus speaks to me of that joyous creativity. It also speaks to me of humility. Poetry, whether in psalm or hymn, is on one hand language that lifts our voice in praise, that gives us words for what cannot possibly be expressed in words. It is also always witness to the fact that our words, even our very best ones, are never more than pointers. Our very best words are never more than pointers to the Word. Wisdom's manifoldness will always exceed the grasp of our words, even our very best ones. And when those words are at their best they will not be definitions and formulas, but the poetry of worship, doxology, praising the love of Christ that is beyond grasping, as Eph 3:19 reminds us.

Few of us are artists. Or at least few of us think of ourselves as artists. True, few of us are wordsmiths, musicians and painters—although, thank God, we have them

among us. That is one reason why Jesus is best confessed by the body of Christ, together. The Wisdom of God is manifold; so is Wisdom's body—manifold not only because we are different in the way we are gifted, but manifold in the experiences we bring, from wholeness to brokenness, from wealth and privilege to poverty and marginalization, from imperial power to abject victimization. Many of us experienced that this summer at the MWC Assembly in Asuncion. This is a great gift, even if it is sometimes difficult to receive.

I'm sure you yearn as I do for a confession that speaks of the wisdom and lordship of Jesus in ways that engage the world(s) in which we live, that listens hospitably even as it confesses confidently and humbly, that speaks truth *about* this world, but more importantly truth *for* this world. And for that we need artists, poets, writers and wordsmiths of all kinds, even those we would at times like to banish from the confessional workshop. Remember, the wisdom tradition of Israel accommodated Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, Proverbs and Job; Proverbs and the Song of Songs. The circle of confessors who called Jesus the Wisdom of God included Paul and James, Matthew and John. And, like Peter, we today will not always get our answers right; we may at times get scolded severely. But Jesus chose exactly such to join the circle of confessors. And like my namesake Thomas, known most for his doubt, we are invited to touch Jesus precisely as doubters who are then given the honour of offering the highest confession possible: "My Lord and my God!"

[I had hoped to have time to read a poem that expresses so many dimensions of what I have tried to say in this presentation. I offer it here as an addendum. It was written by Ed Peters of Kitchener (son of F. C. Peters), who died on August 26 of this year, and was printed in the bulletin at his memorial service. He worked for many years for the Canadian Bible Society. This poem exhibits not only the depth of his familiarity with Scripture and love for the biblical treasury of story and metaphor, but exhibits his inkling of the manifoldness of the Wisdom of God—truly a poet of the new creation.]

Trilogy

1. Divinity

In the beginning
God laughed for joy
and ...

The universe, amused, amusing,
elbowed itself to the front row,
and ...

Terra firma, joined the fun
with geologists taking notes
and ...

Then with a thought
life happened.
It seemed like such a good idea.

Biologists agreed
and theologians took notes
and called for academics to join them
as they systematically unpacked transcendence
and collected their thoughts into sacred texts.

Then God told
the strangest story of all
confounding the common and the smart
the weak and the powerful
but ...

He withholds the twist
until the time is right
and the audience is ready
and the curtain falls.

2. *Humanity*

Meanwhile mankind,
attending and taking attendance,
chuckled, and joined in ...

Vegetation, glorious and various,
murmured with joy
looked up, did photosynthesis
and ...

The earth, resplendent
shrugged, adjusting its verdant prayer shawl
and ...

Animals,
prescient, present,
celebrated their names
and perfected their life cycles
and ...

Story tellers
added logs to the fire
as the night fell

3. *The New Jerusalem*

Singularity birthed art
each event once—kairos time, history
Adventure, excitement,
No pattern ... God's grace a mystery
and ...

Repeatability ... tools, technology
Averages, means and modes—chronos time, science
No mystery ... careful measurement, man's work

Life, death, resurrection, and eternity,
Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven,
Jesus loves me this I know,
for the Bible tells me so.
Community, ritual, prayer, Eucharist,
Life ... death ... life.

God is gracious,
and when the time is right,
transcendence, imminence, and the new Jerusalem.

Edward Allen Peters