Preface to the Second Edition

During the final decade of the last century, the 1990s, GOD—The World’s Future was widely read in settings of theological education. It took the decade prior to that, the 1980s, to write the book. It is a book that looks toward the future. While looking toward the future, the present changes. So should the book.

Postmodernism

One change readers of the first edition will notice here in the second edition is somewhat greater acknowledgement of deconstructionist postmodernism. When GOD—The World’s Future was first being conceived, the dominant form of postmodern consciousness in North America was holistic. Employing the contextualization principle, I sought to draw out the significance of the gospel in light of a social context replete with holistic thinking. Employing the engagement principle, I sought to embrace what is healthy and repel what is excessive.

Like other forms of postmodernism, holism is impatient with Cartesian dualism and Newtonian mechanism. Overcoming the subject-object split and overcoming the reduction of life to its material components became the means for making the person at home once again in the universe. Holistic postmodernism seemed
to leap out from behind every bush in the 1970s and 1980s. An earlier emergent holism was retrieved in the philosophy of biology, wherein a living organism is a whole that is greater than the sum of its chemical parts. The same theme guided the rise of systems theory. And again in ecology, wherein the earth as a biosystem became seen as a whole on the analogy of an organism. Holism took mystical flight in the spiritual fancies and therapies of the New Age, which sought in its own way to overcome the subject-object split by overcoming the science-spirit split. And holism appeared in quarters familiar to theology: Whiteheadian process theology, retrievals of the perennial philosophy, retrievals of Native American spirituality, and the pastoral care programs of Granger Westberg.

As the 1980s took a turn to the 1990s, into the English-speaking world poured books and articles drawn from French deconstructionism and related fields. Like a boar being strangled and then devoured by a python, soon holistic postmodernism could no longer be seen. All that was visible was deconstructionist postmodernism. “To deconstruct” became a verb useful for analysis of any cultural subject matter. By deconstructing metanarratives, by reducing them to masked grabs for social power deriving from the perspective of one social location among many, the net effect of this form of postmodernism became pluralism. Belief in pluralism arose as protection against tyrannical holism, against a superimposed unity that would violate the freedom of the parts.

But a python shortly after devouring its prey takes on a shape that, curiously enough, bears the silhouette of what it has eaten. Similarly, holism has not disappeared completely. Its silhouette is occasionally visible in theological versions of postmodernism that emphasize justice for the marginalized, communities of character, and ecological ethics. Protection against heteronomous holism has become the ethical agenda of authentic holism.
Here, in the second edition, I will continue to explore some of the implications of holistic thinking for theological explication. On one point, however, I find I must simply depart from deconstructionist postmodernism, namely, I pursue construction of a universal vision of reality. I work with certain assumptions: theology seeks to be rooted in the truth. For the truth to be truth, it must be truth for all places and all times. For truth to be truth, it must be more than the subjective projection of an individual from his or her social location; it must be rooted in objective reality as well as subjective perspective. This means, finally, that the truth must be one, and it must be encompassing. Otherwise, it is less than the truth.

Where we find ourselves in faith is committed to a God whom we believe has given us a partial revelation. Now we see through a glass darkly, but we have a divine promise that we will in the future see face to face. On the basis of this promise, the theologian needs to project possible visions of the whole based upon the partial perspectives with which we have to work. These projections of the whole of reality are not by any means to be considered final, unsurpassable, or absolute. Rather, they are hypothetical constructions. They are wagers. They are speculative creations based upon explications of biblical symbols. Even though they are lights to lighten our way, compared to the truth yet to be revealed, they are still dark glasses.

**Feminist Theology**

A second change is increased analysis and constructive appropriation of feminist theological thought. On issues such as gender equality, God-language, relationality within the divine life, Sophia/Wisdom interpretations of Logos Christology, and the sex of Jesus, I will offer expositions of a variety of feminist positions. With each exposition,
I will offer a brief evaluation. When positions conflict, I will recommend some as preferable over others and say why.

Of acute concern is the negative impact of biblical symbols for God such as Father, King, and Lord, because such symbols for God have been employed over the centuries to reinforce patriarchal repression of women. If God is male and rules in heaven, then males have a divine right to rule on earth. So it seems to the Christian tradition our generation has inherited. But when Christian symbols repress rather than liberate, we know something is wrong, very wrong. The kind of critical consciousness exercised by feminist thinkers enables us to use the symbols against their misuse, to retrieve their power to free. It is my firm conviction that the gospel message signifies the divine imputation of dignity to each one of us, and this translates into human equality across gender, generational, racial, cultural, and all other divides. The gospel is incontrovertibly anti-hierarchical.

In Christology, I venture a modification of the tradition of the *triplex munus*. Traditionally, we have known this as the doctrine of the three offices of Jesus Christ: prophet, priest, and king. Chapters 6 and 7 are partly organized around this structure. My venture, which I lay before the reader for consideration, is a *quadriplex munus*, a four-office view. The fourth office would be wisdom incarnate. We know of the Logos incarnate, to be sure. We note here that Logos is masculine. We note also that it is connected historically with Sophia, which is feminine. Both have roots in the biblical wisdom background. And, messianic wisdom is appropriately eschatological when Isaiah prophesies the coming of a king who will be crowned with “the spirit of wisdom and understanding” (Isa. 11:2).

Other changes strewn throughout the text are more modest in import. The reader will find the same commitment to the gospel understood as the story of Jesus told with its significance. This significance will continue to be drawn out conceptually and ethically.
Conceptually, the gospel’s significance for understanding reality will draw upon our modern and emerging postmodern context with special interest in natural science. Ethically, the gospel’s significance will continue to be drawn out by envisioning a better future for our planet and working toward making that future a present reality. The reader will find the same commitment to a proleptic ethics that pursues a just and sustainable global society.

**Thank You**

My heartiest of thanks go to Mary Elise Lowe, my teaching assistant and editorial assistant. In preparation for the revised second edition, Mary went through the text with a fine-tooth comb looking for ways to add clarity for the student reader. She researched and rewrote sections, updating factual information, and increasing sensitivity toward women’s concerns and contributions.

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Berkeley, California
Epiphany 2000