

# A THEOLOGY FROM MINISTRY

SALLY LENTZ PALMER

## PREFACE: THE STRUGGLE TO BELIEVE

### A. The Problem with Mere Humanism—Insignificance

A man said to the universe  
"Sir, I exist"  
"However," replied the universe,  
"That fact has not created in me  
A sense of obligation."

—Stephen Crane

### B. Recognizing that Doubt is Part of Faith.

O God,  
give us eyes to see thee,  
ears to hear thy voice,  
and faith to touch thy love.  
When the world tears us into little pieces,  
help us seek *thee*  
to make our lives whole.

Help us, Lord,  
to accept our doubt  
as part of faith.  
Help us understand that  
if faith were easy  
you would not ask it of us.  
O Lord, help us believe and  
forgive our unbelief.

Amen.

### C. Accepting Mystery as Part of Faith.

Almighty God,  
Help me to accept *half* your story  
Let me bask in the warm rays of the sun,  
without wanting to scan its scorching light;

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SALLY LENTZ PALMER is a third year student in the Master of Divinity Program at The Iliff School of Theology and Pastor of Pilgrim Congregational Church (United Church of Christ) in Denver. This paper was presented in an Advanced Colloquium Group.

let me find joy in the tasks of this earth,  
without wanting to probe the far side of the tomb;  
let me take a breath  
without knowing  
where it comes from  
or where it goes.  
Most merciful God,  
Help me feel close to you  
in spite of your secrets.  
Lord,  
Let my finite mind  
rest easy  
with your Infinity.                      Amen.

### AFFIRMATIONS OF FAITH

#### I. *God the Creator*

##### A. God as Omnipotent — as the Maker of all Things

Almighty God,  
I stand before you in awe.  
I behold your shadow—  
which stretches from the smallest spider  
to the farthest moon.

I see your grace  
in the granite furrows of a mountain,  
in the dark secrets of a marsh,  
in the open wisdom of a smile,  
in the bitter voice of dust.

Almighty God,  
who stirs the smallest atom  
and the largest star,  
stir my soul.                      Amen.

##### B. God as Immanent — as Active *in* this World

O Lord,  
Help me find thee in the jostlings of this world:  
in plants which welcome the wind,  
in stones which cling to the ground,  
in creatures which buzz, and crawl, and glide.

So often, Lord, I only look for thee in unworldly places,  
in awesome thoughts which hang from the stars,  
in brilliant flashes which radiate from the sun,  
in frozen moments which hide behind the clouds.

Dear Creator,

Help me know that you are  
the Infinite and the Finite,  
the Changeless and part of the changing  
In the vastness of your Universe  
help me feel akin to thee.                      Amen.

C. God as Personal — as Active in *my* Life

Thank you, Lord, for my life.  
My mother caressed me in her womb.  
My father gave his seed.  
But they could not make life.  
It was you, Lord, who pushed me from oblivion  
to sound and sense and sight.

Thank you, Lord, for my life.  
I know I am the child of my mother and my father.  
By why did you call me here?  
    why was I born in this land?  
    why was I born at this time?  
    and, why am I my parents' child?  
It was you, Lord, who gave me this earthly home.

Thank you Lord, for my life.  
My mother fed me.  
My father heard my cries.  
They loved me but they could not make me grow.  
It was You, Lord, Who turned my food to flesh,  
    Who stretched me out,  
    Who helped me heal,  
    Who gave me rest.

Thank you, Lord, for my life.  
I am the child of my parents,  
But they could never have imagined me—  
    my laughter, my sorrow reach beyond their wishes,  
    my needs, my talents far exceed their care,  
    my loves, my fears fly beyond their grasp.  
Their love made *a child*  
But only You could imagine *me*.

Thank you, Lord, for the gift of life.  
For being more than mother and father to me.    Amen.

*II. God the Redeemer — Jesus Christ*

Almighty God,  
Help us understand One Man's death;  
    Jesus chose to die,  
    He chose to follow your will,  
    He chose to prove the triviality of our fear.

Almighty God,  
Help us understand  
    How one single Person  
    Took all our sins  
    And died with them. . . .  
So that we might live.                            Amen.

**B. God who Saves us**

Savior of mercy and power,  
We continually make mistakes—  
    because we are human,  
    and selfish,  
    and forgetful of God.  
But you, Jesus Christ, can free us—  
    from sin,  
    from guilt,  
    from our worst selves.

Enter our hearts  
Fill us with grace  
Help us learn to forgive.  
    In thy Name, we pray.    Amen.

*III. God the Enabler — The Holy Spirit*

Almighty Spirit of God,  
    who catches the wind,  
    who turns the earth,  
    who brings us the comfort of Christ,  
    descend upon us now.  
Help us know you, with our minds and our hearts.

Forgive our blindness which expects to see you only  
in the spectacular.  
Forgive our impatience which asks you to come only  
when *we* are ready.  
Forgive us, Lord, and help us draw your Presence  
with each breath. Amen.

#### IV. *Doctrine of Persons*

I am my brother's keeper—  
that is my agony, that is my joy.

Dear Lord, who cares for us all,  
Help us be our neighbor's keeper.  
Help us  
to understand,  
to feel respect,  
to bear our mutual weakness.  
Help us live together,  
as people who share this earth  
Help us  
to rejoice in our differences,  
to understand what we ask of each other,  
to say a gentle "I'm sorry."

O God,  
As you cared for us  
Teach us to care for each other. Amen.

#### V. *Doctrine of Sin*

Sin is separation from God.

Lord,  
There's something in me that has to break—  
it holds fast to each moment;  
it claims a right "to use my time as I please";  
it hurries and grows impatient.

Lord,  
There's something in me that has to break—  
it shouts  
"This life belongs to me;  
It may be all I have, but, at least, it's mine."  
it proclaims  
"Each day, each year (and especially each vacation)  
Is part of *my* Domain."

Lord,  
There's something in me that has to break—  
So I can come  
And flow with Thee.

Amen.

### VI. *Doctrine of Evil*

Evil exists in this world; its effect is human misery.  
Sin is misery that is within our control.  
Evil is misery outside our control.  
As Lord's Prayer says: "*Lead us not into temptation*  
But *deliver us from evil.*"

O Lord,  
So much of what ravages this planet  
stretches beyond our individual hands,  
We feel its darkness,  
We fear its power.  
Open our eyes to your kingdom  
So the mistakes of this world no longer hold sway.  
Amen.

### VII. *Doctrine of the Church*

The Church is *we*  
we who *proclaim* Jesus is Lord  
we who *show mercy* in the Name of Christ.

Lord,  
Help us know that love is,  
what we can do *with* other people.  
Help us  
to respond  
to care  
to seek out  
to listen.  
So often, we're trapped by our own possessions;  
Help us to make them less important  
than the people we love.  
So often, we're caught by our own images;  
Help us know that loving is *not*  
making someone a carbon copy of *our* dreams.

O Lord,  
Help us be content with ourselves  
So we can reach out gladly  
And love others  
for what *they* are. Amen.

### VIII. *Doctrine of Self*

Each self has free will  
which carries with it both  
opportunity *and* responsibility.  
Free will refers to our *attitudes* as well  
as our *actions*.

#### A. Free will in actions

O Lord,  
Save me from myself. Amen.

#### B. Free will in attitudes

O Lord,  
The world turns through Thy love.  
Help me turn with it.  
When I see something lovely, I want it to linger.  
When I care for others, I want to possess them.  
When I understand something, I want it to be true—  
forever.  
If I had my will, I would hold onto this huge earth  
and keep it just the same.

O Lord,  
Help me relinquish—gladly.  
The world turns through thy Love  
Help me turn with it. Amen.

### IX. *Doctrine of Ministry*

Ministry is radical love—  
“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God  
with all thy heart  
with all thy soul  
with all thy mind and with all thy strength.  
Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

Almighty God,  
Who is both Mother and Father to us all,  
Help us serve you first  
    and serve other people in your Name.  
Comfort us, but also  
Confront us  
    with the responsibility to be  
    the men and women  
    you would have us be.  
Help us make your word of love  
    become flesh  
    in our action.  
Through Jesus Christ, we pray.      Amen.

#### *X. Doctrine of Salvation*

We are saved, not by merit, but by grace.  
God's grace exists for us and for the world.  
We can choose whether or not to accept grace in  
    our lives.  
When we choose God's grace, we are saved.  
When we forget the grace of God, we become miserable.  
Our merit, then, comes in seeking the grace of God.

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Our merit comes in joyfully proclaiming:

    "Thine  
    Is the kingdom  
    And the power  
    And the glory,  
        for ever  
        and ever.    Amen."



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