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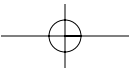
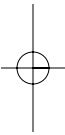
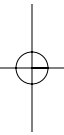
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Editor's Foreword



Talk is cheap, or so they say. Listen in on daily life, and it's hard to disagree. We live in the midst of a vast ocean of talk. The resulting flood of words is not always cheap in an economic sense, because much of it is devoted to advertising, but it can cheapen our lives in a more important way when it diminishes the value of the things that matter most. Much of what people need to talk to one another about—love, anger, forgiveness, promise—is not only beyond price but also, often, beyond words. And yet we keep on talking, using language as we interpret our world and try to connect with one another. Doing so, we find again and again that the kind of talk we most need can be quite costly. To our surprise, however, the right words sometimes come to our lips, or to our ears, as a gift.

In *Testimony: Talking Ourselves into Being Christian*, Thomas Long invites readers into a conversation on how to talk about what matters most. In particular, he helps us to consider how to talk with integrity about God during our everyday lives at home, at work, or in the public square. Within a society shared by people of many faiths or none, such talk can seem difficult, even dangerous—especially because some of those who talk most loudly about God appear to view many of their fellow human beings with disdain. Indeed, many well-intentioned people wonder whether it is ever possible to talk about religious beliefs without becoming arrogant—or dying of embarrassment.

Thomas Long is honest regarding the complexities of speaking about faith within the current social and cultural context, but he does not allow these complexities to halt the search for honest testimony. The worship and daily ways of Christian communities across the ages, rightly understood, hold a good deal of wisdom for a contemporary culture that is awash in cheap talk. Critical yet loving attention to the

Christian practice of testimony, Long shows, can help us speak of God with integrity within the real contexts of our daily lives. But that is not all. This book also claims that *talking* faithfully is one important aspect of *living* faithfully.

One of the most insightful Christians to ponder how talk about God shapes one's walk in the world was Augustine of Hippo, who earned his living teaching Roman citizens the art of persuasive speech before becoming a Christian and eventually a bishop. Words, Augustine observed as he watched fourth-century children learn to speak, are "precious cups of meaning" that allow human beings to enter into community. He also knew from experience, however, that words can become "weapons" when they emerge from the mouths of those who seek to dominate rather than to love and serve.¹

Thomas Long also makes his living teaching others to speak persuasively, though in a different context. As a professor in a divinity school, he helps Christian ministers discover words of clarity and vigor and grace with which to speak to their communities about God's active presence for the life of the world. In this book Long takes a wider view, offering his love of God and his gift of strong and merciful speech to a larger group of talkers. Here he becomes the teacher of all who would offer their testimony not in pulpits but in offices, stores, bedrooms, ballparks, and every other place of conversation.

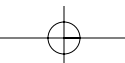
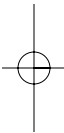
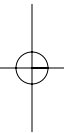
In all these settings, people yearn for talk about God that comes as an invitation to share a precious cup of meaning, for talk about God that is not used as a weapon. A supple, sturdy practice that addresses these yearnings comes into view in this book. I am delighted to add it to the Practices of Faith Series, which offers resources drawn from the deep wells of Christian belief and experience to those who long to live with integrity in the rapidly changing world of the twenty-first century. *Testimony* will provide Christian readers fresh perspectives and renewed hope as they speak the familiar words of faith; it also will offer challenge and wisdom to spiritual seekers who long to hear the truth spoken in love.

As you explore these pages and consider how you may grow as one who offers faithful testimony within your own daily life, I encour-

age you to find companions with whom to discuss, pray about, and live this practice. To assist you in this endeavor, *A Guide for Conversation, Learning, and Growth*, based on this book, is available at www.practicingourfaith.org.

June 2004
Valparaiso, Indiana

DOROTHY C. BASS
Editor, Practices of Faith Series



Acknowledgments



There are, according to the author Ben Cheever, at least two things wrong with acknowledgments in books. The first is that there is always an air of implied hubris about them; their very existence seems to presume that something wonderful has been accomplished. The second is that acknowledgments are altogether too cheerful. “Every woman cherishes her husband, every writer, his publisher,” Cheever complains. “The children, if mentioned, seem to have spent years tip-toeing around in felt slippers, presenting trays of tea and toast to the invalid genius. Who are these people? Acknowledgments often leave me with the impression that I’ve been lied to.”¹

As if that were not enough, the critic David Oshinsky piles on a third problem, namely, that most acknowledgments simply list too many names. In a book he reviewed recently, Oshinsky claimed that if even half of the people named in the acknowledgments purchased the book, it would be a runaway best-seller.²

So here come the acknowledgments, but I believe that I can honestly plead innocent of hubris. I am all too keenly aware that most of the ideas in this book, and all of the good ones, have been borrowed from others, to whom I am indebted. As for the charges of excessive cheer and the listing of too many names, the reader will have to judge that. I am, in fact, cheerfully grateful for those people whose support and stimulation I needed as I wrote, and there are a lot of them.

I will never forget a comment that one of my teachers, the great Lutheran preacher and professor Edmund Steimle, made about preaching. Facing a roomful of clergy and betting that most of them fancied themselves to be—ahem—scintillating and accomplished preachers, Steimle growled, “A good sermon is not a beautiful package with a pretty bow tied by the preacher. A good sermon is like the

rings on the surface of a lake when the preacher has gone down in deep water.”

I do know, having dived into the murky pool of Christian testimony, that I have been in deep water, and I also am quite aware that I have often been way over my head here. My best hope, then, is that in this book you can see the rings on the water where I took the plunge.

And I would like to thank some of the people who pushed me into the lake.

Dorothy Bass is a great friend and an intellectual companion whose fine theological sensibilities and broad knowledge of the language of practices has greatly shaped my own thought. Dorothy is the director of the Valparaiso Project on the Education and Formation of People in Faith, which has given needed and appreciated support for the writing of the manuscript.

The publisher Jossey-Bass has a treasure in editor Sheryl Fullerton, who gave good direction to the work. My friends Barbara Brown Taylor, Patrick Willson, Ted Wardlaw, Joanna Adams, William Willimon, Fred Craddock, William J. Boyd, and Tom Lynch are all lovers of words, and just watching them put words to work so well encouraged me to keep at this. My dearest friend, Craig Dykstra, could have done a better job on this book than I, but he is kind enough to share his ideas unselfishly and friend enough to be gladened when he sees but pale reflections of them here and there in these pages. My research assistant, Alex Tracy, who reads Seneca and Plato when he's not tracking down footnotes, is to be thanked not only for working the whisk broom behind my research but also for making many wonderful suggestions.

And finally, I want to thank my wife and my true companion, Kim, for all she does to make our life together a joyful place.

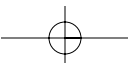
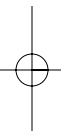
T.G.L.

If I have achieved anything in my life, it is because I have not been embarrassed to talk about God.

—DOROTHY DAY, FOUNDER, CATHOLIC WORKERS MOVEMENT

The words with which we praise God shape the world in which we shall live.

—WALTER BRUEGGEMANN, OLD TESTAMENT SCHOLAR



TESTIMONY

