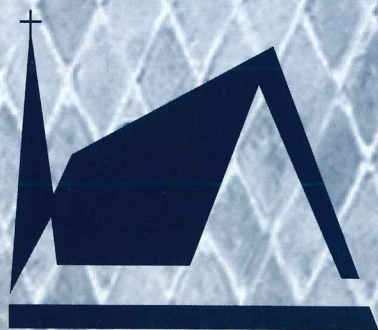


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† G. Waldemar Degner †
(1925-1998)



Dr. Gerhard Waldemar Degner was born on August 9, 1925, in Hampton, Nebraska. He became a child of the Triune God through Holy Baptism on August 19th of the same year at Zion Lutheran Church in Hampton. His baptismal faith was confirmed before Zion congregation on May 7, 1939.

Dr. Degner was ordained into the Office of the Holy Ministry in August, 1951. He then served St. John Lutheran Church, Tyndall, South Dakota (1951-53), Grace Lutheran Church, Breckenridge, Minnesota (1953-57), and Trinity Lutheran Church, Ithaca, New York (1967-75) as pastor. His teaching service to the church included Milwaukee Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wisconsin (1957-59), and Concordia College in the same city (1959-67). He joined the faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary in 1975.

His educational career was rich and diverse: Zion Lutheran School (1931-39); Hampton High School (1939-41); St. John's Academy, Winfield, Kansas (1941-43); Concordia College, St. Paul, Minnesota (1943-45); and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri (1945-50), from which he received the Bachelor of Divinity and Master of Divinity degrees. His scholarly achievements in classical Greek and Latin led to graduate degrees at Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, where he received the Master of Arts, and at the University of Chicago, from which he received the Doctor of Philosophy in 1982.

Dr. Degner's special gifts for the good of the church were recognized by his peers and across the continents. Dr. Degner made some of his most significant contributions in his later years, accepting assignments from the Board of Mission Services to further theological education in Taiwan and Latvia. He was instrumental in helping found the Master of Divinity degree program at China Lutheran Seminary in Taiwan, establishing it

on a solid, confessional Lutheran foundation. Additionally, he knew the importance of the printed word for theological education and the spread of the Gospel. To that end he helped arrange for the translation and publication of Martin Chemnitz's *The Two Natures in Christ* (from Dr. J.A.O. Preus Jr.'s translation), as well as his own *Hermeneutics* text. Later he spent a semester teaching in the theological department at the University of Latvia in Riga. Through these and his other efforts he made a profound and lasting impact on the Lutheran Church in America and abroad. Writing on behalf of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Dr. A. L. Barry, President of the Synod, noted: "The church has lost a giant. Former students of Dr. Degner have told me of how much they loved learning from him. He always brought a gentle human kindness and love to his work, with a quick wit and great erudition. His passion for the biblical text inspired and encouraged many, and no doubt will continue to do so. His ministry, literally around the world, strengthened the church and the faith of so many. For all this we thank and praise God. Our Synod will remain forever grateful for his service." Dr. Jeffery Oschwald of China Lutheran Seminary also observed: "Through his students he has already influenced a new generation of Christian leaders here and throughout the world; through his writings and the writings of others that he worked to see translated, he will teach generations of leaders to come. How the history of Lutheran theological education in Taiwan has been changed by the deeds of Waldemar Degner! How he will be missed, and remembered, and celebrated!"

The entire seminary will miss his kindly and pastoral attentiveness to the needs of students and colleagues, as well as his clear confession of the Lutheran faith.

May he dine at the high feast of the Paschal Lamb where all is light and life in Christ.

Letter to a Preacher

Donald L. Deffner

Dear Pastor:

I am a teacher at the graduate level. I have a Master's degree in Guidance and Counseling. I have also had extensive training in composition and communication skills. And in teaching classes in the church I have always sought to follow Jesus' methods of communication.

I have been a member of the Lutheran Church all my life. I have spent many hours sitting in the pew listening to dull, uninteresting, and uninspiring sermons. May I share my concerns with you and make some suggestions?

Now in all fairness I admit that I am not familiar with your schedule. I know crises arise and sometimes pastors are at the hospital most of Saturday night into Sunday morning.

Others see their first priorities as counseling and calling. Indeed, one survey I read put sermon preparation sixth on the list.

But please hear me out. I go to church with expectancy and hope for a message that will get me through the week.

Here is why I often go home not only unfed but angry.

The Rehasher

I am not a theological butterfly but I do visit various Lutheran churches. At this one church the preacher was seven minutes into the sermon. But so far he had no illustrations, no inductive questions pulling me into the message, and no proclamation of God's law/judgment. It was a dead re-hash of one of the lessons for the day. There was no fresh language, just a simplistic, catechism-like serving up of religious goulash. No sharp, fresh applications of the text were made to my contemporary life here in my cultural setting. A number of people were dozing.

The Rev. Dr. Donald Deffner was Full-time Visiting Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions at Concordia Theological Seminary at the time of his death in November, 1997.

I will never forget the fifteen year old black girl seated six rows in front of me. Now I paint no stereotype. From friends of mine I later learned about her home situation. She has an absentee father, but a deeply committed Christian mother. She has no siblings. She has had sex frequently since she was thirteen years old. She has sampled drugs. Failing in school, she sees her future as a blank ghetto wall. Her head was on the back of the pew. She was asleep. Like her, I took nothing home from that sermon, either. The droning preacher that day could be called Mr. Completely.

The Jokesmith

Oh, this preacher is “interesting.” The style is sort of “tee-hee.” Light. Humorous innuendos. Easy to listen to, because I was not asked to change anything in my life. The preacher made only general references to “sin.” But then broadside attempts at humor really began to distance me from the speaker.

The pulpiteer floated on into a soliloquous style for a while (with which we were supposed to identify). But the ending was abortive. There was no real *summa* at all to what was said. I remember nothing of the message.

The Remote Scholar

Another church. Again, there was no law/judgment on my sinful life except by vague implication. There was not a shred of personal application to me, the hearer. It was a classically generic “sermon”—but really not a sermon at all but an “exegetical talk.” No more than that.

The Strident Growler

I have heard this pastor really cares for people and has an exemplary Christian family. But he is something else in the pulpit. His voice is strident, his paragraphs convoluted.

Ten minutes into his message he had done no more than rehash the text. There were no contemporary applications of the text to my life, no specific law/judgment proclamation, no

illustrations, and few questions directed at me. Fifteen minutes into the sermon there was still not one reference to my life in this city. At eighteen minutes he started pounding law into me. Repent! Then he drifted into two to three minutes of generic gospel. The sermon was twenty-one minutes long. The gospel did *not* predominate.

I took *nothing* home with me.

Dedicated But Dull

When I listened to this person preach, I could sense the individual's dedication and genuine fervor for the gospel. But the message, though pure law/gospel, was not a "sermon" as I understand it. The preacher did not start with me and my life, and then go on to the spiritual truth to be learned ("from the known to the unknown"). Jesus' principles of communication (as outlined below) were completely ignored. No theme was stated. The preacher rambled and did not apply the message *to me personally*.

I was never indicted by God's law/judgment, nor was the gospel applied to me personally with respect to the forgiveness of my sins. The whole message was generic. The judgment of God on my sin was brought in briefly near the end of the sermon with a tense, grating style. But I went home unmoved.

As I reflect on the character of this preacher, there is not a deceitful bone in the preacher's body. The individual is certainly dedicated, but dull.

A Sea of Sweeping Generalizations

And now to *your* sermon last Sunday. As I listened to you my self-centered life this past week was not really probed at all. The word study and general discussion about Christ really being the Son of God neatly sidestepped my need to confront my specific sins. There were no illustrations in which I saw myself, and no questions that really indicted me. I went home fairly undisturbed and satisfied with myself.

By the way, I have been rather lonely the last several weeks. Not a one of you preachers addressed that “universal” in the human condition.

Interminability

One more point here. Some preachers cannot stop talking. Or, they try to make up for what they failed to say in the sermon in a rambling *ex corde* prayer afterwards.

I counted five conclusions to one preacher’s message. That man’s delivery epitomized that of the speeches of President Harding: “They are an army of pompous phrases marching across the landscape in search of an idea.”

When you conclude, I wish you would *conclude*.

Sameness

Now if you hear a certain sameness in all the above, *that is precisely the point!* Often I am tempted not to go to church at all on Sunday morning, I am so tired of mediocrity. I am inclined to stay home. When I do not go to church, though, I feel like it really has not been Sunday, and there is a big gaping hole in my life.

So I try going back to church again.

My Plea

I am a professional. I work hard at my craft all week long. When I go to church, I want to take something edifying home with me. I know you are overworked and incredible demands are made upon you. As I see you, you are a caring, loving person. You are the kind of person I would want at my deathbed.

But I wish you would put your preaching higher on your list of priorities. I am inclined to drive ten miles beyond your parish to hear another preacher, because that person always feeds me. It is not that that person is “interesting” or tells stories. But that individual speaks to my world with fresh material, in contemporary terms, and follows Jesus’ principles of

communication: questions addressed to me personally, story-illustrations with a telling twist to them (in which I see myself), and creative language with word pictures that really grab me.

By the way, I would rather have that kind of sermon even *read* to me, than hear a preacher without a manuscript—where the individual just “winged it” and fell into the two traps of shallowness and repetition.

Why Are Some Preachers Dull?

I have often puzzled over this question.

1. Some may say that they preach the way they were *taught* to preach. In other words, they never knew any better.

I find that hard to believe. Are they not able to recognize a dull sermon when they hear one?—and want to do something about their own preaching? Also, some *were* trained by good homiletics. But they have either forgotten or ignored what they learned.

2. Some preachers think that the sheer stating of Biblical truths is “preaching.” They simply repeat the whole story and the Holy Spirit does the rest and people will apply it to themselves.

But “Telling is not Teaching!” And just stating Bible truths—pure as they may be—is not “preaching.” I want the clear gospel every Sunday. “*Christ died for my sins and rose again.*” Let the gospel always predominate in your preaching. But proclaim it to me *afresh*, with rich contemporaneity applied to *my life today*.

I am quite aware of the fact that the pastor is to “preach the text.” The sermonizer is not there to titillate, just to “tell stories” or make the sermon “interesting” for the people. But the preacher *is* to speak the law and gospel to the *real* world I live in. As Luther said: “If you preach the gospel in all aspects with the exception of the issues that deal specifically with your time—you are not preaching the gospel at all.”

3. Why are some preachers dull? A preacher may counter, "But people say they *like* my sermons!"

I respond to that by suggesting:

- Many people lie. (A noted Lutheran sociologist, J. Russell Hale, makes this point about polls, also.)
 - They love you even though you are boring. You are a nice person. They will never forget the tender care you showed a member of their family.
 - Many persons would rather hear innuendo than be called to account for their sin with clear law application.
4. Some pastors are just plain lazy. "I just get up and throw out a few thoughts. . ."
5. Some pastors have never really had to *listen* to their own sermons with a trained homiletician evaluating the message.

So may I suggest the following.

State a Clear Problem/Resolution Theme

A man came into church late, near the end of the sermon. He whispered to his wife, "What's he talking about?"

"I don't know," his wife responded. "He hasn't said yet."

My point: stick to one clear idea, with the problem/resolution theme stated within a minute of your beginning. Then I will know where you're going—and if you went there!

That is not dull! It gives me a focus, a "line of direction." You have not "given me the answer" already with an obviously predictable outcome. Rather, I will see if you *have* the resolution properly mapped out, and whether you present it cogently, and applied to *my* life in *my contemporary setting*.

Inductive Questions

So many dull sermons I have heard were not really sermons at all but discussions, lectures, comments *about* a topic. It was deductive, a laying out of certain principles or biblical truths.

But it was not applied to me with piercing questions that called for a dialogical response in my own mind. For example:

Christ's words "Abide in me" warn against spiritual vagrancy, against intermittent consecration, against a spasmodic religious life. There are some people who visit Christ, and others who abide in him. To the one class religion is a temporary expedient; to the other it is a permanent principle. "Not good if detached" is as true of church members as it is of a railroad ticket.

Or:

There is a Persian bird known as the juftak. It has only one wing. On the wingless side the male bird has a hook and the female bird a ring. Neither can fly alone, but when fastened together they can fly. How like the human race is the juftak. And how like the church. What would your church be like if only men and boys belonged, or only women and girls.

Or:

Now let's go back and see what happened in the Garden of Eden again. God had created a man and woman as. . .

"Oh, no!" I say. "Not another re-run of the Garden of Eden! Ho hum!"

In contrast to the above, note this preacher's use of incisive questions which really grabbed me personally:

Have you ever felt like running? — running away from it all . . . running to escape some of the pressures in your life . . . running to try to find some *meaning* and *purpose* in your life!

That leads to my theme today: *although we at times are tempted to run away from our responsibilities — or even from God — he calls us to run to him and the refuge of his protective wings.*

Now that preacher really had my attention right away, because that is how I often feel. Here is another:

Who is *really* in charge of your life — you, or God?

Do you doubt or believe? Do you trust Christ is here with you each day, or are you depending on your own planning and abilities?

Do you shift with the wind — blown about by others who influence or intimidate you?

"That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord" (James 1:8).

Indeed, we need to turn, to change. God calls us to be truly *contrite* for our sin, to *repent*.

Or:

A terrified young woman sits fidgeting on the edge of a chair, facing her doctor. She looks like a frightened bird about to take flight. Her body is tense and she turns her head quickly from side to side, blinking her eyes, as she glances nervously around the room.

"What are you afraid of?" asks the doctor.

"I don't know," she replies. Then, very softly, "Yes, I do know . . . I'm afraid I'm going to die. . ."

"You probably won't die for a long time," says the doctor. "But you are having an anxiety attack."

The woman looks at him incredulously. For the first time, her head is still, her eyes steady and unblinking. "Anxiety? Is that all?"

"It is enough," says the doctor. "In your case, *more* than enough."

Have you ever felt like that woman?

The preacher that day had me in the palm of his hand. Yes! I *have* felt like that woman! Or take this one:

A man is driving home from work. He remembers the haggard, pained look on his wife's face as he left the house in the morning.

"I honestly do not know what we will eat tonight," she said. "There is no food in the house."

Shamed, he drove to work. "And no money in my wallet, either," he thought bitterly.

Then, in the afternoon, it came. The pink slip. He was fired. And his final check wouldn't be in hand until Friday.

Not till Friday! "No food in the house!" What will I tell my kids? How can I face them?

You promised me, God! Where are you now, God!?

Have you ever felt like that man?

Well, many of us *have* felt like that man. And *often!* And a telling inductive question like that involved me *dialogically* in the preacher's message.

He's describing *me*. I am involved in this text!

Illustrations with an O. Henry Ending

O. Henry, of course, was a famous short story writer with a rich style whose tales also involved a fascinating twist at the end of the story.

I wish preachers used illustrations that were more than just boring analogies. Many illustrations I hear fall flat because they make a theological comparison of some sort, but the analogy is lifeless and dull. Maybe the preacher has made a trip to Palestine (for which the parish will have to pay *two* times!). Or the preacher has seen some famous paintings in museums, and describes them in florid but interminable detail.

"There is this picture in the Louvre. . ." intones the preacher. "And so it is in the Christian life. . ." So what? Tell me a *story!* That is what Jesus did!

The point is, the preacher should strive to select illustrations with a *denouement*—strong punch line, like the "hook" at the end of a well-told tale. Such a resolution clarifies the outcome or point of the story which, of course, must fit the text and never eclipse it. For example:

A man was going to a masquerade ball in a devil's costume. It was a thundering, rainy, stormy night, and the man was driving along a country road. The car went off the road into the ditch. He could not get the car started again, so he got out and made his way across a cornfield to a small country church.

Well, the people were inside the church having their evening prayer meeting, singing hymns and praying. And just as this man got to the front door of the church and opened it—dressed in this devil's costume, mind you—there was a bolt of lightning, a clap of thunder. All the people looked around in amazement and saw the devil standing there, and they went out of the doors and windows as quickly as they could—except for one little old lady standing in the center aisle.

With her cane in hand, and shaking from head to toe, she said: "Mr. Devil, I do not know what you want here, but I have only one thing to say. I have been a member of this church for 40 years, but I have really been on your side all the time!"

Or:

Some years ago a foreign exchange student at the University of Michigan flunked his exams. He was afraid to go home to his family—he would "lose face." And so he hid in the bell tower of the local Methodist church.

Well, there were some strange goings-on in that building for a while. The spaghetti disappeared from the refrigerator after the ladies' aid meeting. There were some creakings, groanings, and rustlings in the building. And no one could figure out what was going on, until someone discovered that there had been a "man hiding in the church."

Are you the man or the woman *hiding in the church*?

But even a good story can be *badly* told. The first version of the following illustration was soundly emasculated by some copy editor who had no imagination.

The need for cooperation in the church is the theme in the story of a little girl lost in a cornfield on a freezing winter day. Rescuers searched for hours, but to no avail. Finally, one person suggested that the group hold hands and traverse the field systematically. They found the child.

Now note how another preacher made the same incident "come alive."

Out on a farm, a father had always told his little girl, "Now, never stay outside when it gets dark, especially in winter when it gets cold so fast."

Well, one day the little girl had been playing in the corn field and got lost. She did not know which way to go to get back to her house, because the corn was a lot taller than she was, and so she just kept stumbling around in a circle.

Now it had gotten quite dark, and a very cold wind came up. Soon it was nearly freezing, and the girl did not have a warm coat on.

The farmer missed his girl and started searching for her. But he could not find her. Then he got desperate, so he phoned all his neighbors and asked them to help him find her. But they did not have any success, either. By this time, it was extremely cold, way below freezing, and they all were afraid for the girl's life.

So one man said, "Why don't we start at one end of the corn field, and all hold hands, so we don't miss any spot where she might be, and slowly cross the whole field together?"

And so they did. And they finally found the little girl—freezing and on the verge of death. Her father, with great joy, cried out: "Thank God we were holding hands!"

That is what we need to do in the church. Let's keep "holding our hands together" in prayer and mutual cooperation, so that we do not wander off on our own—and get lost.

Note the simple—but not simplistic—language used. That preacher was also sensitive to the presence of children listening to the message.

Rich Imageries

Would you tune *in* or tune *out* to the following:

Many of us have never stopped to think of how important water is in our daily lives. It takes care of our physical needs and can also be used for recreation when we go swimming or boating. But it also has a spiritual connotation. For when you were baptized. . .

Or:

Now you must realize that children learn a great deal by watching their parents. Students learn much by watching their teachers. Now if you have been really listening to me, you see, we teach each other by the kind of examples we portray. And so, as Christians. . .

Those are actual statements I have heard in sermons and some devotional books. But I get a feeling of condescension, of being talked down to like a little kid.

The preacher is stating the obvious, with no imagination, and no creativity. There is no depth of thought going beyond that which is plainly evident.

I must add that you can raise your voice, pound your Bible, get very emotional, or even cry—and wipe the tears from your eyes, but I am still not impressed unless you have some fresh content in your sermon.

“But I am just not a creative writer,” you may say.

I challenge that. Study great literature, great writing. Get out your Roget’s *Thesaurus* or click the mouse on that button on your computer and work on richer imageries in your speech. There may be more creativity and imagination within you than you realize.

Remember the man who was in prison for 20 years until one day he tried the door and found it . . . *unlocked*.

Denouement

By the way, I heard a sprightly old lady tell you after church, "Wonderful sermon, pastor!" And you quipped, "Well, we'll see!"

Will I be in church next Sunday to hear you preach? "Well, we'll see!"

Now I do not want to end on a negative note. I have some rethinking to do myself. This is a joint task between both of us, preacher and hearer.

It's not just a matter of communication. The Means of Grace are involved here. It is *God's Word* being proclaimed. And I need to focus more on what God has to tell me through you.

I should concentrate less on what I think I need, and more on Christ and what He knows I need to hear. I will work on that.

So . . . "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

May God bless your preaching ministry.

I will see you next Sunday.

Sincerely . . .

For Discussion

Responses to "Letter to a Preacher"

- This person really turns me off! The parishioner's mind is on *self* (as an individual) and not on *Christ*. The person should focus on what *God* wants to tell us, rather than on what we think *we* need — me! me! me!
- "I am not being fed," the person moans. Yeah, I hear that a lot. But you are fed in different ways — the sermon being only one way.
- "My *particular* needs," the person says? I have hundreds of people sitting out there in the pews on Sunday morning. I cannot meet all their needs. Plus the fact that many of them came to church for the wrong reason. They want a show. They want to be entertained.
- "You did not preach to my *loneliness*," the critic says. Well, it has not been in the lectionary this year.
- This person is a pain! I hear the complainer saying, "You had better be good or I will leave!" The individual does not understand that you go to church to praise God, not to make yourself feel good. This person just wants warm fuzzies.
- Frankly, this critic's expectations sound more like those of a professional speech expert than an average parishioner. I cannot match up to all that, nor did I receive the training for it.
- Okay! I will admit it. My gift is not preaching. I am limited in my ability to communicate well in the pulpit. But I love my people. And I love counseling and calling. And my people seem to really appreciate that. "Such as I have I give thee."
- This critic does not motivate me to change. In the business world we have a phrase: "Win-Win." You do not force a person into a situation where one wins, and one loses. It is better that *both* win. So you need to be *positive*, not negative, to motivate people.

A Case of Identity: Reflections on the Church's Preaching in the Modern World

Charles Hughes

"Who am I? They mock me,
these lonely questions of mine.
I am, thou knowest,
O God, I am thine."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Who am I? There is perhaps no question of more compelling interest to modern man than that of his own individual identity.

It is a question to which our secular culture offers many possible answers. Christianity, of course, has its own answer to the question of human identity, and it is the Christian answer, as expressed in Lutheran preaching, that I would like to consider here.

The purpose of Lutheran preaching is to assure its hearers that they are purchased children of God—that they have been ransomed from the captivity of sin by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and, through faith, will be the beneficiaries of God's promise of eternal salvation.¹ Martin Luther himself, in his work *Christian Liberty*, urged the preaching of "why Christ came, what he brought and bestowed, [and] what benefit it is to us to accept him."²

Certainly, the truth of this joyous message needs no confirmation from any human source; it is proclaimed by God in Holy Scripture and has always characterized the unique

¹See, for example, F. C. Rossow, "The New Obedience," *The Lutheran Witness* (July 1995): 12-14, especially 13: "Our salvation is 100 percent complete and certain the moment God declares us righteous on account of Christ. We're in."

²Martin Luther, *Christian Liberty*, translated by W. Lampert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 20.

Mr. Charles Hughes is a member of St. Andrew Lutheran Church, Park Ridge, Illinois, and serves as a member of the Board of Elders of that congregation.

Lutheran witness within Christianity. It is, in Luther's words from another context, the "purest gospel."³ Nevertheless, it is my purpose to level a criticism—a criticism not (heaven forbid) of this gospel message of hope and salvation, but of the preaching of the church, insofar as it stops with the delivery of this message and goes no further. For there is, I think, a sober and essential corollary to the good news of salvation by grace through faith. When this corollary is omitted from the church's preaching, Christians may receive an incomplete (and, to that extent, false) idea of who they are, and the eternal peril to which we all are subject may be increased.

The essential corollary to the gospel message of Christ's saving work is an explicit recognition of the spiritual context in which the believer finds himself in this world. Although God, through Jesus Christ, has opened to us the very gates of heaven, the majority of Christians are not, at any given moment, standing at those gates. We have a life to live in this world, a road to travel here, a race to run. And we have the clear assurance of Scripture (John 16:33; Acts 14:22), not to mention the teaching of our own experience, that our journey through this world will not be an easy one, but will, as the hymn says, be filled with "dangers, toils and snares." As our Lord Himself, when He had assumed human form, was subject to the temptations of Satan, so are we too. We are, therefore, always subject to the possibility of succumbing to the particular temptations with which we are faced and turning away from the faith given to us by God. It is this that needs to be acknowledged by the preaching of the church, in order that believers may be prepared and strengthened against the time of testing. If Saint Peter, within hours after telling Jesus that he would rather die than desert Him, could then deny his Lord three times, how confident can any of us be that we too will not fall away?

³Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, translated by J. Mueller (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1976), xiii (referring to the whole of the Epistle).

The spiritual reality for all of us, while we live in this world, is that we are the subject of a struggle of eternal proportions between the powers of heaven and hell, with each human soul as the prize. "[W]e are not contending against flesh and blood," says Saint Paul, "but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). This is the reality that occasioned Saint Peter's warning, "Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Commenting on Peter's words, Martin Luther writes that Satan "is not a thousand miles from you, but encircles you and stands by your side, so close to you that he cannot come closer . . ."⁴ Satan "does not pass before your eyes when you are armed against him," warns Luther, "but looks out before and behind you, within and without, where he may attack you . . . that he may cause you to fall."⁵

Jesus' own teaching sought to prepare His followers against the spiritual dangers they would face in the world. Repeatedly, He enjoined them to watch and be ready for His coming again, stressing the need for constant vigilance in their earthly lives no less than His promised return. "Watch . . . for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming" (Matthew 24:42). If the foolish maidens had known when the bridegroom was coming, they would have been prepared with their lamps and would not have been shut out of the marriage feast. But they did not know and were not ready (Matthew 25: 1-12). "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (Matthew 25:13). And again, "you . . . must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect." (Matthew 24:44). These injunctions to watchfulness and preparation would hardly have been necessary were our spiritual risk not great, and they are of supreme relevance to us all, whether the Second Coming occurs in our lifetimes or not. To paraphrase a remark of C. S. Lewis,

⁴Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistles of Peter & Jude*, translated by J. Lenker (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1982), 224.

⁵Luther, *Peter & Jude*, 223.

what the Second Coming is to the whole human race, death is to each individual person.⁶

If, then, our spiritual lives are fraught with such danger, the unmistakable implication is that the church's preaching must be directed, in significant part, to warning believers against the danger and preparing them to face it. Every person, everyone in church on Sunday morning, is on the road either to heaven or to hell. John Henry Newman once concluded a sermon with this description of the inescapable reality that each of us faces: "Life is short; death is certain; and the world to come is everlasting."⁷ We are not to be anxious about our lives in this world (Matthew 6:25). Given the spiritual dangers we face, however, we are to "work out . . . [our] own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). Saint Paul's instruction to Timothy to "preach the word" and "be urgent in season and out of season" is, in this light, hardly surprising (2 Timothy 4:2).

Now what if all that has been said so far is true? What if believers are, in fact, in constant spiritual danger while they live in this world, and what if, this being so, the church has a responsibility to do all it can to safeguard them? What does this mean, in specific terms, for the church's preaching?

For one thing, it must mean the obvious, that the danger must be told. Through its preaching, the church must tell its people what it knows about the "wiles of the devil" that continually threaten their spiritual welfare (Ephesians 6:11). To judge from His teaching as recorded in the Gospels, this was not a subject that Jesus felt might be given too much emphasis. Similarly, the church should not shrink from reminding its members that "the days are evil" and warning them that they must "keep alert" to the end that they may "withstand in the evil day" (Ephesians 5:16; 6:18, 13).

There is also, I believe, another means by which the church can give practical help to believers in preserving their faith:

⁶C. S. Lewis, "The World's Last Night," in *The World's Last Night and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1960), 110.

⁷John Henry Newman, "Watching," in *John Henry Newman: Selected Sermons*, edited by I. Ker (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 278.

namely, by the preaching of obedience to God's commands. Now such obedience, whether as a subject for the church's preaching or as an object of an individual believer's life, doubtless needs no other justification than that it is God's will for us all.⁸ Still, a preaching emphasis on obedience may strike some as "un-Lutheran," and some explanation of what I mean is, therefore, perhaps in order.⁹

If the church is to emphasize obedience to God in its preaching, what precisely is it to say? The question may be a deceptively simple one. Our inclination, when considering obedience, may be to think immediately of the Great Commandment to love "God with all your heart" and "your neighbor as yourself" and to stop there (Matthew 22:37, 39). After all, Jesus Himself said that all the law and the prophets depend on these two commandments (Matthew 22:40). In preaching obedience, however, it is important that the church go further, not only in the sense of extrapolating from the Great Commandment itself and trying to apply its lofty terms to our lives, but also by distilling those terms into more basic elements. Speaking personally, the Great Commandment at times seems too high and remote a standard, given my own spiritual condition, and, accordingly, sometimes does not seem to speak directly to me. Spiritually, as well as physically, we must walk before we can run. If the focus of the church's preaching on obedience is limited to the Great Commandment, many believers may be left where they were found, feeling that God's one commandment that really matters does not apply to them in any concrete way.

The preaching of obedience must begin at a more basic level, emphasizing aspects of the Christian life that are "closer to

⁸See the Augsburg Confession, Article XX: "It is also taught among us that good works should and must be done, not that we are to rely on them to earn grace but that we may do God's will and glorify him." *The Book of Concord*, translated and edited by T. G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 45.

⁹One may see, for example, Rossow, "The New Obedience," 12: "We may feel uneasy when we hear a pastor or teacher encouraging good works; we may think it's 'un-Lutheran' for them to do so."

home" for most believers. God certainly has not left us without instruction of this more basic kind. Christians should read the Bible, for "[a]ll scripture is inspired by God and profitable" (2 Timothy 3:16). Christians should make prayer a regular part of their daily lives; we should "pray constantly" (1 Thessalonians 5:16). Christians should "not be conformed to this world" but should live differently, always striving to do "more and more," so as to "command the respect of outsiders," "in order that in everything God may be glorified" (Romans 12:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:10,12; 1 Peter 4:11). This we are to do by obedience to the Ten Commandments, not relaxing even "one of the least of these" (Matthew 5:19). Whatever our work happens to be, we are to do it "as serving the Lord," not primarily for material gain, since "if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content" (Colossians 3:23; 1 Timothy 6:8). "[A]s we have opportunity," we are to "do good to all men," practicing "hospitality ungrudgingly to one another" (Galatians 6:10; 1 Peter 4:9). And all that we do is to be borne of "faith, hope, [and] love" and done "in humility," so that we "count others better than" ourselves (1 Corinthians 13:13; Philippians 2:3).

These are some of the precepts that God, in His Word, has made it incumbent upon Christians to obey. They, and others like them, are worthy subjects of the church's preaching, solely insofar as they are duties that a fallen humanity not only does not perform, but often does not even acknowledge. The point I am making in the present context, however, is that, by urging obedience to such precepts in its preaching, the church can help prepare believers for the testing of their faith that they will encounter in this world. How can this occur? In the space that remains, I will attempt to say how I believe the preaching of obedience can have this effect.

Before addressing this issue, however, let me pause to be clear as to certain things I am not saying. I am, of course, not saying that any person, other than Jesus Himself, has ever obeyed God perfectly or ever can. With Saint Paul, we must confess that, "None is righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10). Nor am I saying that any amount of good works can merit eternal salvation from

God. We are "unworthy servants" even if we have done "all that is commanded" (Luke 17:10). It may nevertheless appear that, by suggesting the preaching of obedience as a means of helping believers to prepare for the trials they must face, I am also suggesting that it is within the power of the individual believer to contribute to his own salvation, when all the glory belongs to God alone. But this also I am emphatically not saying. We are taught by Saint Paul that the Holy Spirit dwells in all believers (Romans 8:9,11; 1 Corinthians 6:19). Therefore, if by obedience the believer is enabled, in some degree, to protect his faith against temptation, are we not compelled to say that his obedience, to no less an extent than his faith, is the work of the Holy Spirit? Given our imperfect capacity of understanding, obedience may seem to us in the attempt as something we ourselves are doing, but that does not make it so. As Martin Luther has said, with respect to the power given by God to believers: "It is the power that serves us in securing eternal life and in godly living here. . . . And that power is with us and in us in a way that what we speak and work, we do not do, but God himself does it."¹⁰

How is it, then, that the preaching of obedience by the church can help preserve believers in their faith? That it can, in fact, do so should come as no surprise, in light of our Lord's parable of the house built on rock (Matthew 7:24-27; Luke 6:47-49) and Saint Paul's teaching that "godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come" (1 Timothy 4:8). But how is this effect achieved?

In considering this question, it is perhaps best to start with an examination of our own spiritual lives. In my own case, upon such examination, one thing I find is that my loyalties are divided. I love God, but I must confess that I love the world, too. If I am honest, I find that I have an abiding desire for the world's attractions: its comforts and ease, its honors and praise; and I find, also, that, because I love these worldly things, my tendency is to want to remove any obstacles in the way of their attainment and, accordingly, to limit my commitment to God.

¹⁰Luther, *Peter & Jude*, 240.

I want to have it both ways, so to speak—to be a Christian, but at the same time not to let my Christianity interfere with my worldly ambitions. My inclination is to be a “taxpayer Christian”: in matters of faith, as with filing my tax returns, I want to pay the minimum that is required, and not a penny more.¹¹

This spiritual condition of divided loyalties, which I have been describing as my own, is, I suspect, a common one among Christians. And the essential point, for present purposes, is that it is not a safe one. Our divided loyalties are dangerous, precisely because they impair our ability to heed Jesus’ repeated warnings that we must be watchful in our earthly lives, always looking out for His coming again, “lest . . . [our] hearts be weighed down with . . . cares of this life, and that day come upon . . . [us] suddenly like a snare” (Luke 21:34). A soldier at his post can hardly keep alert, if he is fraternizing with civilians, much less if he is fraternizing with the enemy. Jesus’ own words could not be more clear: “You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24).

Now it is with the problem of our spiritually divided loyalties that I believe obedience can help—even obedience that will surely be far less than perfect. It can probably go without saying among Lutherans that, by attempting obedience, we learn to what extent we are sinners. What does need to be said, I think, is that, by attempting obedience, we can also learn to want to be saints; and the desire for holiness, once kindled within us, will itself produce that watchfulness so urgently enjoined by Jesus Christ, for the sake of all believers, and afford to us the spiritual protection that He graciously intended us to have by this means.

It is true that we are children of a fallen race and that a love of holiness does not seem to come naturally to us. But our sinful nature is not “original” with us at all: sin was originally no part of our first ancestors; we were created in God’s image, and He “has put eternity into man’s mind” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Although

¹¹See C. S. Lewis, “A Slip of the Tongue,” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, edited by W. Hooper (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1980): 129, from which the analogy of the taxpayer is derived.

we have since fallen, we have, through Christ's death and resurrection, been made "dead to sin and alive to God . . ." to "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:11, 4). We should not, therefore, be content to pursue the world's attractions. We should instead set our sights much higher—on the things of heaven for which we were made, remembering that we are only "strangers and exiles on the earth" and that "our commonwealth is in heaven" (Hebrews 11:13; Philippians 3:20).

Love of holiness, then, is natural to us in a way that our love for the world can never be. But, just as we must first study the grammar of a language before we can love its poetry, so in spiritual things we must begin by earnestly trying to obey God at the most basic level. When we do so, we will begin, by His help, to realize, with the Psalmist, that "the ordinances of the Lord" are "[m]ore to be desired . . . than gold" (Psalm 19:9-10). We will begin to love the riches for which God has made us and to find that His treasure is our heart's desire.

In this way, obedience can give us the singleness of mind and purpose that is essential if we are to watch and be ready in our earthly lives, as Jesus has instructed us to be. In this way we also will be prepared, by God's grace, to face what we must in this world and to persevere in our faith to the end. The question of ultimate importance turns out to be, not who we are, but whose. By the mercy of God, we are His, and this obedience can help us to know.

Who am I? Amidst the confusion of the many answers offered by the world, it is Christianity that holds the one true answer, and it is the church that has been called to proclaim this truth. In an age of "mega-churches," when marketing techniques are confused by some with theology and the cross is removed from nominally Christian sanctuaries to avoid giving offense, the church at large may perhaps experience an identity crisis of its own. In such an age, it must be the prayer of all believers that the church will remain true to its calling to feed the flock of the Good Shepherd and bring His sheep home in the end to Him. This solemn responsibility, it has been my purpose to suggest, can most effectively be carried out only if the church gives a prominent place in its preaching to telling believers not just who

they are in God's sight at a given moment in time, but also where they find themselves—to a description of the real and constant dangers confronting believers in the world and to the most practical help possible for protecting their faith against these dangers. Stressing the importance of obedience to God in our individual lives is one way in which I believe the church can provide this kind of help.

Needless to say, this message will not always find a receptive audience. Yet, though the church may sometimes feel itself to be weak, by worldly standards, as compared to the strong secularizing tendencies of this present time, it can confidently proclaim the truth entrusted to it, resting (like Saint Paul) on our Lord's blessed assurance: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

The Problem and Power of Preaching: Romans 1:16

Loren Kramer

Introduction

We are preachers, you and I. That is our calling. It is our primary task. No time is more important in our ministry than the moments spent in the preparation and preaching of sermons.

How are you feeling about preaching these days? Do you anticipate the task with delight or dread? Is preaching a great blessing or heavy burden? Reinhold Niebuhr kept a journal through the years of his ministry. The entries he made in the early days after graduation from the seminary are most revealing. His first call was to serve a congregation consisting of eighteen families. Here is a short sample from his journal in those early days in which he articulates his feelings about preaching:

Now that I have preached about a dozen sermons, I find I am repeating myself. A different text simply means a different pretext for saying the same thing over again. The few ideas that I had worked into sermons at the seminary have all been used and now what? They say a young preacher must catch his second wind before he can really preach. I'd better catch it pretty soon or the weekly sermon will become a terrible chore. . . . Here I am trying to find a new message each Sunday. I struggle to find an idea worth presenting and I almost dread the approach of a new Sabbath. I don't know whether I can ever accustom myself to the task of bringing light and inspiration in regular weekly installments.¹

¹Reinhold Niebuhr, *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic* (Chicago and New York: Willet, Clark, and Colby, 1929), 4.

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Have you ever had similar feelings? I must confess that I have. Sermonizing is like trying to conceive and give birth to a new baby every week. If that sounds like a lot of hard work, that is because it is! But that is our task. That is our calling as preachers. Knowing that, with the Spirit's blessing, let us take a look at the problem, power, and promise of preaching.

I.

What is the problem with preaching? When we get frustrated by something we are trying to do, the most natural thing is to point the finger of blame at someone else. The problem with preaching is the audience. If we had better listeners, the task would be easier. Somewhere I read of a seminarian who was deathly afraid of the prospect of preaching. The thought of getting up in front of the congregation terrified him. One of his professors, seeking to be helpful, encouraged him to have a mental picture of the congregation as a cabbage patch. That way, each one of those heads out there would be basically harmless. That may have eased the student's anxiety, but it did not get at the real problem of preaching. Those are not just a bunch of benign and empty cabbage heads out there. The problem with the audience is more serious than that. Listen to the opening paragraph from a book entitled "The Twenty-first Century Pastor":

Being a pastor today is more difficult than any time in memory. This century has witnessed the collapse of the Christian consensus that held American culture together for centuries. The secularization has pushed the churches to the margins of our nation's consciousness. George Hunter claims that 120 million Americans are virtually secular. They have no Christian influence, no Christian memory or vocabulary, and no Christian assumptions or world view.

How do you go about trying to reach those people with preaching? That is an enormous problem for us as preachers.

It is not, however, the only problem. An equally pressing problem for preachers is the one that stares back at us from our

mirror. A big problem with preaching, simply put, is the preacher. That is not a new revelation. That recognition is as old as the call to become a preacher. Remember Moses? When God called him to be his spokesman, Moses said, "I cannot do it. I have a speech impediment." When Jeremiah was called to speak he said "I cannot go, I am too young. I am only a child." When Isaiah heard the call, he cried out "Woe is me. I am undone for I am a man of unclean lips and dwell in the midst of people of unclean lips." All of them felt inadequate. None of them felt up to the task. It overwhelmed them. And frequently, the call threatens to overwhelm us as well. We pastors are called to work and to speak for God in a disbelieving world. It often drains and debilitates us, saps us of our energy and enthusiasm. So what is a preacher to do when he feels frustrated and unfulfilled? That is a dangerous moment. Sometimes the temptation is to turn to gimmicks and fads that will hold the audience's attention and feed the fragile ego of the preacher. But that is not the solution. It simply adds another element to the original predicament.

II.

The real solution is to do what we have been called to do—preach the gospel. That is what Paul did. Talk about a preacher who had every reason to toss in the stole and take up tent making full time. In his journal, he could recount that his preaching had gotten him imprisoned in Philippi, thrown out of Thessalonica, smuggled out of Berea, and laughed at in Athens. All of that and more for doing what we do every week—preaching the gospel. It looks like enough to discourage anyone, but not Paul. Instead of hanging his head, turning tail, and slinking away, he says with confidence and conviction, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. I am proud of it." Then he adds this awesome confession of faith: "It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." Let that sink in. The gospel is the power of God.

Recently, through the Hubbel telescope, that powerful lens in the heavens and on the heavens, we were treated to some truly magnificent pictures of gaseous masses, which, as astronomers

tell us, are stars and galaxies in their formative stages. One scientist, looking at the phenomenon said, "I have seen the face of God." Awesome as that sight is to behold, as hard as it is to comprehend what we are seeing, it is nothing when compared to the power of God revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The same God who shows His almighty power in creation, shows us His true face, not in a gaseous cloud, but in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. The same God who called the world into being—the sun, the moon, and the stars—by the word of His power, rescued and redeemed that world when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. He saves people, not by the might and mystery of fission and fusion, but by the mystery and miracle of One who became a suffering servant and bore our burdens, forgiving us our sins and comforting us in our sorrow. The same One who defeated death now gives us everlasting life. Our task and calling is to proclaim this truth. It is our highest and holiest privilege. God has put into our hands and into our hearts and on our lips the good news of His plan and purpose for all the problem people of the world, starting with us. Our task is not to change the message, but to preach it. It is what we have been called to do, and we dare not be ashamed of it, even today, here and now. It is God's power to save people. Nothing else can or will do the job.

III.

With that firm conviction, I want to narrow the focus from the "what" of our task to the "how," from the content to the container, from the means to the method, from God's part to our part. I am talking about us, you and me, as preachers of the gospel and how we go about preparing and doing what we have been called to do. Recently, I was listening to an interview with a man whose ministry had been enormously blessed in a few short years. He was reaching all kinds of people in a part of the city where other churches were closing their doors. When asked if he saw any reason why his ministry was flourishing when others were failing, he reflected for a while and then said, "Too many shepherds don't smell like sheep anymore." What a comment! It reminded me of an experience I had as a first-year seminarian. A small group of us had received an assignment to

meet with the pastor of Zion Lutheran Church in downtown St. Louis. This was one of the four original congregations served by C. F. W. Walther. Pastor Lange shared with us future preachers some of the richness of his own years of experience. This statement I remember as clearly as if I had heard it yesterday. He said: "A pastor has two hands. You need to use both of them. One hand must be out and about with your people. The other one must be deeply imbedded in the scriptures, especially the New Testament." We are called to be two-handed preachers, good shepherds who know their sheep and are known by them. People come to hear what you have to say because they are looking for something. They have hungers to be satisfied, thirst to be quenched, hurts to be healed, fears to be overcome. They seek understanding of their failures, forgiveness for their sins, hope for their future.

Robert Randall, who is both a licensed clinical psychologist and pastor, has written a book entitled "What People Expect from Church: Why Meeting the Needs of People is More Important than Church Meetings." Listen to this excerpt:

People long for words of life from their preacher. Fruitful preaching has always been rooted in the lived experiences of the congregation. Preaching will be effective when it conveys a deep understanding of human pain and struggles and of hopes and joys. People will then know someone has broken through their loneliness. Sermon preparation consequently will begin by the preacher being with the people.

Being with your people is essential, but that is not enough for productive preaching. First and foremost, preachers of the gospel need to spend time with their Lord in His word — not just professionally, in preparation, but personally for daily living. If we are to speak for him we need to listen to him. If we are to lead others to Him, we need to know where to find Him ourselves. And we need to ask for His help and blessing as we go about the task.

Sometimes, we as Lutherans, are so concerned about avoiding the appearance of making prayer a means of grace, that we go

to the opposite extreme. We neglect the power that is promised by the One who calls us to preach the good news. Jesus was a man of prayer. On the mountainside, by the seaside, in the garden or in the upper room, he prayed continually. And the blessing came.

Erasmus has great counsel for those who would take on the task of preaching. He compares it to what the disciples did when they brought the loaves and fishes to Jesus. This is what Erasmus says:

Just bring those two little fishes, bring them to Jesus. Nothing he has not touched will be to any avail. Have you then, eloquence, have you philosophy, have you ability, have you knowledge of the sacred scriptures? Whatever you have, place it in the hands of Jesus. Let Him bless it and break it and give it to you. Then you can give it to the people, not as your own, but as coming from Him.

From Him, His blessings—that is where the power comes from in our preaching.

One final bit of counsel, fellow preachers. This is a call to commit yourselves to doing the very best that you can. Write clearly. Speak the word well. I am reminded of the story of the man who went to church one Sunday, leaving his family behind. The children were sick and the mother stayed home to care for them. When he returned from church, the wife was interested in the message for the day. She asked “What did the pastor preach about?” The husband thought for a moment and then answered. “He didn’t say.” Once again, write clearly and speak well. Luther’s counsel is still excellent for preachers to heed. “Pray as if all depends on God. Then work as if all depends on you.” Inspiration and perspiration are necessary companions in preparation and preaching. Someone recently found an original manuscript of a sermon by the great preacher Charles Spurgeon. At the top of the page he had penned the words, “Jesus deserves my very best.” And He does. God held nothing back. He gave the His very best—His own Son—to give the gospel its power. We who are called to preach should never settle for mediocrity. If you are a preacher, heed these words from another preacher.

Study diligently, pray fervently, write clearly, speak boldly, say it well. Then trust the promise. The gospel is God's power to save. His word will accomplish the task for which He sends it. That is His promise.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude with some words that I shared at a previous pastors' conference long ago. These words helped me through the years of parish ministry. As I stepped through the sacristy door, to enter the sanctuary, I had these words posted there as a reminder of the privilege of preaching. They come from the mind of O.P. Kretzmann, a master preacher of his generation:

I am a preacher. . . . I am one of the greatest line in the history of men. . . . My line reaches back beyond the Cross to the days when the flood came over the earth . . . only because of the Church I serve and the Word I preach does God permit the world to roll on its way. I have watched men step quietly through the last gate because I had been permitted to show them the way. . . . There are men and women, and children too, before the throne of heaven today who are my children. . . . They are there because God let me bring them there.

The saints of the church are my joy, and the sinners are my burden. . . . I am an ambassador of the King of Kings. . . . My lips are among the few left in the world that speak truth. . . . I almost alone among men deal day after day with eternal things. . . . I am the last echo of a far voice that forever calls men home. . . . I am the hand of the bridegroom, the shadow of the Cross, the trumpet of the King. . . . Neither obscurity nor popularity can rob me of my glory. . . . It is not my own but the reflected glory of Him whose free and happy slave I am. . . . I am driven. . . . I must preach faith in a world that disbelieves, hope in a time that has no hope, and joy in an hour that knows only sorrow. . . . I am at home in a tenement house or in a mansion because my home is neither. . . . I and my people alone stand between the world and destruction. . . . The

flames on my altar will not die and the lights in my sanctuary will not be quenched by flood or storm. . . . I am a preacher — and very glad of it. . . .

Learning from Pieper: On Being Lutheran in This Time and Place

Gilbert Meilaender

I find it rather interesting to reflect upon the fact that I have been invited to be the banquet speaker at a symposium on “things indifferent.”¹ It is rather comforting really, for it doesn’t raise the standard too high. Whether I am the right person for the occasion is hard to say, however. I am afraid that I have made a career out of being, on the one hand, just a bit indifferent to things other people are prepared to fight about and, on the other hand, almost belligerent (were I not so gentle a soul) on matters about which others are reluctant to say “thus saith the Lord.”

When President Wenthe called to invite me to talk at this banquet, he gave me a very general—not to say vague—assignment: I did not, fortunately, have to talk about Article X of the Formula of Concord. Rather, he wanted me, in some way or other, to think and talk about what it means to be a Lutheran in our time and place, about what issues ought to be engaging our attention now. As I reflected on that invitation and assignment, it occurred to me that what I really wanted to say might be summarized in a way that does relate to Article X, but with a certain twist. One might say that Article X is about discernment—about learning to discern what is really important, what really counts, not anywhere and everywhere, but in a particular time and place. It is about learning where to draw lines and where not to. And I think I have learned something during all these years toiling in the wilderness of academia, and it will, in a sense, be the theme that draws together my scattered reflections tonight. What I have learned is that you have to take your friends where you can find them, and that, in our time and place, they will not all be found in any single ecclesial communion.

¹Because this paper was delivered as a “talk” at a banquet dinner, I have retained its relatively informal style and have not provided footnotes for citations.

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In order to make this theme appear slightly more respectable for an audience such as this one, however, I have decided to title my talk "Learning from Pieper." For each of the three parts of the talk, I shall begin with a passage from Pieper—on the basis of which I will then, as it were, free associate and do a little reflecting of my own.

I.

In every conceivable case love signifies much the same as approval. . . . It is a way of turning to him or it and saying, 'It's good that you exist; it's good that you are in this world!' . . . Human love, therefore, is by its nature and must inevitably be always an imitation and a kind of repetition of this perfected and . . . *creative* love of God.

In his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* ["The Gospel of Life"], Pope John Paul II wrote of what he called a "culture of death" manifesting itself especially in advanced western societies such as ours. If we ask what issues ought to be engaging our attention today, what Lutherans ought to be worrying about, this is a good place to start. We ought, the Pope writes, to be "fully aware that we are facing an enormous and dramatic clash between good and evil, death and life, the 'culture of death' and the 'culture of life.'" We are not asked whether we wish to face this "dramatic clash"; we simply find ourselves in the midst of the conflict. I make reference here not only to abortion, assisted suicide, and euthanasia, but also to a wider range of related questions: the whole paraphernalia of prenatal screening (right down even to the routinely recommended sonogram), which is altering our understanding of the relation of mother and child; decisions about withholding treatment from those whose "quality of life" is diminished; even the approach to organ transplantation that is beginning to train us to think of human beings simply as collections of body parts. In countless ways, we are having trouble saying to others who share our human nature, "It's good that you exist."

Behind all these issues lies the persistent *leitmotif* of modernity: the human will as abstractly creative, as the source of all value and meaning; and, correspondingly, of the natural

world as inert and without order until that human will, in godlike fashion, gives it meaning. Indeed, in the modern period many thinkers have celebrated the limitless creativity of humankind. To all other creatures God has set specific tasks and limits, but the task of man is simply to create himself. We had to wait several centuries, of course, for our own century now moving toward its close, to acquire the biological insight and skill needed to apply this vision directly and powerfully to human life itself. But when we do apply it, the loving affirmation of others that we offer is no longer a recognition of the dignity that is simply theirs as children of God; it is, rather, a value that we first create and only then recognize. Anyone who does not think that this is increasingly the case in our world has simply not been paying attention.

We stand, therefore, not only on the brink of a new millennium but at the end of the long attempt to Christianize European societies. The theme sounded by *Evangelium Vitae* is essentially that articulated near the beginning of the second century of the Christian era by the Didache, which begins: "There are two paths to follow: one is life and the other is death. There is a profound difference between the two." The long, slow process of imprinting "the way of life" upon our societies, a process that took centuries, has now begun to turn back upon itself. Christians taught us to esteem highly the individual will that must either turn in love to God, the source of life, or back upon itself and certain death. That very Christian estimation of the will, taken still further, has now become a human will without limit, that creates value or denies it as if by divine fiat—no longer a will that, as Pieper put it, understands itself as an imitation or a repetition of the creative love of God.

This is where we stand right now, where the people in your congregations stand, whether they think about it or not. How well positioned are we to think and teach about such matters of practical reason? Not very well, I sometimes fear, and one of the reasons, strangely enough, may be indirectly related to what we have made of the concerns of Article X. The clash between the way of life and the way of death compels us to think about many questions on which the Bible is silent or to which it speaks

only obliquely, and we are often very reluctant to do that. Garrison Keillor captures our weakness quite nicely in his "Young Lutheran's Guide to the Orchestra." "Suppose," he says, "that you, a young Lutheran, find yourself to have musical talent—not just more than the other people in your family, but real talent. You ought to ask yourself, 'Which instrument should a Lutheran play? If our Lord had played a musical instrument, which one would he have played—assuming he was a Lutheran?'"

The approach is low key, but the point is serious. If we have trained ourselves to suppose that Christian teaching is nothing more than simple and direct application of Bible passages—without the intervening mediation of theological and moral reflection—we may well conclude that the clash between these two ways is something about which we can say very little. We will have to be silent about some of the most crucial and defining features of our epoch, lest we should say more than we ought without a clear and simple biblical directive. Thus, as Oliver O'Donovan puts it in his recent and very important book, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology*, "those who want never to be out of date will never interpret their today; they will wait until they can read about it in the newspapers. But those whose business lies with practical reason cannot take their place among what P. T. Forsyth called 'bystanders of history.'"

A decision lies before us. We can concentrate our attention chiefly on those questions the Bible addresses clearly, or we at least think it addresses clearly—but at the risk of becoming bystanders of history. Or we can take a different sort of risk—speaking not just in the voice of individual opinion, but on behalf of the church, to questions the Bible addresses less clearly—but which may be the more important questions demanding the church's attention. Now, of course, one might say that there is no need to make a choice here. Let us just address all questions. But then we will have to do it pretty much on our own, without the help of many other Christians who might sharpen our vision and deepen our understanding.

We will not be taking our friends—on these matters of crucial human import—where we can find them.

I can only testify to you that that has not worked very well for me. In order to think about the sorts of questions I mentioned earlier—in order to reflect upon how we ought to live, how we ought to say “it’s good that you exist” to fetuses, the sick and dying, the mentally infirm, the disabled—I have had to learn from and make common cause with Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans, Jews, those whose religion is largely a kind of natural piety, and even one Methodist, to whom my debts are incalculable.

On the wide range of issues that practical reason addresses, I am almost compelled to suggest that if the Pope did not exist we would have to invent him. For—and think how different this is from the situation that faced Lutherans in the sixteenth century—we are essentially parasitic upon his political clout. Remember, for example, the publicity surrounding, first, the United Nation’s 1994 Conference on Population and Development in Cairo (when an abortion-rights agenda advocated by the United States delegation shoved all other population and development issues into the background), and, second, the United Nations 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing (in which issues of sexuality and reproduction, and the very meaning of motherhood and family, were hotly debated). Suppose I were to ask, “Who represented *our* interests on these occasions?” The best answer, I think, is: “The Holy Father.”

We need, in short, to develop a certain sense of what counts, of where our energies ought to be directed at a given time and place—not to suppose that we stand where Lutherans stood fifty, or even twenty-five, years ago. I have never forgotten reading an account of the rebuke issued by Hans Asmussen to Werner Elert, who was a great Lutheran proponent of the law/gospel distinction and, in many respects, a very conservative Lutheran theologian. Elert flirted with the German Christians from a distance, but he also offered a theologically serious critique of the Barmen Declaration, which had been drafted mostly by Karl Barth as the Confessing Church’s

statement of opposition to the Nazi regime's attempt to take over the churches. Asmussen responded to Elert: "Excuse me, Herr Professor, for bringing to your attention the latest news. For the last year thousands of pastors have had their existence as Christian preachers threatened, thousands of congregations have had their existence as Christian communities threatened. We find ourselves in a raging sea after a shipwreck. A seaworthy ship [the Confessing Church] is near by, ready to rescue the shipwrecked. Believe me, those who have been shipwrecked will not jump into the water again, because an engineer on the land has shown that in his opinion our ship's mast is slightly askew." That is, Elert lacked a sense of what counted at the time and place in which he found himself. We need such a sense—need to learn who our friends are and where to direct our energies today—if we are really to be of service to both church and world.

II.

Do we not find ourselves somewhat caught in the modern world of work—faced with the increasing politicalization of the academic realm and the ominous shrinking of inner and outer opportunities for public discourse, and especially for genuine debate? Where shall we seek the "free area" in which alone *theoria* can thrive? . . . We begin to understand that Plato's Academy had been a *thiasos*, a religious association assembling for regular sacrificial worship. Does this have any bearing on our time?

This passage, in context, comes from Pieper's discussion of the boundaries that marked the medieval period at either end. He suggests that we might place that period's beginning at the time when Cassiodorus—the younger contemporary of Boethius—decided that philosophy could not really be done in the court of the German ruler Theodoric and fled his official position at the court to found a monastery. And, Pieper notes, "for almost a thousand years to come Boethius remained the last 'layman' in the history of European philosophy." We might, at least symbolically, place the end of this period at the moment when William of Ockham reversed the direction of Cassiodorus'

flight and left the cloister for the German imperial court. Whereupon philosophy again took up its residence in the world. With that in mind, Pieper suggests, we have to ask how hospitable the world in our time has become to serious philosophical work—or whether, in fact, it might now be that the church will become the only place in which genuinely free discussion and argument can survive, as eastern Europeans learned during the decades of Soviet domination.

That is, I believe, something to which we might aspire and through which we might serve our world. Freed by our baptism from what Augustine would have called “domination by the lust for domination,” we can begin to think seriously about hard questions—not just safe questions. With our identity established by our baptism, we should be set free at least to some degree from the identity politics that positively engulfs the modern academy and often renders genuine discussion impossible. We ought to be able to have the kind of free-wheeling discussion available only to those who know that certain things are given.

Consider where things now stand in the relation between church and society. The church first flourished in a society that was hardly hospitable to its presence. The result of that flourishing was Christendom—that is, Western civilization’s attempt to let the triumph of Christ over the powers of evil actually begin to infiltrate the structure of society. It was a noble attempt, whatever its dangers and failings. Among those failings, of course, were some that threatened the very existence of Lutherans in the sixteenth century. The background for Article X of the Formula of Concord was political controversy between Lutherans and Catholics and, then, between different “brands” of Lutherans. How much compromise, they asked themselves, is permissible under threat of persecution from others who are fellow Christians but, yet, political enemies?

Our situation is very different today. We find ourselves in a world that once again is not all that hospitable—in public—to the faith Christians share, unless that faith remains resolutely private. Indeed, Christians may gradually learn what it was like to be Jews in Christian Europe. In such circumstances we must

take our friends where we can find them. The threat does not come from any other Christian ecclesial communion. It comes from the spirit of modernity – which, of course, penetrates and influences every ecclesial communion, including our own. In the face of such circumstances, the church must be or become the place where the hard theological and philosophical questions are again taken up.

As many of you know, I have written a good bit over the years for the magazine *First Things*. It has no party line, but its contributors tend to be concerned about classical Christian belief and the way that belief relates to the whole of life. Indeed, its contributors tend to have such concerns even when they are Jewish, for they see better than we how, as I said before, Christians may come to learn what it meant to be Jews in medieval Europe. And I have been regularly amazed, when I write for *First Things*, at the responses I get from all sorts of people. They are people who care deeply about the faith, but they are scattered across many different ecclesial communions. I have concluded that people are eager to talk and think about important questions within the context of shared commitment to classical Christian belief. Indeed, they thirst for such opportunities. They sense that our situation has changed drastically in just the last quarter century. They are not devoted so much to old battles, because they sense that more important challenges lie before Christians now. And they are looking for help.

We have to ask ourselves whether we have served them well, whether we have provided our pastors with the kind of education that prepares them to begin to speak to that thirst for Christian understanding, whether we are in a position to form both the heart and the mind of those who seek our help. Dorothy Sayers once wrote that “the dogma is the drama.” It is, she wrote, “the terrifying assertion that the same God who made the world lived in the world and passed through the grave and gate of death. Show that to the heathen, and they may not believe it but at least they may realize that here is something that a man might be glad to believe.”

Are we communicating that—the sheer intellectual astonishment and audacity of Christian belief? The difference it makes? Where among us are the magazines and the journals in which the most fundamental Christian beliefs are taken up and rethought in relation to our time and place? Or do we simply presume that all those matters are clear and then devote our energy to the practical tasks of ministry or church growth? All around us there are, I think, signs of a genuine thirst for rearticulation of the most basic—and most supernatural—beliefs of the church. There is a desire for a “space” in which to carry on that discussion freely, imaginatively, and openly. We should be asking ourselves how we may contribute to that effort that is underway among many Christians, for it is what we really need just now.

To undertake such a task, to provide the space in which such Christian thinking can go on, will call for the virtue of patience. We will need to learn sometimes to say “I don’t know.” I can still remember the tensions of my years as a seminary student in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Those were not altogether pleasant times to be at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. And I remember how, whenever a difficult question arose, I would take myself off to the library to try to find an answer. That wasn’t all bad. I learned a lot. But in retrospect I realized that I also, rather unwittingly, sometimes felt that if I failed to figure out an answer the church might not survive. It took me a few more years—and some help from that one Methodist—to learn sometimes to say “I don’t know” in the confidence that the church would somehow manage to carry on. The task before us is simply this: to learn to offer to God the whole of our intellect with all its powers, yet not to suppose that the church is built upon that intellect—which task calls for and demands the virtue of patience. Karl Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* is unfinished—all those volumes, but never completed. St. Thomas’s *Summa Theologiae* is unfinished—in his case, at least according to the stories, by choice. In an age where classical theological reflection has often given way to identity politics on the one hand and practical tasks on the other, we have an opportunity to provide something in very scarce supply—a space for true theological conversation. Understand—if we don’t, the church

will survive. Someone else will do it. But wouldn't it be nice if we could?

In order to do it, however, we will have to learn to take our friends where we can find them. Not too long ago I wrote an article for *The Journal of Religious Ethics* analyzing certain themes in Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* ["The Splendor of Truth"], an encyclical that treats some fundamental themes in moral theology. In that article I did not shrink from characterizing the encyclical's position as "semi-Pelagian" and as failing really to understand the place of the *sola fide* in the moral life. And having made those claims and supported them as best I could, I wrote a closing paragraph that went this way:

If *Veritatis Splendor* requires such correction, it is at least also true that it speaks a theological language serious enough to invite such a response. One is—or I, at least, am—hard pressed to imagine an equally serious statement on the nature of theological ethics issuing at this time from any major Protestant body. Those who wish to keep alive the questions of the Reformation and the centrality of the language of faith in our vision of the Christian life must therefore be thankful for *Veritatis Splendor*. Ironical as such a conclusion to this essay may seem, it accurately reflects the state of "theological existence today."

If we think hard about the circumstances in which we find ourselves, and if we think honestly about what we as Lutherans have to contribute to the wellbeing of both church and society, this is, I think, something like the tone we need to learn to adopt. Learning it will mean breaking ourselves of some very old habits grounded in a quite different time and place—just as Cassiodorus once did, and William of Ockham did centuries later. It means learning to rethink who are our friends and who our enemies. I do not know whether "we" are up to it. We have come close to creating a generation fearful of really serious theological conversation. Indeed, I sometimes think that just as the Israelites who had been marked by the experience of slavery in Egypt had to die before "Israel" was ready to take possession of the land of promise, just as the controversies among Lutherans in the sixteenth century could be resolved only when

new leaders replaced Melanchthon and Flacius who were so marked by the old battles, so perhaps only the generation that succeeds my own will be able to take stock — with a certain sense of freedom — of where we Lutherans really find ourselves today, and who are our friends and who our enemies. Perhaps, though, even we are not entirely ruined, and even we can make a beginning.

III.

Since we nowadays think that all a man needs for acquisition of truth is to exert his brain more or less vigorously, and since we consider an *ascetic* approach to knowledge hardly sensible, we have lost the awareness of the close bond that links the knowing of truth to the condition of purity. Thomas says that unchastity's first-born daughter is blindness of the spirit. Only he who wants nothing for himself, who is not subjectively "interested," can know the truth. On the other hand, an impure, selfishly corrupted will-to-pleasure destroys both resoluteness of spirit and the ability of the psyche to listen in silent attention to the language of reality.

This leads me, finally, to some brief reflections on the kind of pastors we need in this time and place if we are to help the people in our congregations with the kinds of questions I have noted and if we are to find a worthwhile role to play within the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. What Pieper suggests that we need is, in a word, chastity. Not because we have tunnel vision and can think about nothing but sexual morality, but because without chastity we must suffer "blindness of the spirit," an inability "to listen in silent attention to the language of reality."

What does this mean? It means that the unchaste man wants to grab what is not his. He wants for himself what is another's or cannot rightly be his. He does not see — because he *will* not see — that what he wants *is* not his. He understands many things, of course — his own desire for happiness, the importance of fulfillment and satisfaction in human life, the truth that even great sinners can be forgiven and that there is no human being

who is not accurately described as simply a justified sinner. But all of these understandings—true enough in themselves—become only so many ploys in a dishonorable and often pitiable pursuit of self-interest. Once we understand this larger meaning of chastity, that it is part of the more general virtue of temperance, we will see that this tendency to grab what is not ours, to be unjust, can manifest itself also in many contexts other than sexuality—in the tendency to manipulate people in a congregation, to set them against each other so that they will not be against us; in the tendency to manipulate the truth in an attempt to retain control of parishioners, which manipulation may seem easier than the hard intellectual labor needed to converse with them; in the tendency to cloak whatever our goals may be in a language like that of “evangelism,” secure in the knowledge that no one will be willing to criticize such an unquestioned good.

If we pastors are to learn chastity once again, we will have to be willing to do what all serious practical reason requires—to hold others to a standard higher than we ourselves have sometimes met, higher than our structures of discipline have sometimes managed in the recent past. We will need district presidents and bishops who sound more like Dr. Laura than like someone who has been reading the latest book on the latest approach to pastoral counseling. And, of course, if we are really to be serious about such discipline, we will need, as I have been suggesting all night long, a finely honed sense of what really counts—lest an ugly clericalism should reassert itself more often than it already does, and we should decide to be unyielding on all the wrong issues.

What, then, should Lutherans be thinking about and trying to do here and now in order to serve both church and world? Well, in case I have not been clear enough, let me put it again quite directly. First, we should begin to understand how Christian vision on essential questions about the meaning of our humanity is being marginalized in our society, and we should consider the possibility that the development of common Christian vision on these questions—a vision based neither on mere citation of the biblical witness nor on the distinction

between law and gospel, but on the structure of created reality—may be more important than some other matters about which we are accustomed to debate. Second, we should take seriously the need for a place—and a space—in which those who care about classical Christian commitments can explore in fresh ways the dogma that is itself the drama at the heart of the faith. Third, we will not develop a pastorate that can see the truth in these matters or teach it effectively unless we refuse to let our own vision be shaped by the grasping, manipulative unchastity of spirit that asserts the self rather than seeks the truth.

All this, my friends, under the admittedly somewhat elastic rubric of “Learning from Pieper.” I have deliberately chosen as my starting points some passages from Pieper that you may not have read and that may have seemed unfamiliar. And, indeed, a part of what we really need right now is to range more widely in our reading and discussion, to become more truly catholic in our theological vision. I have not therefore taken up the *crux theologorum*, the *ichtheologie*, or the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*—theologically important as these questions are, and essentially correct on them as I believe Franz Pieper to have been. I have, instead, sought to think with you about some other passages on other matters from an other Pieper—Josef Pieper, a wonderfully learned and instructive German Catholic philosopher of our century, whose books I commend to you this evening.

Theological Observer

Germany and Australia: Ordination of Women?

The issue of the ordination of women has surfaced within our German sister church, the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK). One crystal-clear response was provided by the Working Group on Biblical Theology, and Church (*Ev. Luth. Arbeitskreis Bibeltheologie und Kirche*), in the theses translated and gratefully reprinted below. The Department of Systematic Theology of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, continues to view the ordination of women as a matter of the gravest, and church-divisive significance. In the spirit of mutual confessional accountability we urge the widest possible attention to the important German theses.

These theses are particularly relevant to the present emergency in the Lutheran Church of Australia, which is in danger of being robbed of its solemn, official confession of the truth in this matter. The tragedy is that the new, permissive position now being advocated in that church radically disavows the faithful testimony of men like the late Doctors Hermann Sasse and H. P. Hamann Jr. Humanly speaking, it was Sasse whose humble, persistent theological work brought the two Lutheran churches in Australia together in 1965, on the constitutional basis of the *Theses of Agreement*. The *Theses* clearly confess:

Though women prophets were used by the Spirit of God in the Old as well as in the New Testament, 1 Cor. 14:34-35 and 1 Tim. 2:11-14 prohibit a woman from being called into the office of the public ministry for the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. This apostolic rule is binding on all Christendom; hereby her rights as a member of the spiritual priesthood are in no wise impaired (VI, 11).

Now to set aside this truth once so clearly recognized would be to repudiate the confessional foundation of the Australian Lutheran Union and to undo its integrity and legitimacy – which may God graciously avert!

* * * * *

**Theses for the "Discussion Concerning the Ordination of
Women into the Office of the Church in the SELK"
(Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church [Germany])**

Evangelical Lutheran Working Group on Biblical Theology,
and Church

1. The decision whether women may be admitted to the pastoral office may be based only on the statements of Holy Scripture. Scripture interprets itself and is thus the sole authority for churchly doctrine and practice (John 8:31ff.; 2 Timothy 3:16ff., among others), which also means that Scripture itself determines the temporary or permanent validity of its statements. Every biblical exegesis is bound to this principle (2 Peter 1:19-21), if such exegesis occurs in unconditional obedience to Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church.

Thereby is rejected the opinion, that extra-biblical anthropologies and world-views may govern the understanding of biblical texts.

2. The question whether women may be ordained into the pastoral office directly touches the office of the church instituted by Christ, and must therefore be answered on the basis of such biblical texts as treat of this (especially 1 Corinthians 14; 1 Timothy 2). The binding force of these texts means that no one in the church has the right to judge otherwise on the issue.

Thereby is rejected the opinion, that it lies within the discretion of a church whether to admit women into the pastoral office or not. Traditions, pragmatic considerations, and the like, may neither theoretically nor practically be placed above the biblical statements.

3. The office of proclaiming the Word and administering the Sacraments is instituted by Christ (Matthew 16:19; 18:18; John 20:21ff.; 1 Corinthians 4:1, among others) and is to be understood out of His words ("christonomically"). It is derived from the office of the Apostles called directly [immediately] by Christ. They set in place presbyters here and there (one may see Acts 14:23), in order that they might

"tend" the congregation of Christ (1 Peter 5:1ff.; Acts 20:28), which is God's people (1 Peter 2:9ff.) and "His Body" (1 Corinthians 12). The character of this office is not that of ruling (1 Corinthians 4:8), but of serving (Matthew 20:25ff., par.). It can be clearly defined on the basis of the biblical statements, and is thus to be distinguished, also in respect of its incumbents, from the services and gifts otherwise existing in the congregation. It is not in competition with those offices and charisms.

Thereby is rejected the opinion, that the office of proclaiming the Word and administering the Sacraments

- can, on account of the variety of services and charisms in today's congregation or church, no longer be defined unambiguously,
 - does not stand in direct connection with today's shepherding office,
 - includes a (worldly) claim of power, and that the exclusion of women represents discrimination.
4. What the Apostle Paul specifies regarding the position of woman in the congregation carries weight also for the preaching office. In 1 Corinthians 14 it is a matter of the "command of the Lord." In 1 Timothy 2:13 the divine order of creation is adduced in support. This order is not invalidated by the equality before God in Christ, attested in Galatians 3:28 (see also Ephesians 5:21-25).

Thereby is rejected the opinion,

- that 1 Corinthians 14:33-40 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15 no longer have binding significance for the church of the present day,
- that they may not be applied to the question of the ordination of women to the pastoral office,
- that they are at best to do with statements that belong into the realm of adiaphora (indifferent things).¹

¹The original of these theses may be found in *Lutherische Beiträge* 3 (1998): 313-314. The translation is by Professor Kurt E. Marquart.

Why We Need a Critical Edition of Walther

Time spent in St. Louis recently brought several significant revelations. Among them is the fact that under the leadership of Daniel Preus, Concordia Historical Institute has now catalogued and indexed all the holdings having to do with C.F.W. Walther (No small task!). This includes some 1200 letters written by Walther; a couple of dozen *Gutachten* written on behalf of the St. Louis faculty, signed by Walther; *et alia*. Interesting too has been the discovery of long forgotten notes for several other series of "Luther Hour" lectures ("Law and Gospel" was produced from such notes) regarding the inspiration of Scripture, justification, and a series on Luther's Great Confession on the Holy Supper (1528).

A second revelation was the fact that CHI is now pursuing funding for a critical edition of Walther's works. One can only hale the prospect—long overdue—of a significant collection of Walther's writings. Lamentably, the series envisioned will by no means be complete (15 volumes are proposed). And while it purposes to bring forth in English much which is thus far available only in the original, the German text will unfortunately not be included. In a perfect world we would have an interleaved edition. Nor is Walther's *opus magnum*, the so-called "Baier-Walther Compendium," the standard "Pieper" before Pieper, included in the project. If we are to have Walther, why can't we have the whole Walther? We have had enough abridgments and piecemeal efforts! Is he or is he not one of the most significant of the nineteenth-century American Lutherans?

Norman Nagel has repeatedly pointed out where others have played fast and loose in translating Walther. The standard translation of *Church and Ministry* (what happened to the *Amt in Kirche und Amt*?) and other works will have to be completely re-worked (and this is, thankfully, envisioned). If Walther writes "Kirche" the reader must see "church" in the English text (not "congregation"), and let it be the reader who decides in which sense church is to be understood.¹ But not only so. Walther must

¹For example, *Church and Ministry*, page 192, line 15.

be read according to his own worthy criteria (Scripture, the Confessions, Luther and the fathers, law and gospel), and so comes the "critical" factor in the envisioned project. We here highlight one such criterion. Because Walther above all desired to demonstrate a continuity in his theology with the fathers of the church, special attention needs to be given to whom Walther is quoting, and the context of the statement of the churchman being quoted.

Case in point: under Thesis V on the authority of the Office of the Ministry in *Church and Ministry* (translated by J. T. Mueller), we read a citation from Chemnitz' *Examin* delimiting the powers of the pastoral office. Among them:

. . . with the consent of the congregation introduce ceremonies that serve the ministry, are not at variance with God's Word, do not burden consciences, but promote order, dignity, propriety, peace, and edification.

Walther's German reads, ". . . mit Konsens der Gemeinde einrichten,"² that is, just as Mueller rendered it, "with the consent of the congregation," if *Gemeinde* is simply to be rendered "congregation" according to Walther's intent (which is likely). German editions of *Kirche und Amt* give us Chemnitz' Latin in a footnote: ". . . constituere cum consensu ecclesiae ritus servientes ministerio."³ Walther rendered Chemnitz' "with the consent of the Church (*ecclesiae*)" as "with the consent of the *Gemeinde*," which Mueller renders "with the consent of the *Congregation*." Thus we've traveled from *ecclesia* to congregation via *Gemeinde*. Did Chemnitz mean to state that inherent in the authority of the Office of the Ministry was the power for each pastor to introduce or change the ceremonies (that is, liturgy) as long as his *congregation* consented?

A quick peek at the *Examin* provides the answer. Trent asserted,

If anyone says that the received and approved rites of the Catholic Church, customarily used in the solemn

²*Kirche und Amt*, 1911, 241.

³*De Sacramento Ordinis* I, 3; *Examin*, Preuss edition, 474a.

administration of the sacraments, can without sin be either despised or omitted at their pleasure by the ministers [*a ministris pro libitu omitti*], or be changed into other new ones by any pastor of the churches, let him be anathema. Canon XIII.⁴

Chemnitz notes that the intent of the canon is to guard papal authority by asserting the sinful character of any change to a papal decree. That stated, Chemnitz grants:

And indeed, for the sake of order and decorum it should not be permitted to everyone willfully, without the decision and consent of the church [*Ecclesiae iudicio et consensu*], just because he desires it [*pro libidine*], either to omit or change anything even in external and indifferent things [*in externis adiaphoris*].⁵

Later in the section Chemnitz elaborates:

Those rites also which are retained should remain what in fact they are - indifferent ceremonies, in order that they may not become snares of consciences but be freely observed without any idea that they are necessary, so that, barring offence, they can be omitted or be changed or abrogated by the direction and consent of the church [*Ecclesiae ordinatione et consensu*]. For this should not be permitted privately to the whim of anyone [*privatim cuiusvis*] . . .⁶

In these two passages does “church” equal “congregation”? No. And a final source demonstrates this. Not long after assuming the position of *Generalissimus* Superintendent of the Duchy of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel Chemnitz penned a document in behalf of the ministerium under the jurisdiction of the free city of Braunschweig (something like Ft. Wayne or St. Louis in the number of Lutheran congregations). These “Articles

⁴Examination of the Council of Trent, Kramer, II, 108; Preuss, 259d.

⁵Examination, II, 108; Preuss, 259d.

⁶Examination, II, 117; Preuss, 263c.

to be subscribed by those received into the ministry of this church [*hac ecclesia* - singular]"⁷ include the following:

5. Let him retain the rites in use and received ceremonies of this church [*huius ecclesiae* - singular], and not presume to change anything by private decision without a common decree [*privato arbitrio sine communi decreto*].

Thus we now have an English Walther quoting Chemnitz to make a point which is the complete opposite of what Chemnitz actually stated. A critical Walther edition will have to note such things. Perusing Walther's enormous bibliography demonstrates that he still has much to say to 20th century Lutheranism. He wrote eloquently and at length regarding Lutheran-Reformed Union, the necessity of remaining a liturgical church, the dangers of the 'new measures,' and on many other very contemporary topics, along with of course, Church and Office. We need Walther. We need the real Walther. And we need to read Walther critically, according to his own excellent criteria. May the planned project progress in every way.

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⁷Sehling, KO VI/1, 471.

Book Reviews

READING SCRIPTURE WITH THE CHURCH FATHERS. By Christopher A. Hall. Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998. 223 Pages. Paper.

Interest in the early Church Fathers and their interpretation of the Scriptures, if not in full-bloom revival, is nonetheless vibrant. At least two reasons assist in explaining this phenomenon. One is the on-going search for Christian unity among the churches. Despite the importance of agreement in doctrinal understanding, sacramental practice, and polity, clearly all Christian communions claim the Scriptures to be, at least, the most important source of faith and life. Since the splits and schisms that have marked the church's history were accompanied by rival claims of Scriptural authority and imprimatur, the move to study the interpretive history of the so-called "unified church" is understandable. Secondly, the method and the claims of historical criticism have simply collapsed, along with most intellectual structures which have their foundations in Enlightenment rationalism. I remember a well-known patristic scholar telling me some ten years ago that he was spending all of his time in the history of exegesis. Why? Because the analytic impulses of higher criticism fractured the Scriptural narrative into smaller and smaller units of material that finally had no organic relation to each other, either historically or thematically. Of course, the final redactor was the "real" evangelist, but by the time one got to him, the disjunction of faith and history was so great that the message of the Scriptures was utterly compromised. "Historical criticism makes the Scriptures incapable of being preached." So said my patristic scholar friend.

But if one admits that the Scriptures are to be preached, then one has already largely answered the question posed in the first chapter of this book: "Why Read the Fathers?" The claim that the Scriptures are not merely source materials for historical reconstruction of the early "Jesus Movement," but are, in their own intentionality, to be addressed to faith and life, locates the Scriptures within the church where that faith is confessed and that life is lived. Not surprisingly, as long as Enlightenment assumptions were regnant, no one thought it necessary, or even interesting, to read the Fathers. They certainly were not guided by the light of pure reason, shining forth from the autonomous mind. They were shackled by tradition and dogma, the imposition by external authority upon the thinking capacities of human beings. That, of course, did happen. But there is today a healthier appreciation of the reasonableness of tradition and dogma.

The real "truth" of the purely autonomous individual is a self-serving nihilism. That is the new doctrine of post-modernism. And it is more correct than many wish to admit. Why is it that at a time when the sale of Bibles is at an all-time high, and there is more insistence and encouragement for individual Bible study than ever before, that Bible literacy is virtually non-existent and the use of the Bible seems congruent with just any agenda and viewpoint (listen to the assinities on much evangelical television!). Answer: because Bible literacy implies a communal understanding of the text; something that can be and must be taught and learned and not simply absorbed by privatized reading. It is the burden of this book to elucidate these points more expansively.

Like earlier studies of early Christian exegesis (for example, Kugel and Greer's *Early Biblical Interpretation* [1986] and Simonetti's *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church* [1994]), Hall intends to describe the attitudes, the intellectual commitments, and the hermeneutical methods of the Fathers. Within the scope of his book, he does a fine job. However, unlike earlier studies, this book openly, although not obtrusively, has an intentioned agenda. It is a flower of a very particular tree. This book is really the introductory guide to the large project guided by Thomas Oden, the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (ACCS). This project is properly being called a "Christian Targum," for it intends to provide select, but significant patristic quotation on the biblical text. Hall answers the question, "Why Read the Fathers?" by a quick narrative of the intellectual conversion of Thomas Oden from the aridity of collapsing modernity to an appreciation of the wisdom of the past. That gives the personal testimony entrée to the community endeavor of patristic reading. Significant human experience leads one to a common humanity and its concerns (Paul, Luther, Augustine). A chapter on the "The Modern Mind and Biblical Interpretation" places the publication of the ACCS in the contemporary intellectual and culture context.

After a chapter on "Who Are the Fathers?" (antiquity, holiness of life, orthodox doctrine, ecclesiastical approval), Hall chooses "The Four Doctors of the East" (Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil of Caesarea, John Chrysostom) and "The Four Doctors of the West" (Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Gregory the Great) as his exemplars in describing patristic interpretation. Each section provides a brief introduction to the life and career of each father and then gives a "hermeneutical sampler" in which the biblical interpretation of each

is examined on the basis of particular discussion. Given the introductory intent of this volume, one cannot fault the choice of these particular fathers. Nonetheless, all of these "doctors" are fourth and fifth century writers who, despite their differences, are governed by much the same issues and concerns. The biblical hermeneutics of a Tertullian, an Irenaeus, or a Cyprian would have been proper here. Nonetheless, the discussion of Hall is fair and gives the reader a good beginning in following the biblical thinking of these important figures.

Two further chapters intend to provide broader background for patristic exegesis, namely, the well-trod differences between the "Alexandrian" and "Antiochene" exegetical approaches. Here Hall remains well within the boundaries of common discussion. The "Alexandrian" exegesis is characterized by allegory in which the persons and events of the text suggest "spiritual" realities and virtues. Hall mentions the importance of Philo and, of course, Origen. However, when he claims that Justin Martyr and Irenaeus are "predecessors to Origen," I must wonder whether he has been reading the same Irenaeus I have. Despite the difficulty of precise, inclusive definitions of "allegory" and "typology," one cannot simply proceed as though the difference is so slight that Irenaeus and Origen become the two representative figures of "Alexandrian" exegesis. Whatever Irenaeus is, it is not "Alexandrian." The "Antiochene" exegesis is characterized by interest in grammatical, historical, and rhetorical details. Here Hall discusses Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia. Here he also discusses the Antiochenes' important notion of "theoria."

In a final chapter "Making Sense of Patristic Exegesis," Hall discusses a number of important issues implicitly raised in the quest to revitalize patristic exegesis for contemporary biblical interpretation. The disposition and attitudes of the Fathers indicate that their conservatism was due to the fact that they were not private individuals alone with their text. They were (largely) bishops of the church who transcended their own time and place. Hence they listened to the voice of those who had gone on ahead of them. One must be quiet in order to read rightly. Obviously this raises the issue of tradition, which Hall treats briefly but circumspectly. Finally, Hall summarizes four operative hermeneutical principles that governed the reading of the Fathers: 1) read the Bible holistically; 2) read the Bible christologically; 3) read the Bible communally, with Christ's

body, the church; 4) read the Bible within the context and practice of prayer, worship, and spiritual formation. The remaining distance between the fathers and the contemporary reader of the Bible (liberal or evangelical) lies in the fact that these four principles are so alien to us. This book does a good job in beginning to close the gap. Hopefully the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* will amply illustrate Hall's claim of patristic wisdom, and will justify his evident enthusiasm for patristic commentary.¹

William C. Weinrich

ERASMUS, THE ANABAPTISTS, AND THE GREAT COMMISSION. By Abraham Friesen. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998.

For years, scholars have alleged that Christian humanists, especially Desiderius Erasmus, influenced Anabaptists in the sixteenth century. However, no historian has made this connection as explicitly and exhaustively as Abraham Friesen does in this volume. The book centers on Erasmus's interpretation of the Great Commission in which Christ commanded his followers to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:18-20). Friesen argues that Erasmus's unique interpretation of the Great Commission greatly affected the Anabaptists' understanding of believers' baptism and their theology as a whole.

Friesen's project entails a fascinating study of the various interpretations of the Great Commission in church history. While many Christians today associate this passage with missions, such was not always the case. During the Arian controversy in the early church, this text was important because it contained the only biblical command that baptism be administered in the name of the Trinity. This presented a problem, for, according to Acts, the apostles repeatedly baptized persons in the name of Jesus only. This apparent discrepancy caused an interpretive debate among the Church Fathers

¹The Missouri Synod is especially honored to have four editors of the individual volumes of ACCS on its seminary faculties. From Concordia Theological Seminary there is Dean O. Wenthe (Jeremiah), Arthur A. Just (Luke), and William C. Weinrich (Revelation). From Concordia Seminary there is Quentin Wesselschmidt (Psalms).

that has yet to be definitively resolved. Consequently, exegetes for centuries interpreted the Great Commission chiefly as a reference to the Trinity, not as a missionary command.

Erasmus offered a new interpretation of this passage. As part of his attempt to reinvestigate the scriptures within their historical contexts, Erasmus explored what the Great Commission meant to the apostles, not what it meant to the later Church Fathers. In his biblical paraphrases on Matthew, Erasmus emphasized that the Great Commission commanded the apostles first to “make disciples” and then to baptize them. This interpretation forbade the baptism of infants and the use of baptism as a converting sacrament. For Erasmus, baptism was an external rite that signified internal conversion, not a means of salvation (pages 50-51). He supported this interpretation with his paraphrases on the baptismal passages in Acts, especially chapters 2, 8, 10, and 19. In his view, these passages depicted the apostles’ obedience to the Great Commission through teaching the essential beliefs of the Christian faith, converting their hearers, and then baptizing the converts. Thus, like in the Great Commission, these baptismal passages emphasized the making of disciples first, and baptism second. Taking this interpretation as his point of departure, Friesen documents the numerous Anabaptist citations of Erasmus’s interpretation in the sixteenth century, demonstrating that it was a major theme in Anabaptist thought, especially prominent in Menno’s 1539 *Fundamentboek* and the works of several Swiss and South German Anabaptists.

Along the way, Friesen defends both Erasmus and the Anabaptists against claims that they were “undogmatic” thinkers. While some historians judge Erasmus as one who disregarded the theological intricacies of the Reformation in favor of the “simple Christianity of the Sermon on the Mount,” interpreters tend to label Anabaptists as radicals who diffused Christian dogma into ethics and discipleship (pages 43-44). Friesen’s study questions these views. In their adoption of Erasmus’s interpretation of the Great Commission, Anabaptists asserted the importance of Christian dogma, for they baptized believers only after they had accepted the essential teachings of the church. Here Friesen points out that the Anabaptists did not oppose the theological arguments of the Reformers. Instead, these radicals only criticized the magisterial Reformers for not bringing their institutional churches into conformity with their theology (page 100). Like Erasmus, many Anabaptists accepted basic

Christian doctrines, and they did so through their interpretations of the Great Commission. In highlighting this theological emphasis, Friesen presents a balanced assessment of Anabaptist thought. While most Anabaptists did focus on practical rather than speculative questions, those who followed Erasmus's interpretation of the Great Commission also affirmed the theological convictions that provided the framework for the life of discipleship.

Friesen's argument is cogent, well written, and engaging on several levels. For those attracted to the history of biblical interpretation, Friesen presents a good case study in his examination of some contrasting perspectives on the Great Commission. Interpreters of Erasmus will find in this book a revisionist picture that dispels the "liberal" assessment of the great humanist and highlights the biblical foundations of his theology. However, the book is most valuable for its reassessment of Anabaptist origins. By explicitly demonstrating the influence of Erasmus on the Radical Reformation, Friesen clarifies the Anabaptists' place in their intellectual milieu.

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HENRY MELCHIOR MUHLENBERG: THE ROOTS OF 250 YEARS OF ORGANIZED LUTHERANISM IN NORTH AMERICA. Essays in Memory of Helmut T. Lehman. Edited by John W. Kleiner. Studies in Religion and Society Volume 41. Lewiston, Queenston, and Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1998. xii + 164 pages. 79.95

This welcome addition to American Lutheran literature stems from a 1992 conference that recognized the 250th anniversary of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg's arrival in North America from Germany (by way of England). When coupled with recent issues of the *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* and the *Lutheran Quarterly*, as well as scattered articles in both of these journals, one sees clearly that the interpretation of the life, work, and thought of Muhlenberg is alive and well at the end of the 20th century.

What is it that makes Muhlenberg such an intriguing figure for historians to study? Certainly it is not his theological corpus—he produced only one piece that approaches the category of serious theological literature (a defense of Pietism—the remainder of his

legacy lies in his mission reports to Halle and his correspondence). The answer lies, instead, in the title of the first paper of the book: "Henry Melchior Muhlenberg: Orthodox Pietist." In this piece, A. G. Roeber of Penn State University briefly examines Muhlenberg historiography, as well as Muhlenberg's personal conception of church history. In the end, Roeber concludes, "It seems relatively clear that Muhlenberg remained throughout his life a moderate pietist within the bounds of a confessional Lutheranism" (page 6). The strength of the piece lies in Roeber's willingness to allow Muhlenberg to speak for himself and to permit the seeming contradictions to stand. Put another way, was Muhlenberg a hopeless Pietist, or a Pietist for whom there was hope? Roeber, it seems, affirms the latter.

Other articles do not reach the high standard raised by Roeber. Jeff Johnson's "Muhlenberg's Relationship to African-Americans" is a case in point. Here Johnson displays some significant historiographical lapses, particularly his penchant toward anachronism. He applies the ethical, sociological, and philosophical conclusions of the present to Muhlenberg and then condemns him for not measuring up to them, rating him as "condescending, paternalistic, and racist" (page 25). Johnson specifically faults Muhlenberg for not actively condemning "slavery as an institution, to say nothing of attempting to abolish it" (page 26). Michael Cobbler's response corrects Johnson's misreading of Muhlenberg by unpacking not only the significant comments made by Muhlenberg regarding slavery, but also the context in which they were made and the way that Muhlenberg related to slaves over the course of his ministry. In the end, while allowing Muhlenberg to be a man of his time and certainly not excusing his lack of action, Cobbler also notes the significant ways that Muhlenberg challenged the assumptions of the American colonies in the mid-eighteenth century. In other words, if Muhlenberg's views on slavery are worth studying—and they may not be due to the paucity of sources—then Cobbins' conclusions will have to be addressed, while Johnson's work will lend little to the ongoing discussion.

Faith Rohrbough's piece, "The Political Maturation of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg," strives to periodize Muhlenberg's understanding of and relationship to the American scene. Was Muhlenberg against, neutral, or assimilated to the developing American republic? Rohrbough divides Muhlenberg's time in

America into three parts: 1) the young immigrant; 2) the Patriarch of American Lutheranism; and 3) the retiree forced to flee the revolutionary conflict in Philadelphia. The picture that emerges is that of an increasingly passive Muhlenberg at odds with a developing democratic political scene, to which he finally capitulated. Rohrbough's argument is not completely compelling, as commentator Samuel Zeiser demonstrates. He points out a consistency to Muhlenberg's response to specific pastoral challenges throughout his ministry—he dealt with them in an authoritarian manner!

In the end, the volume is a helpful model of the historiographical enterprise. The other articles—Mark Oldenburg's "The 1748 Liturgy and the 1786 Hymnal," Marianne Wokeck's "The Desert is Vast and the Sheep are Dispersed: Muhlenberg's Views of the Immigrant Church," and Peter Stebbins Craig's "The Relationship Between Swedish and German Churchmen in the Muhlenberg Era"—are all quite solid. As a collection, this volume shows clearly how each historian brings personal assumptions to the task, as well as the manner in which those assumptions color his or her interpretation. How else are we to explain how people dealing with precisely the same historical facts come to such radically different conclusions. The volume tempers the notion of a purely scientific, objective history, which was itself, after all, a product of rationalism.

Finally, an excellent piece on "Archival Resources for Muhlenberg Research" by John Peterson of the Lutheran Archives Center at Philadelphia, along with a truncated (books only) bibliography, round out the book.

Two criticisms, however, remain. First, the book lacks what I believe is a necessary part of any Muhlenberg discussion, namely the nineteenth-century battle over his legacy. Missing is any discussion of the war between S. S. Schmucker, B. Kurtz and the American Lutherans, and the Confessionalists led by Charles Porterfield Krauth, each of which tried to claim Muhlenberg for their own. Second, even with Mellen's discounts for pastors, this volume is still fairly steeply priced. However, if one is interested in the history of American Lutheranism, this volume is quite helpful. Further, the articles in this collection will aid one in deciphering Pietism's sometimes overt and sometimes subtle presence in American Lutheranism. Obviously more might be said regarding this seminal figure in American Lutheran history. Missourians generally retreat

to the too easy dismissal ("Pietist!") or too easy acceptance ("Missions!") to consider fully the remarkable narrative of this intriguing historical figure. The answers are not always easy, but the adventure is worth the effort.

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ONE RIGHT READING? A GUIDE TO IRENAEUS. By Mary Ann Donovan. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1997. X + 197 Pages. Paper. \$18.95.

For the scholar of the early church Irenaeus remains a major source of interest. He incorporates materials into his discussion that are clearly primitive, reflecting the first decades of the second century and perhaps even earlier (Jerusalem based?) traditions. He provides, given the loss of Justin Martyr material, the earliest listing and description of the early heresies, and he provides the first synthetic attempt to place the biblical material of the Old and New Testaments into an interwoven, theological whole. Moreover, Irenaeus provides early evidence of items of interest to scholars: rule of faith, early hermeneutical processes, the idea of tradition and succession of bishops, sacramental ideas, and also a thorough-going presentation of primitive chiliasm.

Irenaeus remains important and has become crucial for the church's reflection on its present context. The fractured collapse of the unity of doctrine, the unity of worship, the unity of creed, the unity of biblical understanding, the unity of practice, even the unity of Christian ethics make the present situation of the church much more like the second century than, say, the sixteenth. That we seek our spiritual unity in the heart, in the soul, in faith, simply reflects the gnostic spiritualizing which runs rampant in modern society and church. Irenaeus' insistence on God the Creator of the material world as the one and only God lies at the basis of everything he says and thinks. Hence, the centrality of Israel's history, its cult, the law, Moses and the prophets; hence the centrality of the incarnation, the miracles of Jesus, the death and fleshly resurrection of Jesus; hence also—and this perhaps the most important in these present days—the centrality of the concrete, fleshly, and sacramental reality of the church, the place of the Spirit until the eschatological consummation.

This book by Mary Ann Donovan, Professor at the Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley, California, provides a welcome introductory guide to the reading of Irenaeus' chief work, the five books of the *Expose and Overthrow of What Is Falsely Called Knowledge*, more commonly called simply *Against the Heresies*.

"The intent of this book is to serve as a companion to the reader of *Adversus haereses*. It is not a commentary but a reader's guide. As such it offers an introduction to the intricacies of the "Irenaeian style, explains the content of his thought with attention to his major contributions, and points out areas that have been the focus of scholarly interest. The aim is to present clearly and concisely what Irenaeus says, following the order of his argument" (page 4).

Those who are familiar with the work of Mary Ann Donovan will know that this intent will be exercised with a thorough understanding of Irenaeus, with a diligent scholarship conversant with the secondary literature, with a broad knowledge of the second century, and, I would add, with a clear eye for the center of Irenaeian concerns. In her introduction to *Against the Heresies* 4 (which begins Irenaeus' own attempt to construct a coherent theology), Donovan notes that the value that Irenaeus places on materiality is the primary difference with the Gnostics in the interpretation of the Scriptures (page 97). That is exactly correct and reflects the fact that the doctrinal assertion that the one and only God is the Creator of the material world governs how Irenaeus will read and understand the Scriptures.

Of course, *Against the Heresies* is a presentation of the Scriptures rightly understood against the false understanding of the Scriptures by the Gnostics. Irenaeus is a biblical thinker whose central concern is the hermeneutic enterprise. Donovan knows this and keeps her discussion focused on this central issue: "The Scriptures belong to the Christian community in such a way that any valid interpretation must be consistent with the faith of the community, and authoritative interpretation of the faith for [Irenaeus] includes authoritative interpretation of the Scriptures. In this sense there is but one right reading" (page 61). Hence, the question of the book's title, "One Right Reading?" is answered with a loud "Yes," and to understand this "Yes" is the reason to read Irenaeus. In this task, Donovan's book is helpful and illuminating as an introduction and guide.

Unfortunately, on occasion Donovan uses the specious language of fem-speak. The attempt to avoid masculine language for God at times scars her translations. For example, a couple of times she uses "Godself" to avoid "Himself." So Donovan: "Irenaeus ends AH IV.20.1 with an announcement of the text to be commented on, remarking that God made all things 'from Godself'" (page 116). The Latin text actually reads, "*Ipse a semetipso substantiam creaturam . . .*" *Ipse* is a masculine singular pronoun, and the text actually translates: "He Himself made from Himself the substance of creaturely things" (see also page 84). One might simply shrug this linguistic nonsense off as a minor blight on an otherwise excellent book. And for the most part that is all it is. However, there arises a real interpretive issue when Donovan insists on translating the Latin *homo* with "humankind" (pages 81, 83, 106). In AH III.16.3, Irenaeus writes (Donovan's translation): "that he might be first-born from the dead as he was first-born of all creatures, the Son of God made Son of humankind, that through him we might receive the adoption, humankind bearing and taking hold of and embracing the Son of God." Both instances here of "humankind" render the Latin *homo* in the text. Donovan defends this translation: "the comparison is between God and 'man' in the generic sense, a sense made even clearer by the first person plural form of the verb *percipio* ['receive']" (page 90, note 3). However, Irenaeus does not know of humanity in any generic sense. He knows of humanity "in Adam" and of humanity "in Christ." To translate *homo* by "humankind" makes abstract and non-concrete what Irenaeus conceives concretely and personally. Donovan compromises the particularity of Irenaeus' recapitulation doctrine by this translation, as is evident in the following translation: "In all things, moreover, is humankind molded by God; therefore he also recapitulated humankind in himself" (page 81; see also 83, 106).

Nonetheless, for those starting in Irenaeus and desiring a good guide, this is a welcome addition. Donovan provides a good, but not exhaustive bibliography to assist in further reading.

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UNION AND CONFESSION. By Herman Sasse. Translated by Matthew C. Harrison. *Christ and His Church: Essays by Herman Sasse, Volume 1*, edited by Ronald R. Feuerhahn, Matthew C. Harrison, and Paul T. McCain. St. Louis: Office of the President, The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, 1997. xii + 58 pages.

Dr. A. L. Barry, president of the LCMS, is to be congratulated on providing for the church one of the more important essays by one of the most important confessional Lutherans of our century, Dr. Herman Sasse. In *Union and Confession* we see Sasse at his best as he poses questions to both the church of his time and ours.

Sasse's genius in this piece lies in the way he brings together doctrinal and historical arguments to challenge the contemporary church. Take, for example, the following quote: "It is the deplorable consequence of the obvious ignorance of our pastors in individual churches of Germany regarding nineteenth-century church history, that when the church struggle of 1933 broke out, the great church struggles of the past were not immediately before their eyes" (pages 25-26).

Sasse brings a fresh perspective to the question of Church and Office and puts his finger on the issue for modern Missouri when he writes: "Here it is bluntly said that there is one inclusive German Evangelical Church. It is the sum of individual congregations. These congregations are of various confessional origins and accountability, but they share an essential unity in the faith so that they can, in the present situation, confess as one" (page 29). Some later translators of Walther open up a potential for atomizing of the church—turning it into a voluntary association of like-minded believers, rather than the sacramental community gathered by God's Spirit through Word and Sacrament. For example, J. T. Mueller's description of the church as an aggregate of believers in his translation of Walther's *Kirche und Amt* implies that the church is created by the free choice of individual human beings. The very practical result of the voluntary principle is that it allows, at least in part, for the great disparity in doctrine and practice in the LCMS of the late twentieth century. As Sasse appropriately notes: "What good does it do to maintain the confessional position, what good is it to carry out doctrinal discipline in a Lutheran territorial church (if the pastors are indeed bound to the confession), if other entities which are teaching within the domain of the church concerned, and at times teaching very effectively, are bound to no doctrinal norm? . . . The moment both

Evangelical churches were no longer able to say what separated them, remarkably they also lost the ability to withstand enthusiasm with a clearly confessed word" (pages 40, 41). Sasse anticipates the problem for late 20th-century Lutherans in America as they struggle for unity within their own church bodies. "To this we pose the question, under what circumstances and how long then can orthodox Christians in general remain together in one church with Arians and Pelagians? According to the basic principles of our church we would answer that erring brothers should be borne in love in the hope that they will repent and return to the truth, but that false doctrine must not be tolerated. If false teachers crept their way into the church, they must be opposed. This struggle must also be waged against a church government which protects false teachers and thus makes itself a participant in their evil works" (page 20). Advocates of the Church Growth Movement, still selling their wares with great acceptance in our Synod, push for numbers as defining the church. This is nothing other than another example of a theology of glory. Sasse answers otherwise: "The matter does not depend upon how many or how few confess the doctrines of the Reformation, but rather whether these doctrines are still preached and believed. As long as this happens, the old churches of the Reformation era are still a reality" (page 45). Sasse has the answers for us—now all we need to do is listen to him!

Criticisms of the book deal for the most part with matters of format. First, it is unfortunate that the editors have chosen to use endnotes as opposed to footnotes. This reviewer hopes to see this changed in future volumes. Second, it might have been helpful to expand some of the notes to provide the reader with more context. Editorial notes tend for the most part to be descriptive, not substantive. For example, on page 43 Sasse writes: "Dorner, Nitzsch, and Julius Mueller did this. Their attempts may be read." A note at this point would be very helpful in pointing the reader to the appropriate sources, at least in general. Instead we are treated to the blatantly obvious, as, for example in note 40 when the translator cites AC X. Surely most readers of this volume can decipher the Latin *improband secus docentest* from their English edition of the Book of Concord! Finally, at times the translation is a bit rough, as is the case on page 31, which reads: "Already today no one any longer ascribes to it the epoch-making significance which those who produced it, in particular its real author, Karl Barth, gave it." Surely a little more strenuous editing is in order!

In the end, however, these are mere quibbles in the light of this significant piece of confessional Lutheran material. The editors, and especially Pastor Harrison, are to be commended for bringing this marvelous confession of the historic Lutheran faith to our contemporary situation. Let us hope we see further examples of confessional literature of this sort emanating from our President's Office.

Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

MARTIN LUTHER: LEARNING FOR LIFE. By Marilyn J. Harran. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997.

Today's educational system grapples not only with the Information Age, but also with the dire need of reform. This situation provides the impetus for Marilyn Harran to reconsider Martin Luther and the Reformation era so that parents and educators might glean from them something that they can apply to today. Dr. Harran sets forth three goals: (1) to present an historical account of Martin Luther's own educational experience; (2) to analyze how it affected his views on education, both within the church and in society in general; and (3) to affirm and apply any of "Luther's educational goals and pedagogies" that are relevant for today. The former two goals are accomplished ably, while the presentation of the third lacks depth of study and insight with only short remarks thrown sporadically into the historical review and a short concluding chapter. Dr. Harran's intended audience is "general readers," and the book is eminently readable. And, with the exception of some untranslated Greek, Latin, and German phrases untranslated (in the text or footnotes), she meets her goal.

Dr. Harran's presentation of Luther's educational experience reflects ample use of primary documents and recent Luther scholarship. She begins with the education of Martin Luther, the boy, which, though at times harsh, prepared him well for the rigors of his later life as Doctor and Reformer of the Church. She continues with Luther at the university where he received his training in the Aristotelian scholasticism of the day, especially the nominalism of the Occamist school, against which he would later react strenuously. Nevertheless, Luther's university training in logic and dialectic served him well in his later disputations. At the university also, Luther came into contact with the increasingly significant humanism of the day.

Harran's discussion of Luther's anguished struggle for righteousness and his accompanying theological growth is noteworthy. Besides Luther's discovery of the imputed righteousness of God in the pages of Scripture, Harran posits that it was Luther's "independent attitude toward various authorities, from nominalism to mysticism to humanism," and his desire "to follow his own unique path that was guided above all by Scripture" that set him apart from other theologians before him. Moreover, the significant influence of his friend and colleague, Philip Melancthon helped nurture Luther's love of history and the biblical languages. Thus Luther's educational reforms in the university incorporated emphases on theology (the Bible and classical texts) and the arts (languages, history, and mathematics, among others). And these reforms that met with much success.

Luther, according to Dr. Harran, recognized the importance of educating all youth and vigorously encouraged the same, even to the point that if parents neglected their duty to a child, the state should step in and educate him. In this arena, though, given the dire state of education among the German peasants, Luther's reforms were not as successful as at the university. Dr. Harran is not as critical of Luther's inefficacies as other recent authors, pointing out mitigating circumstances and pointing to signs of improvement.

Overall, this book is easy to read and presents a detailed and scholarly history of Luther and his educational experiences and reforms. The reader is left, though, to apply Luther's principles to the contemporary situation. Given the state of education today, the reader should have no trouble doing that.

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CHURCH HISTORY: AN ESSENTIAL GUIDE. By Justo L. Gonzalez. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996.

Gonzalez points out that one of the main difficulties that beginning students face when entering into the study of church history is the lack of a global vision of the field. This truncated vision, according to Gonzalez, is illustrated by students being unaware of even the general chronology of church history, which results in difficulty distinguishing between what is fundamental and what is secondary. This negatively reduces the study of history into an exercise of

simply memorizing details. Students never form a global vision, fail to develop a broader perspective, and thus cannot interpret the significance of past events as they affect the present.

This book was written in order to serve as a way of supplying beginning students a "bird's eye view" or skeleton, so that they do not have to take their first journey through church history without a guide. As such the book is not meant to be, or to take the place of a traditional textbook. Rather, it is meant to be a map so that students can enjoy the scenery of church history without fear of getting lost.

Gonzalez divides church history into nine chronological periods from Ancient Christianity to the Twentieth Century and the End of Modernity. Each of these chapters introduces the reader to the most significant events, people, and ideas of the period covered. The coverage is not deep, but it is wide so that the book does not end up being overly focused on any one continent. For example, the coverage of the Reformation period includes not only the events going on in Europe, but also the impact the church had on the early exploration of the New World.

Each chapter also features a short bibliography of suggested readings made up of the books most often used in survey courses in colleges, universities, and seminaries in the United States. It is suggested that this book be used in conjunction with at least one of the recommended texts.

As a whole *Church History: An Essential Guide* accomplishes its goal to serve as a map, but it must be remembered that this is all that this book is meant to be. It only serves to introduce the field of church history in skeletal form, there is no analysis offered. Hopefully it will awaken in readers the desire for further study, the desire for analysis, the desire to put flesh on the skeleton.

Grant Knepper
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THE GERMANIZATION OF EARLY MEDIEVAL CHRISTIANITY: A SOCIOHISTORICAL APPROACH TO RELIGIOUS TRANSFORMATION. By James C. Russell. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 258 pages.

This book is actually a revision of the author's 1990 doctoral dissertation in historical theology at Fordham University.

Unfortunately, the main thrust of the book is the subtitle. This book is built on the rather shaky foundations of "metahistory" and sociological patterns. For the uninitiated, "metahistory" is an attempt "to establish and systematically apply a paradigm to major historical developments" (page 3). The metahistorian examines patterns in other societies, develops models, and then fills in the gaps in historical data on the basis of the model. Using this method, Russell hopes to compare the Christianization of the Germanic peoples to that of the pre-Christian Roman society.

Russell suggests a connection between Christianization efforts in Germany and mission work in the modern era. He contends that a "folk or natural religion" society is less open to Christianity than a society acquainted with "universal, prophetic, or revealed religions." Folk religion, according to Russell, centers in and identifies with the popular community, while universal religions focus on the salvation of the individual and doctrinal truths. The Germanic people had many folk religions when the Christian missionaries came. In many cases Christianity was looked upon either as another way of benefiting the folk community or doing harm to it. Russell notes that the church failed to catechize these new communities as thoroughly as in earlier generations, which resulted in a "superficial" or "nominal" Christianization (page 212). Here is a strong warning for the contemporary church and its mission efforts: speed and *eschatological urgency* (page 213) should not take precedence over training up a child in the way he should go.

Russell develops patterns in other societies to explain how the Christianization process took place. However, this fails to take any account of the work of the Holy Spirit. Conversion is viewed as an activity of men upon their fellow men rather than the result of the Spirit of God working through the Word of God. Yet, as one reads this discussion of social cause and effect it is hard not to draw a parallel to activities in the church today. If sociological features are the key to conversion, then those who argue for "user-friendly liturgy and hymnody" and a "more positive Christianity" are correct. Russell observes that Christianity was being reinterpreted "in accordance with the world-view of the Germanic peoples" (page 212). Is not this the same problem being raised by those who chant the mantra of evangelism and missions to justify changes in church practices? Missionaries did not intentionally try to change the teaching of the church, neither do many of the well-intentioned

today, but the long-term effects of medieval missionary efforts require a closer look.

Russell has done the service of identifying the need to learn from history. Failure to look seriously at the intensive missionary labors of the medieval period may have come back to haunt the church. While these insights are appreciated, the book is very superficial in many respects. The author readily admits lack of documentation at times and confesses the need for more historical data about the conversion of the common people.

Karl F. Fabrizio
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WHERE EARTH MEETS HEAVEN: A COMMENTARY ON REVELATION. By John G. Strelan. Adelaide, Australia: Open Book Publishers, 1994. 402 Pages. Paper.

As we approach the start of a new millennium, interest in the Book of Revelation has continued to grow. Lutherans that tune into Christian radio and television are sometimes lured into some of the false teachings that are supposedly being drawn from Revelation, whether it has to do with a 1000 year reign of Christ on the earth after his return or the identification of the person who bears the number 666. There is a need for pastors to guide their members through the complexities of Revelation and to suggest resources for further study. This volume, written by a seasoned Lutheran pastor and professor of the Lutheran Church of Australia, is a fine non-technical and theologically sound verse-by-verse commentary on the English text of Revelation.

Strelan's commentary has several strengths. First, he properly emphasizes that Revelation unveils God's view of reality: "Revelation urges Christians to put on God's glasses, to take another look at reality, to see things as God sees them" (page 11). He notes that this apocalypse is not a revelation that solely consists of eschatology or end time realities, but is a view from God's perspective of all reality: past, present, and future. Revelation is not bound to a linear depiction of time and events. For example, the worship of God and the Lamb depicted in Revelation 4-5 is not a specific event in time; it is an ongoing reality.

The focus on the centrality of worship in Revelation is a second great strength of this commentary. Unlike the many liturgically

bankrupt books on Revelation, Strelan's brief introduction and ongoing exposition of this theme is brilliant. This worship is not only "up there" and future. Strelan properly knits the "earthly" worship of the church as a "participation in the heavenly liturgy" depicted throughout Revelation (page 95). Therefore, rather than seeing worship as an escape from reality and this world, Strelan highlights how worship "defines and reveals reality" (page 16). It is the ongoing worship in Revelation that continually reminds the reader that he must always interpret the chaos of sin in light of the ever present and real victory of the Lamb.

A third strength of Strelan's exegesis is his sensitivity to the prominence of Christ in the various scenes of Revelation. In addition to the Lamb Christology in chapters 4-7, Revelation contains several depictions of Christ where his appearance has some angelic characteristics or he is even specifically labeled an "angel." Although there is little debate about the scenes where the identity of the figure is explicit (for example, 1:12-16; 14:14-16; 19:11-16), there is significant debate about whether other exalted angelomorphic figures are Christ (especially 10:1-11, but also 7:2-3; 18:1-3; 20:1-3). Many Christians get nervous with any talk of Christ as an angel, but not Strelan. He correctly emphasizes that the background for this Christology is found in the Old Testament theophanies where YHWH took the form of an angel. Therefore, the angelomorphic depictions of Christ in Revelation are not asserting that Christ is a created angel, but are reflecting that He is the visible manifestation of YHWH.

There is some room for disagreement, however, with aspects of Strelan's treatment of Christ's angelomorphic appearances in Revelation. First, one should exercise care in the number of angels that are identified as Christ. Although his Christological identification of the angel who seals in Revelation 7:2-3 and the mighty angel in Revelation 18:1-3 are questionable, his identification of Michael in Revelation 12:7-11 as Christ is especially problematic. In spite of the fact that distinguished Lutheran interpreters like Martin Luther and George Stoeckhardt have made the same assertion, there is not strong textual support for this conclusion. The other angelomorphic portraits of Christ in Revelation have some kind of clear indicator of His divinity in the visual depiction; Revelation 12:7 give no visual portrait of Michael. The action of Michael commanding other angels who together throw Satan out of

heaven is seen by some interpreters as indicating Michael's divinity, but it is better understood as God's action carried out by His angelic army commanded by His archangel. It must be noted that Revelation does not depict this action as the source of victory over Satan; the Lamb—not Michael—is praised for the victory over Satan (Revelation 12:10-12). Furthermore, based upon the prominence of Michael as an archangel distinct from YHWH in Jewish apocalyptic literature, most Jewish Christians hearing Revelation 12:7-11 would not have understood Michael to be Christ. The title/name from Daniel that John uses to identify Christ is "one like a son of man," not Michael (1:13; 14:14; one may compare Daniel 7:13).

The prominence of Divine Name theology in Revelation is also not addressed adequately. For example, Strelan mentions that "it borders on blasphemy to think that we might be able even to guess" the hidden name of Christ alluded to in Revelation 19:13 (page 321). This text is a reference to Christ as the theophanic angel who possesses the Divine Name YHWH and is YHWH's visible form or image (one may compare Exodus 23:20-21). Although Christ's hidden name is not naturally known by sinful humans, Christ has revealed to his followers that he possesses the Divine Name (one may compare John 5:43; 17:11, 26). Furthermore, as one who appreciates the sacraments, Strelan should not have passed by several opportunities to emphasize the baptismal significance of the various references to the name or seal that the saints bear on their foreheads (for example, 3:12; 7:2; 14:1; 22:4).

Pastors and scholars who may be frustrated by the lack of detailed discussion and footnotes concerning where to search elsewhere should remember this book is written for laity. It is an excellent reference volume for a church library. The clarity of its witness to Jesus Christ will serve his Bride well as she now participates in the heavenly liturgy while awaiting the final marriage celebration.

Charles A. Gieschen

TESTING THE BOUNDARIES: WINDOWS TO LUTHERAN IDENTITY. By Charles P. Arand. Concordia Scholarship Today Series. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995. 268 pages. Paper.

The subject of this book is the status of the Book of Concord among the Lutheran synods in America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The book analyzes the leading theologians of each synod

in terms of their view of the nature and extent of confessional subscription. The chapters are organized by synods and include the General Synod, the General Council, the Missouri Synod, the Iowa Synod, the United Lutheran Church in America, and the Lutheran Church in America. Because of its broad scope and objective tone, Arand's book has immense, and perhaps incomparable, value as a *Dogmengeschichte* of American Lutheranism.

Arand has performed yeoman's service to the American Lutheran Churches by boiling down their stew of theologians into two camps (pages 14-17). On the one hand are those theologians who saw the Lutheran confessions as being historically conditioned and therefore useful only as "true witnesses to the gospel." This is the official position of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA Constitution, 2.05 & 2.06). On the other hand are those theologians who saw the Lutheran confessions as enduring doctrinal norms, because they are a "true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God." This is the official position of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS Constitution II).

Can these two camps be reconciled? Arand states that "both views of the Confessions could be maintained in a dynamic tension if the Lutheran Confessions are considered in light of their hermeneutical role relative to Scripture" (page 266). Arand believes that he has found a mediating position incorporating both the "historically conditioned" and the "enduring norm" views of the Confessions. Despite his attempt to find middle ground, Arand himself is still firmly in the "enduring norm" camp, as revealed by his conclusion "The Confessions have value as hermeneutics or maps because of their congruence with and correspondence to the reality" (page 266).

Arand assumes that there is an objective and enduring theological reality, which is the thing to which his confessional "maps" point. His dialogue partners, for example, Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, do not share this assumption. In their theological world, "reality" is subjective and fluid, or in their words, "existential." To them confessions can only serve as a "compass" in a changing sea of ice floes. A map and a compass are different tools for different realities.

The great tragedy of American Lutheranism today is that most of its theologians have been bewitched by the relativistic philosophies of historicism and existentialism. What American Lutheranism needs now is a critical analysis of modern historicized theologies. Until the

assumptions of the principle of "historical conditioning" are laid bare, American Lutheranism will continue to be hopelessly divided in spite of Arand's best hopes.

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Harris, Maria; and Moran, Gabriel. *Reshaping Religious Education: Conversations on Contemporary Practice*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1998. 202 Pages. Paper.

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