
Introduction:

A Tribute to Dr. Kurt Hendel

It is fitting that this issue of *Currents in Theology and Mission* serves both as a commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, and a tribute to Dr. Kurt Hendel. Dr. Hendel represents the best impulses of the Reformation while managing to avoid the worst impulses of the Reformation. His teaching and preaching reflect the evangelical nature of the Christian faith and the resulting Christian freedom that is such a hallmark of the theology of the early modern period in Germany. Yet he also manages to avoid the polemical tone that often accompanied the early modern articulation of that evangelical faith.

Dr. Hendel embodies the desire of the Reformers to keep proclamation and pastoral care at the center of their movement. Anyone who has attended one of Dr. Hendel's classes at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC), or Christ Seminary-Seminex understood that they were both students and parishioners. To be a student of Dr. Hendel meant that you could assume that you would be educated and loved.

It is my great honor to present these articles to you in concert with the excellent editorial staff of *Currents*. Indeed, I confess that the significant work done on this issue was by Kadi Billman, Craig Nesson, and Connie Sletto, who work faithfully and tirelessly to fill in the gaps left by amateurs like me. Yet it is my status as an amateur academic and parish pastor that I cherish, and it is Dr. Hendel who made it possible to turn years of continuing education into a Doctor of Philosophy.

Perhaps Dr. Hendel's greatest contribution to the church is his ability to shepherd pastors like me through the wonderful world of the academy. He is a perfect guide. He loves learning and he loves mission. He can make pastors more proficient theologians, and can help theologians become engaging pastors. He has an innate ability to fill both roles simultaneously.

I have personally sat in his office and experienced his ability to guide students like me through a nuanced reading of Luther. And I also sat in his office contemplating the meaning of the loss of my first child through miscarriage. Without remembering a thing he said to me, I remember the assurance he was able to provide that my suffering was shared by a loving God through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He taught me how to make that connection; the connection between what I say about God, and how the things I say are made manifest in my life, and my deaths. When my first child was born he closed the circle on that conversation by sending one the first gifts my son, Christian, received.

So thank you to the editorial staff of *Currents* for giving me the space to thank my Doctorfather for making me a better theologian and hopefully a better preacher, and for teaching me how to make the move from theology to doxology.

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In this issue of *Currents* you will find a treasure trove of contributions that highlight the current state of research on the period of the Reformation, and how that research impacts the world of contemporary theology. Dr. Vitor Westhelle, Dr. Martin Lohrmann, and Dr. Mark Wegener have contributed articles that explore historical, political, and biblical themes related to the work and ministry of twenty-first century Christians. Each of these articles represents the same level of commitment to these fundamental issues that Dr. Hendel himself has contributed as a doctor of the universal church, and as such they continue his own commitment to nuanced approaches to Lutheran heritage that serve the church in every time and every place.

On behalf of every student and every parishioner served by Dr. Hendel from his years as a pastor in Missouri to his years at LSTC serving as a professor, I offer our heartfelt gratitude for the way you modeled your faith for us. The church deserves you, Dr. Hendel, and you deserve your legacy!

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