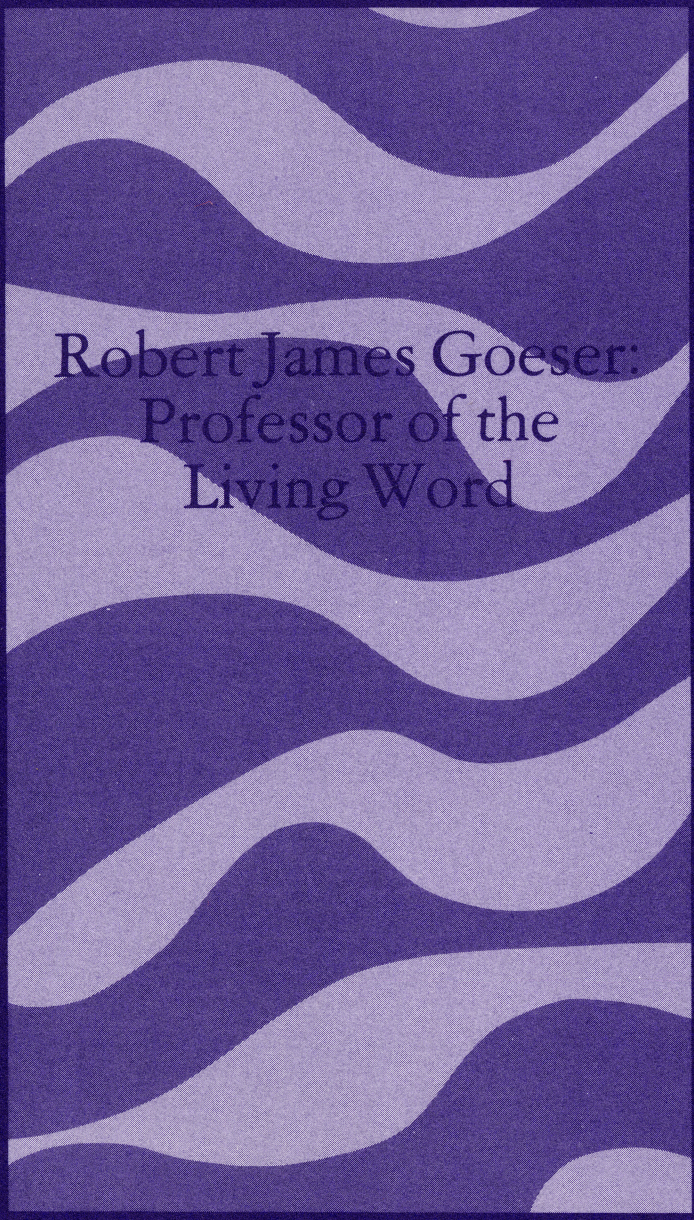
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Robert James Goeser: Professor of the Living Word

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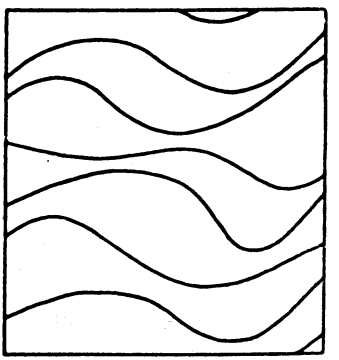
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The Resurrection of Our Lord—Seventh Sunday of Easter

Robert James Goeser: Professor of the Living Word

"Professor" has a double meaning here: 1) a seminary teacher, who has helped train nearly two generations of clergy; 2) a spokesperson or confessor, who has embodied and expressed in his own life and theology the transformative power of that transcendent Word that shatters and rebuilds our lives.

Goeser's teaching career has taken him to the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, Muhlenberg College, Lawrence College in Wisconsin, Wittenberg University, and, since 1961, to Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, California. He received his doctorate from Yale where, under the direction of Roland Bainton, he wrote a dissertation on Luther entitled *Word and Sacrament.*

To honor Professor Goeser, the faculty of PLTS sponsored a conference last May on the theme "Lutheran Confessional Theology Faces the 21st Century." The papers delivered at that conference make up this jubilee issue, published just in time to observe Professor Goeser's retirement this coming spring. Special thanks are due to **Victor Gold** and **Ted Peters** of PLTS who invited and assembled the articles for this issue.

Robert Goeser shows that the language of the word reveals God with such power that one admits the truth about one's self, truth known but otherwise denied. While the law confronts and breaks our presump-

tion and isolation, the gospel brings the new creation and promise. Luther delighted in the sound of music; Zwingli was offended by it. Music has the characteristic of spontaneity, and spontaneity is a characteristic of trust. Luther's rich understanding of creation and incarnation determine his positive assessment of the arts, images, and language. Word is always related to creation. The justified person is free to participate in creation responsibly and without embarrassment. The Word also comes embodied in history; we meet it as we are embodied in history. The all powerful God comes as the little earthworm Christ, powerless at the breast of his mother.

Timothy Lull argues that the Lutheran Reformation had as its intention the renewal of the church around teaching and preaching and sacramental life. Luther's contributions to the *Book of Concord*—the *Catechisms* and the *Smalcald Articles*—provide a context for understanding the *Augsburg Confession*. While the Augustana was written under pressure from the princes, who hoped for compromise, the *Smalcald Articles* declare that the article of faith in Jesus Christ cannot be given up or compromised. Luther notes the excesses of the mass, the supposed superiority of the religious life, and the flaws of the papacy. The *Smalcald Articles* help us to know when to be tough and how to be critical in ecumenical relations. The catechisms help us face the depth of our confusion about the faith and our need to become a teaching church.

Eric W. Gritsch suggests that our government and our church recognize that our life together is constantly threatened by the forces of tyranny and idolatry. In America we seek a proper balance between government and people, and we try to distinguish between penultimate human powers and ultimate divine powers. With the church being threatened today by old heresies in new forms—Pelagianism, Donatism, and Docetism—it is mandated to attain, through worship and education, the Christian formation necessary to live in servanthood and serpenthood. Worship is the inhaling of God's presence, which permits the exhaling of service to God in the world. Lutheranism needs an ethics of justice based on a critical discernment of tyranny and idolatry. It also needs to rededicate itself to Christian unity and to the theological education of clergy and other church leaders. In a response, **John**

Hilary Martin, O. P., sees the Christian churches walking down parallel streets in the same direction and hopes that under the initiative of the Holy Spirit the streets on which we travel are converging.

Jane Strohl contrasts Calvin and Luther on the third use of the law. For Calvin, meditation on the future life is always joined with the call to increased earthly activity on behalf of the creation's restoration. For Luther, life in the world is the means by which one encounters God, but such historical engagement constantly gets in the way of the relationship with God as well. The life of faith is emptying rather than accomplishment; it is regular exercise in loss and failure which is simultaneously apprenticeship in receiving the fullness of God. Lutherans find a perpetual irony: when believers mount their most valiant public efforts for God, they run the greatest risk of substituting their righteousness for the righteousness of Christ. She calls for boldness to join the turmoil of ethical and political conflict and boldness to claim the free and unmerited forgiveness, which is ours in Christ Jesus. In a response, **Jeannine E. Olson** defends the position that Luther did have a third use of the law. She believes it is a false stereotype to portray Lutheranism as too withdrawn or theologically preoccupied to have a positive impact on everyday life.

Ted Peters wants the church to identify with the gospel of the story of Jesus told with its significance, namely, that God is gracious. If we in our church do not commit ourselves to the proclamation of the gospel of God's grace, there is no guarantee that anyone else will. The law and the gospel together constitute a dialectical dynamic, in which forgiveness inspires love, and love directs the church's service to the world. The purpose of preaching the law is to create or sustain human community and to free us from the delusion that we embody the righteousness that belongs solely to God. Rather than hide behind a shield of self justification, we open ourselves to God's forgiveness and the free gift of a justice undeserved.

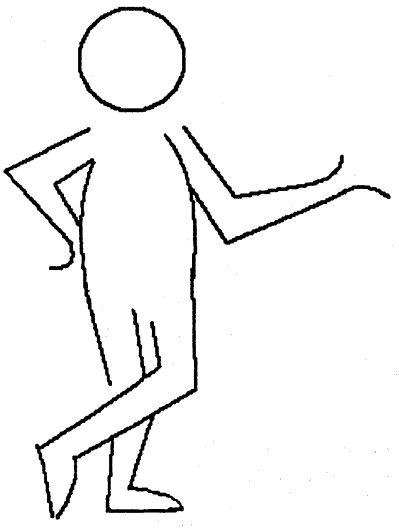
This issue also contains an open letter to Robert Bellah by **Scott J. Dunfee**, and a description of an educational Bible board game by its designer **Don Reiter**.

Co-editors Gold and Peters conclude: "If our church is to grow and flower amidst the winds of cultural pluralism and the impending storms of massive social and political conflict, its rootedness in the life-giving source of grace and power is indispensable."

Ordinary professors occupy chairs; they sit. But theological professors actually stand. Goeser's colleagues note his stance: "Few among us can speak more eloquently or more forcefully on the importance of Martin Luther's understanding of the gospel than Robert Goeser. His lectures embody the dynamic movement from text to Word, from Word to revelation, and revelation to new creation."

God knows our down sitting and our uprising. God knows us into standing. Would that all God's children were professors of the living Word!

Ralph W. Klein
Would-be Professor



Luther: Word of God, Language, and Art

Robert Goeser
Professor of Church History
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and Graduate Theological Union

In a conversation of seminary teachers, one member of the group voiced lack of knowledge and of interest in the Lutheran Confessions. Since he had already expressed enthusiasm for Luther, he was asked how the Confessions and Luther differed—to account for the dissimilarity in his responses. His answer was a single word: "language."

It is Luther's language that I wish to address in this essay: its peculiar expressiveness, concreteness, and drama. My concern is with the way language works for Luther as the reader/hearer encounters it.

During the iconoclasm of the early Reformation, Luther directed a pointed and amusing argument against his opponents. He said that they demanded the destruction of all religious images because they often led people astray. But by this reasoning, since wine and women have been seductive to men, and the sun, moon, and stars have even been worshipped, they too should be destroyed. Beneath this seemingly naive argument is a profound view of creation. Nature is neutral, or in itself good. The physical image by its physicality is not evil. What makes the natural or the created to be evil is wrong human use. Images are not idols. Idols have their locus in the human heart, not in physical representation.[1]

Luther extends the question of images to the nature of language. He explains that when he reads the Gospels and hears the Word he forms inevitably an image in his mind; whenever he hears the passion narrative he sees in his heart an image of Christ on the cross. This imagining follows as naturally as an image of one's face forms in the water on looking into it. This mental image of Christ is no less an image than the sculptured or painted images, and neither of them is evil.[2] Images are built into language; there is no thought without language and no language without images. Specifically, the language of imagery has a special power to touch the affections and the heart, which are described as the center of our humanness.

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[1]*Luther's Works: American Edition* (Philadelphia and St. Louis: Fortress and Concordia, 1955-67), 51:85.

[2]*Luther's Works* 40:99-100.

No literature (or language)—according to Luther—is so filled with images (or so metaphorical or figurative) as the Scriptures. "Indeed in no other writing is figurative language more common." There is something in human nature, in the way we experience language and thought which must account for the peculiar attraction the language of imagery has for us. "I don't know what sort of power images have that they can so forcefully enter and affect one, and make every one long to hear and speak in imagery." Therefore the attempt to strip the figurative language "for the benefit of the uneducated" and give only the "crude and simple sense" is particularly reprehensible. Luther gives an example from Deut 4:19 where the people are told not to worship the stars: "things which God has allotted to all the people under heaven." The Hebrew word translated "allotted" can mean both "allot" and "caress." So Luther goes on to say (picking up on the latter meaning): "Just think, even as a mother fondles her child upon her knees, so the Lord God has given the stars of the heavens to all peoples as if to flatter and caress them, and in order to draw them to himself by his most sweet and tender goodness and to invite them to his love by these gentle benefits." But, he says, if one returns to the other meaning ("allot") the reader is deprived of much loveliness. "You have thrown me [Luther] from paradise to earth, although in the figurative expression, I grasped your meaning with delight."[3]

Clearly for Luther the scriptural language which is especially powerful is that which is imaged, figurative. Images are the kind of language the heart understands. They have an indirect character. They don't dictate or give solutions, summaries, or facts. Like parable, this language teases, disturbs, shocks us into new and surprising insight. The form of the language corresponds to the truth and action being described.

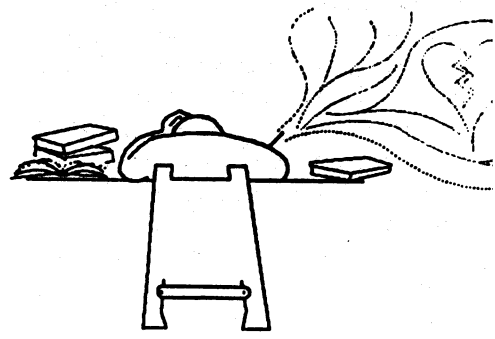
This becomes evident in the way words are used by Luther to bear the Word, for example, in his interpretation of biblical narrative. In his exposition of Genesis 22 he remarks that the author wants the reader to feel at every moment of the journey to Mt. Moriah the tension, the emotional intensity, the conflict. Luther's own language seeks the same. He underscores the incongruity that Abraham, who had 318 servants, must gather the wood and chop it for the sacrifice of his son. He must kill his son in whom "rested all the hope and strength of the aged father." It is just the incredible human poignancy of the moment that Luther underlines. "I am truly surprised that the father did not die from the bitter and persistent grief, for he had to make a journey of three days." How could he hold out for three days? "Nowhere else in Holy Scripture is a walk like this described. There were two. Who were they? The very dear father and the dearly beloved son." It is as if Luther makes the "two" bigger; dear father and dearly beloved son seem now so large that they occupy the whole page. Then Isaac turning to his father "stirs up his natural love, as though he were saying: 'You are my father.' And the father says in turn: 'You are my son.' These words penetrated into and upset the heart of the father." Luther is intent—not upon giving us an emotional bath—but on creating a new event. The event is now our event. We face the three days, the three months, the three years of the events in our lives where trusting God's promise seems contradictory to the evidence around us.[4]

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[3]*Luther's Works* 32:195-205.
[4]*Luther's Works* 4:92-115.

In some respects Luther's interpretation of the book of Jonah is still more powerful. He tries to get language to work in such a way that we go through the totality of the Jonah event. It is as if Luther has worked his hardest to achieve language of the finest cutting edge. So he describes Jonah's plight:

> That is also one of the tender virtues of sin: it renders people mute. It conceals itself; it is ashamed; it would like to remain beautiful like Adam and Eve.... What a battle must have raged in [Jonah's] heart! He, too, might well have sweat blood in his agony.... His soul must have felt suspended by a silk thread over hell and damnation.... This is real faith, it seems to me; yes, a battle and struggle of faith."[5]



Luther wants to put us back in Jonah's plight before he is saved, when he experiences death, shame, the end. And it is an occasion for Luther to remind us that we read the biblical stories as if the actors knew the outcome in advance (since *we* know the ending). Instead we must see where Jonah—where Abraham—is *before* the deliverance. This becomes an event for us, when we do not know the outcome in advance.

What makes Luther's language and exegesis so powerful is that it involves so profound a description of the human situation. He makes of the story of the fall a great and complex parable penetrating the human predicament with remarkable subtlety. The fall marks the loss of a relationship of trust. With the fall, Adam seeks to pull a great cover-up job. He will not own his own involvement. He wants to blame his nakedness, to assert his innocence and blame Eve ("the one whom you gave me"—which Luther says drips with resentment), to blame God for not creating separate gardens for Adam and Eve, and complaining that an omnipotent God could have prevented the fall. With the greatest insight Luther observes that sin not only wants to maintain innocence but "sin wants to be righteousness." So the language of the Word confronts a person with one's pasts, one's evasions, and one's spiritual arrogance. Its task is to reveal with such power that one admits truth about one's self—the truth known but denied.[6]

I turn now to the way law and gospel function linguistically also in non-narrative biblical materials. In his Galatians commentary we find the same insight into the human situation described above. At its root sin is spiritual arrogance. It is the rock wall of righteousness that surrounds the heart—the center of one's existence as a self. This monster of righteousness (as Luther calls it) isolates me from my neighbor; it gives me identity by separating me spiritually from others. By self-chosen works one seeks holiness and separation and superiority. "Therefore the presumption of righteousness is the dregs of all the

[5] *Luther's Works* 19:59.
[6] *Luther's Works* 1:140-190.

evils and the sin of all the sins of the world.... For by [fallen] nature all think that the Law justifies."

The human heart must acknowledge itself radically. For the Word gets me to own my past, but almost more devastating is its work in breaking the wall which protects my false image, my righteousness and goodness, my isolation. The task is nothing less than breaking the old self.

> The proclamation of free grace and the forgiveness of sins does not enter his heart and understanding, because that huge rock and solid wall, namely, the presumption of righteousness by which the heart itself is surrounded, prevents this from happening.[7]

This means that the old self-estimate, the image whereby one lives, must be both revealed and broken. Death must precede life. The word of law does not say we have not done enough, does not demand what we cannot do and so drive to the gospel, it does not give new laws; rather it is a performative word which confronts, reveals, and breaks presumption and isolation. It is the word which breaks the old symbolization to prepare for a resymbolization of existence. The word as gospel brings the new creation, the new beginning, resurrection, and the promise. It achieves a resymbolization, a new creature.

This self is freed from the "monster of righteousness," the desire for private perfection. The Word bears the meaning of the Christ event: the victory over the law, sin, and death. Life is turned outward. One is permitted to allow God, neighbor, creation, history (and even oneself) to be what they are.

Nothing more reveals Luther's sensitivity to language than his concrete expressions of the theology of the cross and the hidden character of revelation. With powerful use of imagery he rings the changes on the scandal of God's revelatory presence. He is marvelously inventive, shocking us with expressions of how revelation contradicts what we expect. This is the character of incarnation: the all powerful God comes as the little earthworm Christ, powerless at the breast of his mother.

Fundamental to Luther's view of language is his understanding that the word or symbol bears what it signifies. Words are able to bear the presence of God. As the Word [Christ] is fully God and bears the presence of God, so words bear the Word. This understanding is there early on in Luther's writings and gets articulated constantly. He doesn't hesitate to use the most graphic and shocking language; for example, he says that with the bodily voice of the preached Gospel, the true Christ—as he sits at the right hand of the Father—is brought into the human heart. The Swiss theologians Zwingli and Oecolampadius realized that what separated them from the Lutherans was summarized in the view of the Word and of language. For them Word does not bear God or Christ, and words are symbols that point to an absent reality. To support this they quote Augustine's Neoplatonic views of language.

Luther's use of language and imagery moves him to the arts.[8] For here the physical image affects the heart and the senses: the verbal icon, the visual icon, and the

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[7] *Luther's Works* 26:310.

[8] For the following section see Oskar Söhngen, "Grundlagen der Kirchenmusik" in *Leiturgia*, Bd. IV (Kassel, Stauda-Verlag, 1961), 1-268; Christoph Wetzel, *Die theologische Bedeutung der Musik im Leben und Denken Martin Luther*, unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Münster, 1954; Charles Garside, *Zwingli and the Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

heard icon of patterned sound (music). Thus Word when languaged does something close to what literature does. Both provide a powerful disclosure of the human situation; the forms of the disclosure have much in common.

Because Luther's theology is constantly concerned with human experience in its createdness or historicality, because he so reveals the depth of the distortions and the sheer goodness of grace and recovery, one turns to literature to illumine what Luther is saying. Literature provides the constant referent to open up his meaning and to get at its cutting edge. He himself wrote to a well known humanist:

> I am persuaded that without knowledge of literature pure theology cannot at all endure.... Certainly it is my desire that there shall be as many poets and rhetoricians as possible, because I see that by these studies, as by no other means, people are wonderfully fitted for the grasping of sacred truth...."[9]

Luther's remark that a page of the dramas of Plautus or Terence is worth more than Erasmus' Colloquies surely involves the form and content of imaginative literature.

The significance of Luther's approach to the voiced and heard icon of music may best be perceived in comparison with Zwingli and Calvin. Zwingli's attitude is well expressed in his interpretation of Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19; he argues that the spiritual songs and songs of the heart mentioned there were not to issue in physical sound. True worship is achieved in private, but if there is public worship, it must be without music. True worshippers call upon God in spirit without the clamor of music. Hence Zwingli banned all music, vocal and instrumental, from the church in Zurich. Yet Zwingli was a competent musician—as performer and composer; music, however, is to be practiced outside the church, not in.

Calvin's case moves between Zwingli and Luther. His views are not controlled by Zwingli's spirit-matter dualism but in part by the difference between the old and new covenants (and the likeness of papal cultus to Jewish cultus). In the childhood of the people of God instrumental music was permitted in order to stimulate hearing and doing the Word of God, but with the fulfillment of revelation in Christ there is no need of instrumental music. Still Calvin respected the power of music to arouse the heart spiritually. Congregational singing is of great value in building up the common life of the community of the people of God. The Word must always rule; care must be taken not to pay more attention to the musical sound than the spiritual meaning of the Word. Congregational singing (but only of psalms and one part choir singing) was permitted in Geneva, but no free hymnody, no polyphony, no altar song, no organs. Within these restrictions some church music flourished. Calvin was so aware of the possible misuse of music that he does not come to a kind of direct, pure joy in music.

Perhaps what is most basic to Luther's approach to music is that it belongs to the wondrous things that come through hearing. As Zwingli was offended by the physical sounding of music in church, Luther delights in it. As the Word is spoken and heard, so music is sounded and heard. The aural-oral character had great meaning for Luther. There is a kind of exchangeability of the gospel and music. Proclamation and

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[9] *Luther's Correspondence*, tr. and ed. by Preserved Smith and Charles Jacobs (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1918), 2:176.

song can both be expressions of the gospel. Music can do what the spoken word sometimes cannot, i.e., move the heart.

Music is significant not only as a form of proclamation but as an expression of trust. Music is an overwhelming welling up of joy; singing has peculiarly the characteristic of spontaneity, and spontaneity is a characteristic of trust. Music is a response to the goodness which surrounds—a response in praise and gratitude.

Music is a kind of natural form of the gospel as in creation itself. It is one of God's great gifts—a gift given with creation, with existence itself. From the beginning of the world, music points to the incomparable munificence of the Creator. It is a gift fundamental to humanness, as if humans cannot not sing. Humans are singing and music-making creatures, just as they are image-making. There is with Luther no sense of a fall with music nor of its possible misuse.

Luther made congregational singing flourish and rejected the clerical dominance and sacrificial associations of Roman church music; he encouraged altar chant, hymns, polyphonic choral music, and instruments (including organs).

The visual icon was also important to Luther. We think of his great concern for the spoken and heard word (and heard music), but actually verbs of seeing occur much more than verbs of hearing in his writing. He thought pictorially. With great frequency he speaks of biblical writers (especially the Old Testament writers) as *painting* with their writing. (One is reminded of van Gogh urging fellow artists to read such writers as Dickens, because they are about the same task as the painter, only with words; they are painting powerful scenes.) He recommended covering the walls of public buildings with paintings of biblical scenes. Among his most intimate friends was the court painter Cranach. He had been exposed in Wittenberg to major paintings—e.g., by Dürer. His religious thought had great influence on Dürer, and the Reformation insights influenced Gruenewald.

Although not elaborated in this discussion, Luther's rich understanding of creation and incarnation determine his positive assessment of the arts, images, and language.

This essay is thus a concrete illustration of the distinctiveness of Luther's thought and the Lutheran tradition. What holds Luther's theology together is a rich and complex understanding of the Word of God. The Word is the second person of the Trinity, brings creation into existence, is active in the history of Israel, incarnate in Christ, and still present through the proclaimed Word. This view involves a profound understanding of sin and grace; nature is good, and the fall constitutes not depravity but being trapped in one's own spirituality, and grace is radical goodness without conditions. Thus Word is promise, source of responsibility, and bringer of death and new creation.

This is no verbalization of religion. Word is always related to creation. So the good is done within creation; it is not a disjunct spiritual realm. The justified person is free to participate in creation responsibly and without embarrassment. Moral responsibility finally comes into its own in relation to the neighbor. Word comes always embodied in history; we meet it as we are embodied in history. God always comes under human, historical created forms.

Luther's Voice within the Confessions

Timothy F. Lull
Academic Dean and Professor of Systematic Theology
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
Berkeley, California

In many ways Luther has been Lutheranism's greatest resource; in other ways he has been its greatest problem. Even today the Lutheran church, and increasingly the church catholic, finds in Luther a *doctor ecclesiae*, a powerful theological authority, an eloquent witness of how to speak of the grace of God and how to keep the gospel central in the church.

But then there is another side: the tensions and even contradictions in his theology, his polemical style, his angry words toward the papacy, the Anabaptists, and the Jews. It isn't just that Luther has been too vital for later Lutheranism; he has also been in need of some editing, so one might know which features of Luther were most typical, most authoritative, most worth remembering.[1]

The "canon" of Luther has varied greatly through the centuries, even these brief centuries of Lutheranism in North America. Part of the fun for each generation is rediscovering Luther, finding in neglected texts (or new readings of old favorites) a fresh, contemporary sense of his enduring witness.

But a part of this canonical question, at least formally, has been answered by the way that Luther appears within the *Book of Concord*, the official collection of teachings of the Lutheran church. Here, to the surprise of some, Luther is the author of only three of the writings. Of the other seven, three come from Melanchthon, three are the ancient creeds, and the final one, the *Formula of Concord* (1577), comes from Andreae and Chemnitz in the generation after Luther's death.[2]

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[1]The best Lutheran treatment of Luther's troubling sides can be found in Eric W. Gritsch, *Martin—God's Court Jester* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), especially Part II. This fine book is unfortunately out of print.

[2]Much valuable theological commentary on these three writings of Luther can be found in Friedrich Mildenberger, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), ch. 6. However Mildenberger specifically refuses to take up the question what distinctive role Luther's writings play within the overall structure of the *Book of Concord*.

To be sure, Luther's influence within the *Book of Concord* is not limited to those three treatises of which he is author, the two catechisms and the *Smalcald Articles*. The inclusion of the creeds mirrors his own continuing commitments to these texts.[3] His influence on the drafting of the *Augsburg Confession* was considerable (despite Melanchthon's actual authorship). He is cited frequently as an authority in the *Apology* and spoken of as the great theologian in the *Formula*: "Dr. Luther, of blessed and holy memory," under whose leadership the teaching of the church was purified and "once more clearly set forth on the basis of the Word of God...."[4]

But the heart of Luther's continuing influence in the confessions comes through his own writings, the once popular but now neglected catechisms and the never much loved *Smalcald Articles*. Yet among Luther's writings these were shrewd choices by the collectors of the *Book of Concord*; they were not the only summaries of Luther's theology that might have served, but they convey very effectively Luther's continuing testament to those who want to hear him.[5]

Luther's voice may not seem all that prominent within the confessions because today's church has not understood just how to appreciate these three writings. Theologians have often loved the organized form of the *Augsburg Confession* or the sustained arguments of the *Apology* better, especially its Article IV. But a hearing of the whole range of confessional voices not only helps one rediscover Luther, but offers a corrective in several important ways.

The form of the catechism reminds those who study and teach them that the Reformation was a crisis in church practice, a cry for reform and renewal within the church. One cannot read Luther's preface to the *Small Catechism* ("Good God, what wretchedness I beheld!") without remembering that the Lutheran Reformation had as its intention the renewal of the church around teaching and preaching and sacramental life.

In these catechisms the same Luther who so often gave way to polemic and distraction concentrates on the basics, in terms that ordinary Christians (and their rather ordinary pastors and teachers) can comprehend. The tone is gently pastoral but hardly bland.

The Lutheran movement has theological priorities to be sure, but these are for the sake of and in the service of reform and renewal in the church. The form of the catechisms (and their prominence in Lutheran history) is a warning against any kind of theology that would scorn such basic teaching or be indifferent to the welfare of the institutional church.

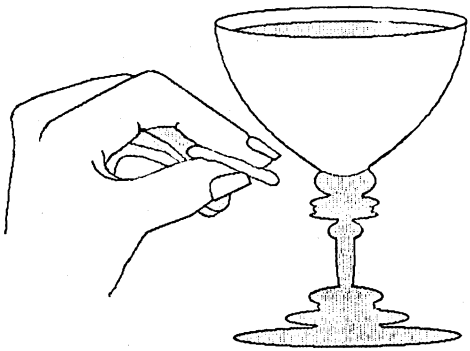
But the catechisms also move those who read them by their non-technical way of presenting the major Reformation

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[3]For a full treatment of Luther's views of these creeds see "The Three Symbols or Creeds of the Christian Faith" (1538) in *Luther's Works* (American Edition) 34:197-230.

[4]*Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration*, in Tappert, ed., *Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 501.

[5]Two other writings of Luther summarize his theology late enough into his own development to be very important statements. The first is that restatement of Luther's personal theology which forms Part III of "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper"—1528 (in Lull, ed., *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989], 50-62, or *Luther's Works* 37:360-72). The second is Luther's discussion of his seven marks of the church which forms Part III of "On the Councils and the Church"—1539 (in Lull, *MLBTW*, 539-76 or *Luther's Works* 41:143-78).



themes.[6] And they make substantive contributions to the shape of the *Book of Concord* as a whole. Here alone, in the confessional writings, does one find Luther's crucial argument (from the First Commandment) that the central human question is not whether there is a god, but which God one will support. Here also in Luther's treatment of the Ten Commandments one has some of the few direct resources for constructing an evangelical ethic to be found anywhere in the *Book of Concord.*

In Luther's interpretation of the creeds we are forced to understand the drama of salvation as good news *for me* and *for us.* Melanchthon was not alone in knowing that one did not know Christ until one knew his benefits; this is the thrust of Luther's whole explanation of the creed. In the Lord's Prayer and in the instructions added later for daily prayer, one finds Luther's witness to the importance of spiritual direction, Luther's own sense of the Christian life lived in both patience and hope.

But the catechisms are especially notable for their inclusion of the sacraments, going beyond the traditional three parts of Commandment, Creed, and Lord's Prayer. Luther was especially harsh toward what he considered wrongheaded sacramental theology (as is clear in the continuing attack on the mass in the *Smalcald Articles* and his writings against the Anabaptists).[7] But Luther's basic sacramental program was positive.

He wanted baptism, confession, and the supper rightly understood by the people and practiced in the church.[8] His catechisms convey his sense of the real presence of Christ not only in the supper, but also in baptism, which "effects forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and grants eternal salvation to all who believe as the Word and promise of God declare."[9]

The Sacrament of the Altar, as Luther likes to call the Eucharist, is "the true body of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, given to us to eat and drink." Yet he chides the Lutherans of his day who had already begun what would turn out to be a

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[6]Bernard Lohse acknowledges that the *Large Catechism* comes as close as anything Luther ever wrote to being his dogmatics and therefore deserves a systematic place of honor among his writings. See Bernard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 134-35. For a very fine treatment of the circumstances surrounding the writing of the catechisms and their theological significance see Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 595ff.

[7]See "Concerning Rebaptism" (1528) in Lull, *MLBTW*, 341-74 or *Luther's Works* 40:229-62.

[8]It is good to remember in a time of sharp anti-Catholic reaction in the church that the question of the number of sacraments is at least formally open for Lutherans. Luther himself never tires of praising confession. See, in addition to the catechisms, his comments commending it (evangelically understood) in "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper"—Part III and "On the Councils and the Church"—Part III.

[9]*Small Catechism* in *Concord*, 348-49.

centuries' long practice of ignoring the supper. "Surely [Christ] wishes that this be done and not that it be omitted or despised," Luther complains in the preface to the *Small Catechism.*[10]

With such powerful resources for understanding and living Christian faith today, it is to be regretted that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America singled out only the *Unaltered Augsburg Confession* among the seven Reformation documents in the *Book of Concord* for special mention.[11] The *Augsburg Confession* has played an unrivaled part in the history of Lutheranism, including its renewal in the 20th century. But it needs to be heard in dialogue with other confessional writings, especially those by Luther himself.

The *Smalcald Articles* provide a kind of balance of power to the *Augsburg Confession* in Lutheran theological sensibility. The circumstances of the writing of these two documents say even more than the temperamental or theological differences between Melanchthon and Luther as their respective authors.

The *Augsburg Confession* was written under pressure from the princes to present the Lutheran version of the faith that had been maintained and the changes that had been undertaken with maximum possibility for acceptance and compromise. The issue of the papacy was completely omitted for this reason.

Luther drafted the *Smalcald Articles* six years later in response to the danger posed by the Council which was summoned by Paul III to meet in Mantua in May of 1537. Here again the princes played a role, but this time asking Luther to distinguish in which areas compromise might be possible and where no concessions could be made.[12]

In this fine, neglected treatise, Luther showed how the "first and chief article" of faith in Jesus Christ "cannot be given up or compromised, even if heaven and earth and things temporal should be destroyed."[13] And this is the heart of Lutheran objection to the three great evils of the church of that day.

The first evil is the mass, which when practiced in the wrong way distracts from faith in Christ. From the falsely understood mass follow such dangers as purgatory, masses for the dead, pilgrimages, fraternities, relics, indulgences, and the invocation of saints—almost the whole catalogue of Reformation era controversies.[14]

The second practice about which there can be no compromise is that of chapters and monasteries, especially the tendency to praise the religious life as "superior to the ordinary Christian life." Luther is surprisingly positive about the benefits that mo-

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[10]*Concord*, 351, 341. Centuries of memorizing Luther's *Small Catechism* did much to underscore this high sacramental sense among Lutherans, even where the supper was offered infrequently.

[11]See *Constitution, Bylaws and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, 2.04–2.06. There all of Luther's three contributions are listed simply among "further valid interpretations of the faith of the Church." The reasons for this seem clearly ecumenical, given the importance of the *Augsburg Confession* in world Lutheranism and in some ecumenical dialogues, especially with Roman Catholics. But this possible overvaluing of the *Augsburg Confession* is part of what creates the current impression that Luther's voice is muted or missing in the church's confessional theology. The burden of this essay is that it need not be so, for those with ears to hear and eyes to read.

[12]A splendid treatment of the circumstances leading to the writing of the *Smalcald Articles* and Luther's circumstances at that time is found in H. G. Haile, *Luther: An Experiment in Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 207ff.

[13]*Smalcald Articles* in *Concord*, 292.

[14]*Smalcald Articles* in *Concord*, 293-97.

nasticism may have had in other times and places (in contrast to some of his other writings on the subject). But the notion of a higher road or way not only threatens the centrality of grace in Christ (to which any members of religious orders also must cling), but also distracts from the simple, everyday Christian freedom to serve God in the ordinary circumstances in which we find ourselves.[15]

The final evil which must be resolutely faced in the church is that of the papacy. Here the unmentionable topic of Augsburg gets full treatment. Luther writes in the language and conceptuality of his day, including his calling of the Pope the Antichrist, but the thrust is not only that no such human office dare compete with Christ, but also a clear call for freedom and mutual respect in the church.

> Consequently the church cannot be better governed and maintained than by having all of us live under one head, Christ, and by having all the bishops equal in office (however they may differ in gifts)....[16]

The *Smalcald Articles* contain other treasures, including Luther's fine celebration of God's imagination in bringing the gospel to us in a five-fold way.[17] It also contains a helpful treatment on the relation between law and gospel. But the chief benefit of the treatise, in Luther's time and in our own, is in its proposals for how to sort primary and secondary matters, and how to understand both the positive Lutheran program and the correctives that were needed in light of the centrality of what God has done in Jesus Christ.

It is a document worth hearing in the Lutheran church today. If the catechisms help us face the depth of our crisis of confusion about the faith and our need to become again a teaching church, the *Smalcald Articles* help us know when to be tough and how to be critical in ecumenical relations. For the truth is that councils are always being summoned, reports are always being readied, and the pressure is always on, from princes or church officials, from ecumenical partners or restless national assembly delegates, to "do something."

Something may need doing, but wise ecumenical agreements are best entered into with eyes wide open. Luther gives in the *Smalcald Articles* a gift to the church to match the catechisms—a legacy of how to think clearly in the midst of stress, how to trust God rather than human authority, how to work for a church centered in the gospel and manifesting genuine Christian freedom in a world of inevitable compromise and change.

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[15]Here the reader does well to study the *Smalcald Articles* in connection with "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper"—Part III (see note 2 above) where Luther develops his critique of monasticism and his praise of vocation in more detail.

[16]*Smalcald Articles* in *Concord*, 298-301. Luther considers the papacy a human institution and loyalty owed to him to be voluntary. Melanchthon takes a more positive, but still quite careful, view of the degree to which Lutherans might come to recognize papal ministry in the church. See his famous dissenting signature to the *Smalcald Articles*, 316-17. This shows not only that Luther's voice is heard in the writings of Melanchthon in the *Book of Concord*, but also that Melanchthon's voice is heard in at least this one writing of Luther's. Often they agreed, but not in this case. Melanchthon apparently did his best to see that the *Smalcald Articles* did not become the Lutheran negotiating position in 1537.

[17]*Smalcald Articles* in *Concord*, 310. The "mutual conversation and consolation" here praised by Luther are regularly lost in Lutheranism and have regularly to be rediscovered, from the pietism of the late 1600s to the lay-centered church renewal movements of our own time.

Back to the Future: Manifest Destiny and Lutheran Identity

Eric W. Gritsch
Maryland Synod Professor of Church History
Director, Institute of Luther Studies
Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg

A Decisive Compatibility

Sidney E. Ahlstrom, the Lutheran dean of American religious history, concluded his massive work in 1972 with the observation that Americans of all stripes find it increasingly difficult to believe that the United States is still a beacon and blessing to the world.[1] In a similar vein, in its assessment of the Lutheran confessional tradition, the Institute for Ecumenical Research of the Lutheran World Federation declared in 1957 that the Lutheran identity in the United States is "strongly marked by an Anglo-Saxon, largely Puritan and fundamentalist style of Protestantism."[2]

The historical trajectory of the demise of what has been called "manifest destiny" and the domestication of radical sixteenth-century Lutheran insights have become fairly self-evident, even though the history of Lutheran confessional identity still needs to be written.[3]

Both the American and the Lutheran identity crises confront Lutherans with the question of whether or not to give up their political and confessional roots in favor of something else. At stake is not only the health of traditional "civil religion" but the very fabric of American political life, which is held together by a trinitarian doctrine of constitutional power balanced between the legislative (congress), the executive (presidency), and the judiciary (supreme court)

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[1]Sidney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 1094.

[2]*Lutheran Identity* (Strassbourg: Institute for Ecumenical Research, 1977), 46.

[3]I am presently engaged in the task of writing a global history of Lutheranism, as sequel to Eric W. Gritsch and Robert W. Jenson, *Lutheranism. The Theological Movement and Its Confessional Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976).

branches. Whenever one of these threatens the other two, a return to the trinitarian power balance after free debate must take place in order to guard proper democratic procedures. Loyalty to the Constitution requires dissent and opposition to the tyrannical tendencies on the part of *any* branch, and the right to such dissent is the most essential of all "civil rights." My "inalienable" and "civil" rights are proclaimed, exercised, and secured in the open space that the unity and balance of constitutional powers provides. Refusal to participate in this constant debate intended to maintain the proper balance of power is unpatriotic and leads to tyranny.

There is thus an affinity at this point between the U.S. constitutional doctrine of the separation of power and the Christian doctrine of the separation of human and divine power as affirmed in the Nicene, Athanasian, and Apostolic creeds. Born in bitter conflict in the Greek Mediterranean world over the Christian faith's proper witness, the trinitarian creeds call for worship of God alone as Creator, Savior, and Spirit. Thus they stand in opposition to the perennial human temptation to equate human power with divine power, which in all of the Judeo Christian history has been regarded as the most original of all sins. "When you eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge," the serpent declared to the woman in Gen 3:4-5, "you will not die. You will be like God, knowing good and evil." Being "like God" is true idolatry—the repudiation of one's humanity and state of creatureliness. The Christian gospel insists that death and evil are overcome solely through one's relationship to Jesus the Jew, the resurrected Lord who admits believers into a new world without sin, evil, or death.

Both the Christian doctrine of the separation of human and divine powers, expressed in the trinitarian creeds, and the American doctrine of the separation of government powers, expressed in the Constitution, acknowledge the frailty of humanity and its tendency to deify itself by creating idols to worship. Our government's founders shared a deep insight with our church's founders: our life together is constantly threatened by the forces of tyranny and idolatry. Power tends to corrupt a human being, and the struggle to attain absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely. To be a loyal American Christian one must, therefore, guard against denying Jesus, the only Savior, and against corrupting or abrogating constitutional freedom. In the words of Jesus, "Many will come in my name, saying 'I am the Christ!'" (Mt 24:5), and in the words attributed to Jefferson, "The price of liberty is eternal vigilance." In this sense, it is the combination of Christian and patriotic vigilance that constitutes the best and only true "civil religion."

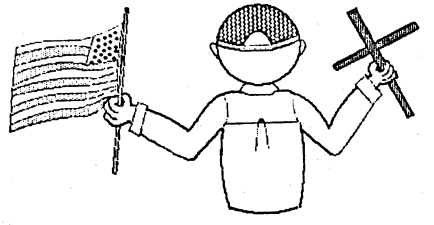
There are indications that this creative and therapeutic tension is being undermined by dangerous political and religious developments occurring since World War II: the increasing complexity of technology is manifested in the international arms race; foreign policy is determined by espionage; moral confusion pervades both foreign and domestic policy; and the electorate is increasingly uninformed, uneducated, and uninterested. The question is whether this nation is still being guided by and nurtured by the two freedoms that have been the lifeblood of America: the constitutional freedom to debate the proper balance between the government and the people, and the Judeo-Christian freedom to distinguish between penultimate human powers and ultimate divine powers.

There are many Christians as well as non-Christians who regard religion as an internal, other-worldly matter, and insist that Christians should not become involved

in political struggles. And there are many Christians who advocate the establishment of a "Christian" nation, by violence if necessary. Both threaten the health of the American body politic, because both make a mockery of the constitutional freedoms and both reject the Judeo-Christian mandate to participate in the world's affairs out of an historically embodied faith.

Lutherans have not been known as effective supporters of a civil religion based on the creative relationship between constitutional freedom and Christian liberty. Some Lutherans have maintained a sometimes fundamentalist loyalty to the Lutheran Confessions; others have tried to become "Protestant" and "American" in ways that go beyond even S. S. Schmucker. Tension has existed between these groups, and that tension persists. However, some Lutherans have reexamined their theological roots and have learned to use the Lutheran Confessions as a hermeneutical guide to Lutheran as well as ecumenical reform and renewal. Indeed, at the beginning of this century, Lutherans were in the forefront of a fast-growing ecumenical movement led by Archbishop Nathaniel Söderblom of Sweden. Söderblom was succeeded by other Lutherans who worked for the renewal of the churches and who were quite aware of the fact that the church does stand and fall with the article of justification by faith alone.

A truly confessional Lutheran theology, focusing on the proper separation of human and divine power so as to avoid tyranny and idolatry, does have a critical appreciation for the compatibility of American political and Christian ecumenical insights. But remembering Luther's sagacity in detecting organized Christian sin—usually known as "heresy"—it could be said that the existing fusion of religion and culture in America has resulted in three distinct



and perduring heresies: Pelagianism, Donatism, and Docetism.

Pelagianism originated as a movement concerned with human responsibility before God and resulted in the notion that one can please God by doing good works. Donatism rests on the conviction that salvation depends on the social and moral attitudes of those who communicate the gospel, which resulted in the notion that sacraments become ineffective or invalid if the celebrant is immoral. Docetism is the christological heresy that limits Christ to being either human or divine, and results in the notion that the Incarnation depends on human reasoning. All three heresies date back to the third and fourth centuries, and all reveal the struggle between ego-power and gospel-power. Once again we are back to the human temptation to violate the First Commandment by desiring to "be like God."

American religious culture tends to be Pelagian, since it elevates individualism to the height of a religious declaration. The Declaration of Independence, for instance, declares that the pursuit of happiness is an inalienable right of the individual. This kind of Pelagian culture also tends to be

Donatist, because it admires spiritual heroes and establishes a social hierarchy—as is evidenced in H. Niebuhr's classic study of the "Social Sources of American Denominationalism." Money, race, and social status shape denominationalism, not theological decisions or doctrines. And finally, American religious culture tends to be Docetic because it often views Jesus as either the great hero who brings a "social gospel"—and thus the kingdom of God—to earth, or the Divine Being who remains in heaven and endows the hearts and minds of fundamentalist and/or charismatic evangelists with supernatural powers.

Return to Baptism

Lutheran confessional theology lives with the proper distinction between law and gospel, between the world of the ego, with its delusions of grandeur and dominion, and the realm of God who, in Christ's incarnation, offers the true reality of life and love. God has penetrated the world of the ego with the good word of Christ's victory over death. This word, the gospel, turns into power when the Holy Spirit joins in its communication through speaking, hearing, and sacramental enactment.

God has assigned to us the ministry of this word of law and gospel during the interim between Christ's first and second coming. Such ministry needs discipline, in the sense of "disciple-ing," that is, following Jesus in the struggle against the powers of this world. Lutheran confessional theology knows that there is no ministry without discipline, without the Christian formation which Luther calls a life of penance, a continual return to baptism.

Baptism is the reminder that God is in charge of the world. It is the beginning of Christian formation, and the baptismal liturgy indicates the basic features of this formation: the renunciation of evil, and the living of a cruciform life marked by struggle and empowered by the Holy Spirit. If the surrounding culture elevates ego-power over gospel power, as usually happens, the return to baptism may have to become a counter-culture movement. Baptism is the return to the future with God.

The chief mandate to Lutherans today is to attain, through worship and education, the Christian formation necessary to enable them to live in servanthood and serpenthood. When Jesus sent out his twelve disciples for the first time, He told them, "Behold, I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves"(Mt 10:16). All of Christ's disciples have to learn what it means to practice servanthood and serpenthood, especially in our culture that propagates the "good life."

Penance (the third Lutheran sacrament, according to Melanchthon)[4] is the return to baptism and is at the center of Christian formation. In penance one confesses one's sin before another baptized person—especially in private confession and/or public confession—and is absolved by that person through the laying on of hands and the clear proclamation of the gospel. In our time, it is important to know that return to baptism, the power to change, comes from the outside by way of another baptized person. It does not come by introspection alone. Baptism's power is renewed the same way it was bestowed in the first place: someone addresses me, lays hands on me, and assures me that God is in charge.

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[4]*Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, 1531. *Book of Concord*, ed. and tr. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 211:4. Hereafter cited *BC*.

This assurance is the basic instrumentation of the gospel; it is embodied servanthood; it is the reminder that there is divine forgiveness, and that one can start again with a clean slate—one can be as "innocent as a dove." Before God we are doves, and we therefore possess the power of his peace, which the world does not know. To exhibit that peace, to spearhead it, to dream about it—that is the center of Christian formation and the goal of evangelism.

Worship and education are the means of Christian formation. Worship, "liturgy," "the work of the people," is the means whereby we learn to distinguish between gospel power and ego-power. In worship, especially public worship, we move away from ourselves into the presence of God. In the Lutheran tradition we do so in word and sacrament, neither being superior to the other. (The proper balance between word and sacrament has often been disturbed when humans succumbed to the temptation to "be like God.")

Worship is the inhaling, as it were, of God's presence, especially his eucharistic presence; it is proper exposure to growth in the ecology of faith, which permits the exhaling of service to God in the world. If inhaling were done properly—without so much of the burden imposed by American religious culture—the exhaling would be more attractive than it frequently is. Many Christians have bad breath because they have a defective worship life.

Worship is intimately linked to education. A true servant knows as much as possible about the Lord who is the head of the church. Catechesis means to "echo" (from the Greek *catecho*) what God has done in Christ. Since God has done much, for a long time, knowledge of the whole Christian tradition is necessary. The wise words apply: "Those who refuse to learn the lessons of history are condemned to repeat them." Our Sunday schools do not do the job they ought to be doing. One reason is that, since both Russia and the U.S.—for different reasons—have made religion a private affair, religion must be taught on Sundays, outside the regular context of education, rather than during the week in a school environment. Education regarding the tradition, the liturgy, and the specific norms of our doctrine and polity is vital for the church's mission.

Worship is the inhaling, as it were, of God's presence... which permits the exhaling of service to God in the world.

Thus education and worship are the twin pillars of the church. They help us to return to our baptism, to discern between gospel power and ego-power, to strive for peace. Servanthood, like love, goes for details. But servanthood also leads to conflict against the forces of evil, sin, and death. One of the chief consequences of ministry is suffering, and may indeed by death. Humans want to avoid suffering and conflict, but these are in the hands of God alone. "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church," said the Christians in the early years, when they were under Roman persecution. In the New Testament, the word for "witness" is "martyr."

There is, however, a necessary move from being innocent as a dove to being wise as a serpent. It is often necessary to accomplish the purpose of love and of evangelism by serpentine means, although there is a fine line between wooing and selling out. Paul was a Jew to the Jews and a Gentile to the Gentiles. Lovers use a lot of imagination, and indeed some cunning, to reach their beloved. There is also a tough love that clings, with discipline, to what is good for the beloved, even when the beloved rejects that good.

The serpent is also the symbol of medicine. Surgery is tough on the body. Trauma stations and emergency rooms are dictatorial for good reason: one does not wait for a vote on the treatment when someone is admitted suffering from a heart attack. On the basis of hard and consistent training, the doctor does what is necessary to save a life.

The core of serpenthood is human reason; it is cold-blooded rationality in the service to others. To be wise as serpents, one must know how to discern and to assess a situation, to "read the signs of the times" as Jesus put it (Mt 16:7).

Theological Homework

On the eve of the second millennium of the Christian era, Lutheran confessional theology needs to engage in specific tasks as well as obeying the enduring mandate to attain the Christian formation begun in baptism and continued in worship and education. I point to three such tasks:

1. The resumption of what the confessional tradition calls "preaching of the law." Lutheran theology and ethics speak of "law" in the sense of divine "orders of preservation" (a revision of "orders of creation").[5] These orders were classified as "family," "government," and "church" in Luther's doctrine of the two realms: the left hand of God, with its order of creation, and the right hand of God, with its promise of salvation through Christ. Both Christians and non-Christians need law and order to prevent the sin of wanting to "be like God" from overwhelming the world and the church.[6] The *Formula of Concord* states the purpose of preaching the law to believers, "so that they will not be thrown back on their own holiness and piety and under the pretext of the Holy Spirit's guidance set up a self-elected service to God without His Word and command."[7]

Christians must be vigilantes fighting against idolatry; and they must unite with others—be they Christians or non-Christians—to act for justice so as to keep a balance of power in the world. Human reason is the instrument used to achieve justice, according to Lutheran tradition; it is to be used to discern the needs of the neighbor rather than to speculate about God. Though a global village when seen from outer space, this world is still a complex patchwork of ideas, habits, idiosyncrasies, customs. There is a strong tendency to "go with the flow," to live as well as possible, and to reflect on life's meaning as little as possible. Many suffer the consequences of technocratic society; so-called super- or industrial powers rob the so-called "third

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[5]This revision of the concept of "orders of creation" was first used by German Lutheran theologians in the nineteenth century. See Carl E. Braaten, "God in Public Life. A Rehabilitation of the Lutheran Idea of the 'Orders of Creation,'" *Lutheran Theological Seminary Bulletin* (Gettysburg) 70, No. 1 (Winter 1990):35, 37.

[6]*Large Catechism*, 1529. *BC* 367:22.

[7]*Formula of Concord. Solid Declaration*, 1577. *BC* 567:20.

Lutheran seminaries must become laboratories of the church, testing programs and ideas for the sake of a faithful ministry.

world" of resources and dignity. The proper exercise of servanthood and serpenthood, therefore, is an ethics of justice based on a critical discernment of tyranny and idolatry.

2. A commitment to Christian unity. Lutheran confessional theology makes a sharp distinction between what is essential and what is non-essential to the true unity of the church. As article seven of the *Augsburg Confession* puts it: "it is enough to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments."[8] Other items, such as polity, rituals, or traditions in general are not essential to the true unity of the church. This is the famous and controversial distinction between ministry of word and sacraments and "*adiaphora*"—things neither commanded nor prohibited by God. "*Adiaphora*" encompass everything necessary for a faithful ministry during the interim between Christ's first and second coming—be it language, constitutions, liturgy, etc. These are the things Christians need to worry about and use their imagination on to discern what is needed to exercise ministry at a specific time and in a specific place.

Something not essential for salvation may, however, become absolutely essential to the exercise of ministry in certain historical circumstances, when the gospel is being suppressed by God's enemies; the Lutheran Confessions call it "a time of confession" (*in statu confessionis*). If, for example, making the sign of the cross is the only thing one can do before dying as a martyr, that sign is the purest form of gospel ministry, even though it may be irrelevant under normal circumstances. When the church is not being persecuted, it is through ecumenical dialogue that the difference is discerned. Lutheran confessional theology must make the strongest possible efforts to stay engaged in such dialogue so that the signs of unity may be discerned and unity may be achieved whenever there is sufficient agreement regarding word and sacrament. This kind of dialogue is as necessary between Lutherans as it is between Lutherans and other Christians.

3. A continuing investment in the theological education of clergy and church leaders in general, with particular attention to curriculum and continuing education of clergy. A learned clergy once was, and ought to be now, a primary objective of Lutherans—not in an esoteric academic sense of an other-worldly elite, but in the sense of sharp, critical discerners of history.

"Reading the signs of the times" is a skill needed at all times, but now more than ever. At one time, shortly after the resurrection of Jesus, Christian leaders were able to teach non-Christians how to discern the world. Lutheran seminaries (derived from the word *seminarium* = seed bed) and divinity schools must once again become centers of theological discernment and argumenta-

[8] *Formula of Concord. Solid Declaration*, 1577. BC 32:2 (Latin text).

tive learning; they must become laboratories of the church, testing programs and ideas for the sake of a faithful ministry. It would indeed be a great advantage if they were to ponder the meaning of the article of justification as a "meta"-stipulation[9] norming Christian thought and action—meta-linguistically, meta-ethically, meta-bureaucratically, indeed meta-theologically—pointing always to the inscrutable majesty of God, who nevertheless became incarnate in the Jesus of Israel. He taught the world that everything is penultimate; the end of life and being remains hidden with God, the source of all being and all loving.

There is a dire need for theological curricula that teach the best skills of critical discernment and, at the same time, inculcate a sense of wonder, create lives normed by doxology and charged with the mandate to exercise eternal vigilance against sin. A successful secular business enterprise invests about twenty percent or more of its budget in research and development. Lutherans should do at least that much.

To conclude

Needless to say, American Lutherans need to recapture their confessional identity. Lutherans have a strong heritage of guarding the gospel against its cultural despisers and enemies; they have been the Doberman Pincers of the dog-eat-dog world of cultural Christendom, always aiming for the throat of the enemy. Unfortunately, they also have a tendency to bite each other when they run out of real enemies. Yet when well trained and loyal to their master, Lutherans are one of the strongest forces in ecumenical Christendom.

American Lutherans have become the sleeping dogs of denominationalism at a time of greatest need for clarity and stamina in the Christ mandated ministry in the interim, which more often than not is a mean and evil time. May God not let *Lutheran* sleeping dogs lie.

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[9]On the "metalinguistic" character of the article on justification, see Gritsch-Jenson, *Lutheranism*, 43.

Response to Eric Gritsch

John Hilary Martin
Professor of Philosophy and Theology
Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology
Graduate Theological Union

Worry about our loss of religious orientation seems to be well nigh universal at the moment. Universal are the complaints that the next generation does not seem to know or to know much about the gospel, let alone be involved in any old fashioned sense of mission. The under twenty-fives are sparsely represented at the worship services, and religious instruction is barred in the schools. Bits and pieces of information communicated in Sunday schools provide, for some, their only religious instruction—and we all know how inadequate those programs have been. Eric Gritsch seems to be saying, if I understand him rightly, that unless something is done soon it will be time to play *Good Night Ladies*—or whatever else it is you do to signal the party is over.

But what should we do? In church communities, lack of identity is felt by parents and pastors who wonder where all their children have gone. Why have they spawned this generation of virtual deists, deists terribly concerned about the poor perhaps, but theological deists nonetheless? Something must be done, like returning to one's roots. In the Roman Catholic church this has resulted in a hurry up call for publication of a *Universal Catechism,* not something short to be memorized by everyone, but a comprehensive reference tool for anyone responsible for Christian education. If you have been following the Catholic or the even the secular press, you know how much the idea of a *universal* catechism has been panned and denigrated. Eric Gritsch's sense of unease about our current loss of religious orientation ironically is, to my mind, another sign of how much the churches of the New Testament share in common. We all seem to go through the same experiences and have the same crises about the same time. I teach church history as well as comparative religion, and over the years my studies have impressed upon me the mutual shifts we have made in pastoral strategies and our parallel responses to challenges to Christian doctrine.

Slogans are, of course, a ready way to call forth identity in emergency. *One God in three persons, blessed Trinity; the just man or woman lives by faith alone; by grace alone; faith without works is dead; Christ came to save all men and women; Christ's salvation is given to the elect.* Or even the more ancient slogans, *I am of Apollos, I am of Paul.* The difficulty with slogans is that if you find a really good one, *everybody* is likely to adopt it. When that happens the

slogan becomes *domesticated* and ceases to do the work of forming identity. The problem with slogans is that when you go below the surface to find out what they mean, the issues involved are not as clear cut or as straightforward as the slogans seem to promise. The carriers of banners emblazoned with slogans find that there is actually a great deal on which they agree. If they are honest, they discover that their own position is not without difficulties and shortcomings. Subjecting a slogan to searching investigation fuzzes the sense of sharp identity. Those engaged in dialogue often discover (in looking for the truth) that a sense of identity is not so necessary after all and that to try to preserve it for its own sake can be another covert form of self-righteousness.

But readers of the New Testament must stand for something at the end of the day. They must stand for what the Lord has told them. To be open-minded with each other does not require that we be empty-headed. We dare not allow our Christian identity either to be watered down by absorbing rationalistic compromises, so we can live comfortably in 20th century America like everybody else around us; nor allow it to become so steamed up that it makes way for nothing but the needs of our own self-interested egos. A *Christian* identity is necessary, but it needs to be worked out in a company of friends—friends who both read and believe in the gospel.

The different Christian denominations sometimes seem to resemble clumps of individuals walking along parallel streets going in the same direction. In saying this I emphatically do *not* intend to imply that we are all journeying to the same place, so that no differences are important. This lame-brained idea undermines the very Christian identity we need. Perhaps a better image is that we are walking on parallel streets, some shaded and overgrown with stately trees, others broad and filled with traffic, some with broken sidewalks and impoverished houses, some on narrow and meandering lanes. The inhabitants of each street have their unique Christian experiences, but they nevertheless are surrounded by the same secular stimuli. I hope that under the initiative of the Holy Spirit the streets on which we travel are *converging*. I see convergence as the goal of the Christian ecumenical movements of our time. This requires first self-consciousness about the worth of our traditions, and so identity, and also a keen consciousness that they may not be the sum of Christian experience.

In the meantime I would agree strongly with Eric Gritsch that we must all maintain a strong commitment to ecumenism. As he says, "Lutheran confessional theology makes a sharp distinction between what is essential and what is non-essential to the true unity of the church.... When the church is not being persecuted it is through ecumenical dialogue that the difference is discerned." We need remember with gratitude that we are not being persecuted now. Still we do not always know, or rather do not always agree, about what those essentials are. I am convinced that we will never find the answers by remaining locked in our own corners, speaking only to each other, polishing an identity peculiarly our own. My purpose here is to encourage us to keep looking into these questions whose answers will alone forge for us a common identity in Christ.

Lutheranism's Call to Action amidst Ambiguity

Jane E. Strohl
Assistant Professor of Church History
Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary

Let me begin by identifying my personal position with regard to the value and truth of Christianity, in particular of the Lutheran confessional understanding of the faith. It is, in my opinion, a theology of extraordinary power and relevance for our generation, possessed of a potential which we in the United States have yet to appreciate and develop adequately.

Indeed, I would like to explore the possibility that a distinctive strength of our tradition lies embedded in what has long been a source of embarrassment for many of us. Accusations of culpable passivity, of Lutheranism's "softness" on Christian discipleship and its neglect of good works have been with us since the 16th century. And no theologically sound defense can hide the fact that the accusations have at times been true; Lutherans *have* sometimes failed to resist evil and at the same time have claimed the Confessions as a warrant for their sin. While there are times when the evil is clear and the honest course of action unmistakable, there are just as many when we are enveloped by ambiguity.

I want to offer an experience of my own as an example of this quality of ambiguity that haunts us at many a turn. I offer it because it is garden variety, typical of the kinds of tensions every Christian faces.

I was a delegate for the ELCA at the Lutheran World Federation Assembly held in January and February 1990, in Curitiba, Brazil. With the ongoing carnage in El Salvador, the covert interventions in Nicaragua, and the invasion of Panama as the recent chief identifiers of my country in the minds of my hosts, I felt ashamed and awkward as a U.S. citizen in Latin America. There is much in those policies that I have no trouble identifying as immoral and stupid, and no amount of closely reasoned political discourse has shaken my clarity of vision on that score. But as discussion on the proposed assembly statement proceeded, I found myself feeling increasingly uneasy.

Let me give you an example from the section entitled "Peace with Justice." When discussing the debt crisis, the original draft stated: "God heard the cries of the children of Israel under the oppression of Pharaoh

and liberated them from slavery. We should identify the Pharaohs of our time and find ways to speak to them. Modern-day Pharaohs include transnational corporations and banks, the governments of many countries, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank." The final text was edited with the kind of qualifications that drive many people crazy, feeling that the church wimps out time and again just when it is on the verge of getting the truth said. The paragraph in question now reads: "Modern-day Pharaohs include some transnational corporations and banks, many forces in the media, the governments of many countries, as well as some aspects of the operation of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank."[1]

Now there were other participants who regarded this modified statement as giving the church greater credibility in the eyes of those it hopes to address and call to account. These delegates criticized the church's readiness to speak judgmentally about a vast array of issues without the requisite expertise and experience. They think of the number of people in the power structures, the limbs of the alleged Pharaohs, who are put off by a church that seems all too ready to moralize at them rather than learn from them. Yet others point out that many of these same folks in power are looking to us to identify the beast that threatens them; they turn to the church for support, not only for the victims of injustice, but for themselves as they struggle in their corridors of power to name evil and combat it. One day at breakfast I met a delegate from Hungary. He expressed profound discontent with the proposed assembly message, and one issue that came up for him was the denunciation of the International Monetary Fund as a Pharaoh. "The Hungarian economy is in such a desperate situation," he said. "The IMF is arranging loans for my country. They will save us. So the IMF is no Pharaoh to me." Can one people's Pharaoh be another people's Moses? And was a vote for the amended statement, with its qualifying additions, an action in the cause of truth, or was it cowardice?

As individuals, as a church, and as a society, we live a lot of our history in such shadowy areas. We Lutherans have just the theology to provide a sustaining vision for enduring such ambiguity. In his recent book *One Nation Under God? Christian Faith and Political Action in America*, the evangelical church historian Mark A. Noll offers an insightful analysis of the difference between the influence of Reformed, specifically Calvinist, and Lutheran piety in the American public sphere. He points out that with the same basic theological components—justification by grace through faith apart from the works of the law, sanctification, the believer as *simul iustus et peccator*, the law-gospel dialectic, the doctrine of vocation—Luther and Calvin proceeded to generate a very different ethos in cultural matters.[2]

The use of the law in the life of the justified believer is a major source of this contrast. Reformation scholars have regularly noted the conflict between Luther's pessimism about the world, and Calvin's confidence that God's plan allowed, even required, real hope for the world's future. It is Calvin's emphasis on sanctification which ultimately yields a different and more sanguine vision of the creation's destiny. Under grace the law may be used to transform the

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[1]*Lutheran World Information*, Release No.: 8/90 (February 19, 1990), 14.

[2]Mark A. Noll, *One Nation Under God? Christian Faith and Political Action in America* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 20-21.

lives of the elect, and from them will proceed influences that transform the world. The law continues to condemn (the second or theological use), but it can also instruct, motivate, and encourage. Thus, it can be heard by believers as not threatening, and that is a measure of how far grace has already succeeded in restoring the creation to its proper condition.

Such a transfiguration of the law is not at the center of Luther's Christian vision. He was, of course, not ignorant of the law's potential to guide the Christian in the way of growing obedience to the divine will. One has only to read the *Small Catechism*'s elaboration of the Ten Commandments to see this. Yet Luther stops short of embracing a third use of the law as Calvin does. His constant fear of legalism did not allow him to give the third use equal time with the second.

As acutely eschatological theologians, Luther and Calvin have much in common. Both believed that the church was passing through the last times, and both felt that fulfillment of the divine will for the creation was imminent. But one expected it to descend upon increasing chaos, while the other foresaw it meeting impaired but improving order. John Tonkin in his study *The Church and the Secular Order in Reformation Thought*[3] characterizes the eschatologies of Luther and Calvin as that of the radical dissolution and collapse of the world (Luther) and the renewal of the whole created order (Calvin). Because Calvin denies any autonomous status to the world but rather includes it in the destiny of the church, he does not finally reject the world the way Luther does. The time of the church is a period of real change as well as one of eager expectation, for, writes Calvin, "we now begin to be formed anew by the Spirit after the image of God, in order that our entire renovation, and that of the whole world, may afterwards follow in due time."[4] For Calvin, meditation on the future life is always joined with the call to increased earthly activity on behalf of the creation's restoration. For Luther, the world remains the world; it does not become the arena for Christian conquest.

Before those among us who are committed to social transformation abandon Luther's theology as useless for this high purpose, let us take a closer look at what he is trying to protect and prevent. In his commentary on Paul's epistle to the Galatians, Luther wrote:

> Run to Christ the physician, who heals those that are broken in heart and saves sinners. Follow not the judgment of reason, which tells you that he is angry with sinners, but kill reason and believe in Christ. If you believe, you are righteous, because you give glory to God, that he is almighty, merciful, and true. You justify and praise God; to be brief, you yield to him this divinity and whatever else belongs to him.[5]

To yield to God God's divinity and all else that belongs to God does not come easily to us. For what God wants from us is total dependence, intimacy with no reservation on our part. We respond with ambiguous feelings. On the one hand, the thought of such a relationship in which we surrender all control over our lives and our destinies to God's almighty action is very appealing. We depend on God's care; we submit to

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[3]John Tonkin, *The Church and the Secular Order in Reformation Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971).

[4]Tonkin, *The Church and the Secular Order*, 116-17.

[5]*Martin Luther, Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1961), 131. Translation emended.

Even if we long to let God shoulder the burden of our fear and failure, we also dread being so vulnerable.

God's judgment; we ground all our hope in God's benevolence. The hard part of justification by grace through faith apart from the works of the law is trusting this hidden and revealed God to come through, trusting the promise of mercy even in the darkest hours of our lives, and resisting the temptation to wrest back some element of control from God's hands. For even if we long to let God shoulder the burden of our fear and failure, we also dread being so vulnerable. We feel safer in a relationship with some degree of reciprocity.

We focus our sights so sharply on action that we may well neglect the vocation we have to suffer. To be marked by the cross of Christ forever is to enter the realm of *passio*, the passion where weakness is made perfect and proves itself strong, where to be defeated is often victory. For Luther it is only through the experience of suffering and deprivation that one can receive true knowledge of the God who justifies the ungodly. Suffering works repeatedly to leave one empty-handed, utterly dependent on a divine action over which one has no control at any point. It drives the sinner out of self-assertion into despair and then ultimately to Christ. Trial and temptation, frustration and loss serve to bring one closer to God, to pry one free from all one's accomplishments and aspirations so that one may be filled with the righteousness of Christ and rest solely in Christ's Word. This prospect is terrifying to us; the pure gospel rings with comfort... but also with threat. And we as proclaimers of the Word need to be honest with ourselves about that. Our declining numbers and increasing marginalization within the life of our society owe much to things we are doing wrong, not the least of which may be our failure to give the moral and social conflicts of our world their due. But the lack of enthusiasm which greets us is prompted by what we do right as well. The gospel of justification in all its mercy and majesty is a hard word for people to hear.

For Luther, that word is never the means to an end, be it the gradual restoration of the creation or the rehabilitation of life in it, even through he did expect godly behavior to emerge as the by-product of the believer's faith. The power of grace enables the believer first and foremost not to transform the world but rather to maintain a strong defense against an earthly realm that, in Luther's view, is becoming progressively more inimical, so that one may remain faithful unto death. Salvation for Luther is to have nothing but God by God's grace alone. Life in the world, historical engagement, is the means by which one encounters God, but it constantly gets in the way of the relationship as well. One's commitment to moral betterment and earthly reform can all too easily fill the places of the heart to which God alone has rightful claim. Thus for Luther, the life of faith is emptying rather than accomplishment; it is regular exercise in loss and failure which is simultaneously apprenticeship in receiving the fullness of God.

Noll, in the aforementioned work, reflects on the program of English Puritan-

ism. Its adherents planned to tame first the sinfulness of the self by God's grace; they would then complete the reform of the Church of England, and finally, by preaching and example, they would make the whole of their society a land of righteousness and peace. These ideas emigrated along with the colonists to America and became the dominant force in shaping religious attitudes toward public life in American culture. Noll insists that while the encroachments of secularism have changed the substance of this Reformed heritage, they have not altered the form of public activity. He writes:

> When Science replaced Scripture, and Progress elbowed God aside, the goals remained the same—all of life must still be reformed. Only the agency was different. It might be Education, opened to all as a means for solving the nation's problems. It might be Science and Know-How, the Form and Demiurge of modernity. Most typically, the new religion has been government, or the state. With Democrats who favor social equality or Republicans who promote legislation for a free market, the crusading mentality remained. Thus, though modern Americans may differ in many particulars from their Puritan and evangelical ancestors, they still are deeply committed to working out their salvation, and the salvation of everyone else, through the restructuring of public life.[6]

Noll remarks upon the general lack of what could be called a sense of "Lutheran irony" in the culture of the United States.

> In religious terms, this irony is the sense that precisely when believers mount their most valiant public efforts *for* God, they run the greatest risk of substituting *their* righteousness for the righteousness of Christ, and thereby subverting justification by faith.... In secular terms, "Lutheran irony" would be quick to perceive where the public crusade leads to unintended consequences.... In situations both religious and secular, a "Lutheran" might be justified in asking if the direct transit from personal moral vision to comprehensive public crusade did not lead to difficulties. If, in fact, there is a difference between God in relation to the individual and God in relation to the world, then a failure to observe the structural and systematic differences between personal moral vision and comprehensive public crusade becomes an important matter.[8]

According to my reading of the sources, Noll has his Luther right. His theology is insistent that Christian virtue can be a temptation as well as a benefit, that the earthly realm has its own integrity and must be shared with those who do not cultivate the same ethical ideals. Indeed, it is a mistake to try to identify Christians by a common moral vision; political commitments and social actions can never serve as our defining means of grace.

Remember Luther's insistence that God acts in the world through masks. History is a veritable hall of mirrors when it comes to pinning God's presence down. Luther violated his own principle in this regard on more than one occasion. He was quick to see in Ulrich Zwingli's death on the field of battle a divine judgment against the Swiss reformer and a vindication of his own condemnation of Zwingli's doctrine of the Lord's Supper and his blending of theological and political commitments. Luther himself did not always do justice to that precious Lutheran sense of irony, that sensitivity to God's hiddenness and to the deceptive quality of appearances, these qualities of human experience in the world under God that Luther's theology of the cross expresses so well.

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[6]Noll, *One Nation Under God?* 25-26.
[7]Noll, *One Nation Under God?* 26-27.

But Luther often faced this reality squarely, and there is, in my opinion, a real genius in the best piece of ethical advice he ever gave: "...sin boldly...." This much misused tag line needs to be heard in its full context:

> If you are a preacher of grace, then preach a true and not a fictitious grace; if grace is true, you must bear a true and not a fictitious sin. God does not save people who are only fictitious sinners. Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly, for he is victorious over sin, death, and the world. As long as we are here (in this world) we have to sin. This life is not the dwelling place of righteousness, but, as Peter says, we look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwell. It is enough that by the riches of God's glory we have come to know the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world. No sin will separate us from the Lamb, even though we commit fornication and murder a thousand times a day. Do you think that the purchase price that was paid for the redemption of our sins by so great a Lamb is too small? Pray boldly—you too are a mighty sinner.[8]

That Luther offered this advice to one of his most cherished colleagues in the evangelical cause, Philipp Melanchthon, is important for us. One very valuable part of our Lutheran legacy is the fact that these two people could share the faith and yet experience the events of their generation differently, that they could express their differences and exhort one another, that they could disagree and still love.

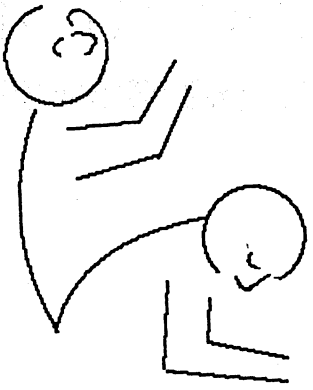
At the Diet of Augsburg, for example, Melanchthon, subjected to the hostility of opponents, agonized over the prospect of violence. Melanchthon dreaded demanding too much, pushing too hard, and thus antagonizing the Emperor and Roman Catholic princes to the point of precipitating bloodshed. How could such extremism serve the interests of either the neighbor or the gospel? Would it not be better to tread softly so that the evangelical preaching might be preserved in the hope of better days to come? Was it not wrong that present and future generations of Germans might pay the price of Lutheran stubbornness (or was it faithfulness?) with civil war? But for Luther the Augsburg Diet was the time to throw caution to the wind, to do the one thing necessary, that is, make a good confession, and leave the consequences in God's hands. To seek to control the results was to try to play God, and, in Luther's opinion, Philipp, for all his anxiety and fearfulness, might well prove guilty of idolatrous temerity. Luther wrote him:

> The end, the outcome of the proceedings torments you because you cannot lay hold of it. And if you could comprehend it, I would not want to be a partner in this cause, much less its author. God has set it in a certain public place, which you do not have in your rhetoric or philosophy: it is called faith, in which place are located all things not seen and not manifest. If someone should try to render them visible and graspable, just as you do, he would take back cares and tears as the reward of his labor, such as you bear while all of us protest in vain. The Lord promised to dwell in darkness and made darkness his refuge.[9]

Did Melanchthon misread history, and Luther alone get it right? Do not both interpretations of the demands of the historical moment have merit? Indeed, what is remarkable to me is Luther's recognition of God's inscrutability, the Lord's refuge in darkness, and the fact that this realization doesn't cripple Brother Martin one bit.

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[8] *Luther's Works* 48:281-82.
[9] WA Br 5, Nr. 1609 [54-63].



The Lutheran sense of irony is anything but justification for inaction. The ambiguity of our place in history and the ambivalence of our experience of ourselves as simultaneously saint and sinner makes effective action possible. They are truths that make us free to negotiate good choices instead of imposing absolute right ones upon ourselves and others. One of my students commented during a class discussion of the doctrine of *simul iustus et peccator* that it made him feel like a dog on a short chain; you could take just so many steps forward in sanctification before you got jerked back by the original sin that haunts us from birth through all our daily returns to baptism to the grave. He heard in this teaching an undermining of hope. How can we trust the wisdom of human judgments and the validity of our seemingly righteous actions when we cannot trust ourselves? The Lutheran response is that a hermeneutic of suspicion in all things is a grace. The Lutheran sense of irony prohibits our generating clarity at any cost both from history and from our own souls. It allows us to be realistic in framing our expectations, knowing that the blight of sin is always with us. It insists that we be wary in pursuing our causes, watchful in our works, merciful and repentant in the face of the failures and unexpected side effects that are sure to come. Yet the proper response to ambiguity for Luther is not despondence but boldness.

> ...we teach and comfort the afflicted sinner after this manner: Brother, it is not possible for you to become so righteous in this life, that you should feel no sin at all, that your body should be clear like the sun, without spot or blemish; but you have as yet wrinkles and spots, and yet you are holy nonetheless. But you will say: How can I be holy when I have and feel sin in me? I answer: In that you do feel and acknowledge your sin, it is a good token; give thanks to God and do not despair. It is one step of health, when the sick person acknowledges and confesses infirmity. But how shall I be delivered from sin? Run to Christ the physician, who heals them that are broken in heart and saves sinners.[10]

Lutheran theology summons the Christian to realism: the promise of the creation will remain fraught with peril and the seeming transparence of history's meaning will often slip into opacity before we have grasped the moment. We will never be better than justified sinners so long as we live, but we do not need to be. Grace is for those who know limitation, so let us be bold... bold to join the turmoil of ethical and political conflict, bold to disagree and yet to honor the bond of charity which God has forged among us, and most of all, bold to claim the forgiveness, free and unmerited, which is ours in Christ Jesus.

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[10]Dillenberger, *Martin Luther, Selections*, 130-31. Translation emended.

Response to Jane Strohl

Jeannine E. Olson
Assistant Professor of History
Rhode Island College

In response to Jane Strohl, I want to concentrate on an issue central to the article that has implications for Lutheranism in both the Reformation era and in the world today: the statement that Luther stopped short of embracing a "third use of the law" in contrast to Calvin. That this is Luther's position is not a matter of consensus, although it was the position of Brian Gerrish, Professor Strohl's teacher, who, in 1962 in *Grace and Reason: A Study in the Theology of Luther*, stated that "The question whether Luther taught a 'third use' of the law (besides the civil and theological uses), is still debated... it is hard to avoid...[the] conclusion that there is no place for a 'third use' in Luther's theology."[1]

But need we necessarily agree with Brian Gerrish on this point? More solidly in the Lutheran tradition was Paul Althaus, professor at the University of Erlangen, who after extensive quotations from Luther, concluded that "Luther saw the commandments not only as a mirror in which he recognizes sin, although they certainly are and remain that even for the Christian, but beyond this as instruction about the 'good works' God wants.... Luther does not use the expression 'the third function of the law [*tertius usus legis*].' Melanchthon did use this expression and it was then adopted in the *Formula of Concord*, in Lutheran orthodoxy, and by nineteenth century theology.[2] In substance, however, it also occurs in Luther."[3]

Likewise, Eugene Klug and Otto Stahlke noted, when discussing the third

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[1](Oxford: Clarendon Press), 113n.

[2]*The Formula of Concord* points out that some have argued against the teaching of the law in the church on the grounds that it is no longer needed once Christians are justified, but this is wrong, because Christians continue as sinners, at the same time that they are justified, and need the law as a rule of life (third use), just as the law is needed to maintain outward discipline in society (first use), and to bring people to the knowledge of sin (second use). For the sections in *The Formula of Concord* that deal specifically with the third use of the law see "Of the Third Use of the Law," and "Of the Third Use of God's Law," 804-805, 962-71 in *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church, German-Latin-English* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1921); "The Third function of the Law," 479-81, 562-68 in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert et al. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959); for biographies of four formulators of the *Formula*, Jakob Andreae, Martin Chemnitz, David Chytraeus, Nikolaus Selnecker, see *Formulators of the Formula of Concord: Four Architects of Lutheran Unity* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977).

[3]*The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 272-73.

use of the law, that when Luther said that the law is of no effect, he was talking of justification, not sanctification. Where Luther speaks of both justification and sanctification, such as in his lectures on Galatians, faith is never alone. The law is a curb and a mirror, but it is also a guide and a rule. "The root meaning of 'antinomianism' is opposition to the Law."[4] Antinomianism always leads to "antigospelism."[5] This battle had been fought early in the antinomistic controversy between Agricola on the one hand and Luther and Melanchthon on the other hand.[6] Between 1537 and 1540 Luther wrote six sets of theses against antinomianism and Agricola.[7] At this time Luther wrote: "The Law must certainly be preached if we would preach Christ."[8] Klug and Stahlke concluded that "those who deny that Luther, or the Lutheran Confessions, taught the Third Use of the Law have no leg to stand on."[9]

The third use of the law detracted in no way from Luther's emphasis on the law as a mirror of sin.[10] As with so many other instances of alleged differences between Luther and Calvin, this is an exaggeration of a nuance. Both reformers stood solidly within the Reformation. Calvin did not think of himself as a Calvinist over against Luther but as an evangelical like Luther, in the French sense of an evangelical as one who announces the gospel or as a mainline Protestant, not in the contemporary American sense. Calvin saw himself as continuing the Reformation on the same path as Luther. Theologically he learned much more from Luther than from Ulrich Zwingli, and he was a friend of Philipp Melanchthon.[11]

What then of accusations of Lutheran passivity or of the failure of Lutherans to resist evil? In the tradition of *simul justus et peccator*, one can rightfully accuse any Christian of a failure to resist evil. We fail to resist evil daily, but collectively the Lutheranism that was accused of having allowed Hitler to take over Germany also produced a Resistance movement, a Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), and a Martin Niemoeller (1892-1984).[12] Lutheranism

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[4]*Getting into The Formula of Concord: A History and Digest of the Formula* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977), 42-43, 48.

[5]*Getting into The Formula*, 48.

[6]*Getting into The Formula*, 42-48.

[7]*Getting into The Formula*, 44.

[8]Martin Luther, *Wider die Antinomer (Against the Antinomians)*, a public letter to Caspar Güttel in Eisleben (published January 1539) quoted in F. Bente, "Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church," 1-266 in *Triglot Concordia*, 166; for further elaboration see section 17, "The Antinomistic Controversy," 161-72.

[9]*Getting into The Formula*, 48.

[10]For an articulate expression of the situation of the Christian before the law see Werner Elert, "The Law and the Wrath of God," 35-43, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, vol. 1, *The Theology and Philosophy of Life of Lutheranism Especially in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia, 1962, originally published as "Gesetz und Zorn Gottes," 31-39 in *Morphologie des Luthertums*, vol. 1, *Theologie und Weltanschauung des Luthertums Haustfächlich im 16, und 17. Jahrhundert* (Munich: C. H. Bed'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1958).

[11]Brian Gerrish, "John Calvin on Luther," in *Interpreters of Luther: Essays in Honor of Wilhelm Pauck*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 69, 87.

[12]Hans Rothfels, *The German Opposition to Hitler: An Appraisal* (Hinsdale, IL: Henry Regnery Co., 1948); for lesser-known Germans involved in resisting Hitler see Annedore Leber, Willy Brandt, Karl Bracher, eds., *Conscience in Revolt: Sixty-four Stories of Resistance in Germany 1933-45*, trans. Rosemary O'Neill (London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1957), originally published as *Das Gewissen Steht Auf* (Berlin: Mosaik-Verlag, 1954).

was the denominational home of Philipp Jacob Spener (1635-1705) and Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771-1872), my own heritage, of the "inner mission" and the deacon and deaconess movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Just this past year, it was the Lutheran churches that led in the overthrow of the Communist regime in East Germany. The Lutheran churches of Leipzig housed the prayer services in which the Monday night demonstrations originated. Lutheran pastors founded the democratic parties, chaired the "Round Tables" that guided the transition to democracy, temporarily ruled cities when mayors resigned, and are now serving as government ministers.[13] Yet it was a Lutheran pastor, Uwe Holmer, and his family that had mercy on the former East German Premier Erich Honecker and his wife, Margot, and housed them in their parsonage in northeast Berlin.[14]

With all this, if one still wants to allow an historical place for Lutheran quietism, one can argue that it was indigenous to Prussia and had its greatest impact on the Germanies with the Prussian hegemony in the nineteenth century. It is only fair to point out that the Hohenzollern family that ruled Prussia with such an iron hand was Reformed not Lutheran, ever since a member of that family made a visit to Heidelberg and returned impressed with the Reformation on the Swiss model there. If the family that ruled Prussia was Reformed, how can one blame Lutheranism for quietism? It is true that the people of Prussia remained largely Lutheran, except for the Huguenot refugees, but the Reformed tradition thrived in parts of the Germanies. The *Heidelberg Catechism* is a part of the *Book of Confessions* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) today.

At the same time, it is wrong to attribute to John Calvin too much optimism about the church in time just as it is wrong to credit Calvin with all elements of what belong to Puritanism. For instance, anxiety about whether one's status was among the elect or among the reprobate was not characteristic of Calvin's thought, but it was of Puritans in seventeenth-century England. Nor did Calvin require an experience of personal conversion for full church membership as did Puritan churches of New England.

The Reformed tradition is even less of a monolith than Lutheranism, and great care must be taken in considering Calvinist what comes out of the Reformed tradition today. Calvin is less central to the Reformed tradition than Luther is to Lutheranism. The Reformed tradition has several founding theologians: Zwingli and Heinrich Bullinger, for instance. In addition, with the state of Christian education today, modern-day Presbyterians and members of Reformed churches may know even less about their heritage than some Lutherans. Finally, twentieth-century Reformed theologians such as Karl Barth have consciously departed from John Calvin on the issue of infant baptism, for instance, or of double predestination. One cannot speak of Calvinism in Reformed churches today in the same way that one can speak of Lutheranism in Lutheran churches.

If one wants to argue that the Reformed churches were historically better organized to meet the world than Lutheran churches, and this is debatable, it may be because of the organizational abilities of men like John

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[13]Uwe Siemon-Netto, "Report: East Germany: Luther vs. Lenin," *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*, no. 4 (June-July 1990):50-52.

[14]"Christianity and the Class Struggle," *The Religion and Society Report* 7 (April 1990):1-2.

Calvin, and not because of their theology, or it may be because members of Reformed churches were for centuries in a minority situation in France, the Low Countries, and England. They had to organize international links in order to survive. But this is a questionable line of reasoning.

Lutheranism was also organized, and Luther and Lutherans were concerned with the world. Luther's interest in the organization of social welfare in Leipzig is one example of social activity, as are the church orders that Johannes Bugenhagen (1485-1558) wrote for Lutheran churches.[15] Luther also wrote to city councils in promotion of education, and favored the foundation of universities.[16] He pioneered curricular changes at his own university in Wittenberg in the direction of a humanist curriculum with emphasis on languages, classics, and rhetoric that he felt better prepared students for biblical study and the ministry than the medieval philosophical and dialectical emphasis. He advocated compulsory education for both boys and girls, and argued that the magistrates could insist that parents send children to school. Luther supported secondary education, and emphasized the importance of teachers and teaching as a vocation, and he was not alone. Strasbourg, with the help of Johannes Sturm, produced one of the first modern secondary schools, with materials adjusted to grade levels and a logical sequence of studies. This institution provided a model copied throughout Protestant Europe and in the countries of the Catholic Reformation as well, particularly by Jesuits. John Calvin taught in Strasbourg's school when he was there (1538-41), and he probably took back ideas to Geneva for the foundation of the Academy there (1558-59).

It is a false stereotype to portray Lutheranism as too withdrawn or theologically preoccupied to have a positive impact on everyday life. At the practical as well as at the theological level, Lutheranism and the Reformed tradition have many similarities, and they learned from each other. We need to be careful on what grounds we contrast Luther and Calvin or Lutheranism and the Reformed family of churches.

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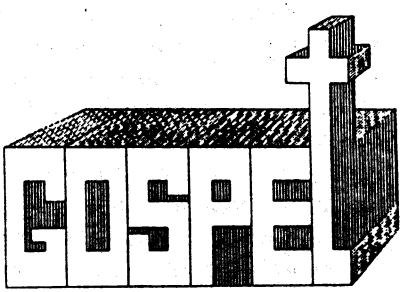
[15]Martin Luther, "Ordinance of a Common Chest, Preface," pp. 169-76; "Fraternal Agreement on the Common Chest of the Entire Assembly at Leisnig," trans. Walther I. Brandt, in *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann, vol 45, *The Christian in Society II*, ed. Brandt (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1962), 178-82; "Ordenung enns gemennen tastens: Radschlag wie die genstlichen gutter zu handeln sind," in *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimar Ausgabe)* (Weimar: Hermann Boehlaus Nachfolger, 1891), 12:11-30; for a summary of early Lutheranism and social welfare see Harold Grimm, "Luther's Contributions to Sixteenth-Century Organization of Poor Relief." *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 61 (1970):222-33; for an overview of social welfare in the sixteenth century see Jeannine Olson, *Calvin and Social Welfare: Deacons and the Bourse Francaise* (Selingsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1989), 20-23, 161-68.

[16]See Martin Luther, "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany that They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools," *Luther's Works*, vol. 45, *The Christian in Society II*, 367-70.

Identifying with the Gospel

Ted Peters
Professor of Systematic Theology
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and
Graduate Theological Union
Berkeley, California

I want to belong to a church that, above all, identifies with the gospel. It is not immediately obvious that our church body or other similar church bodies around us are vigilant in centering their ecclesial lives on the gospel. This is a reminder of an easily lost insight: *we ought not take the gospel for granted.* The gospel is a subtle and fragile thing. It slips unobtrusively into the background when apparently bolder or more brash commitments are substituted. We may then proceed in the name of the gospel, not recognizing that it has been replaced by self-indulgence masquerading as the pursuit of justice or virtue. And attempts to retrieve the lost gospel typically run into the same difficulty.



Once we have awakened to the need for recentering our church, vitriolic attempts to do so risk continuing the masquerade.

So, when I say that I want my church to identify with the gospel, I recognize that it might not be easy. Easy or not, nothing could be more important.

As my contribution to the identifying effort, in this article I would like to offer a brief workable definition of the gospel and suggest that it become our theological insignia. Our church, I believe, should above all be identified with the story of Jesus, including his cross and resurrection; and we should tell this story in such a way that the listeners will hear the message of God's grace coming through. Here I plan to explicate this in terms of the work of God's hands: God's right hand and God's left hand. I do so mindful of William Lazareth's remark that "the Triune God in whom we trust is gloriously ambidextrous."[1]

God's right hand: the gospel

Let me submit the following formal definition: *the gospel is the story of Jesus told with its significance.*[2] Materially, this definition has two components. First, the facts. The identity of our church should be with the story of this historical person from Nazareth, Jesus, a story that includes his life, death, and resurrection plus the still unfinished chapter of his second coming in power and glory. Second, when we tell this story, we need to draw out its significance for the life of the listener and for the history of the creation. We need to so tell the story that the unfailing love of God can be discerned, that the telling itself becomes a means whereby the grace of God communicates the forgiveness of sins and the promise of resurrection to everlasting life in God's coming new creation.

Hence, the gospel is first and foremost a verbal message. It consists of human words through which the Word of God, we trust, will have a saving effect on listeners' lives. There is no more important thing that can be uttered by human lips than the story of Jesus told with its significance.

We sometimes refer to this as the work of God's right hand, the peculiar and particular work of God in the world through Christ's church. If the mission of our church were to be limited to one and only one thing, then this would be it. Nothing is more important than the gospel. It is the prow of the ship that sets direction. It is the central hub around which all else revolves. It is the tap root that gives life to the trunk and branches.

Should our church fail to present the gospel, the loss would be tragic. It would be tragic because we cannot expect any other human institution to take up the responsibility. We cannot count on anybody else to do it!

The secular culture is not going to do it. If we turn to mass media and to our educational system, what we are being taught is self-indulgence. Oh, the language may be

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[1]William H. Lazareth, ed., *The Left Hand of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), xvii.

[2]This definition is intended in part to account for both the broad and narrow definitions of the gospel offered by the *Formula of Concord*. The first or broad use of the gospel refers to the story of Jesus with special emphasis on Jesus' teachings, including the law and the call to repent. The second or strict sense of the gospel pits it against the proclamation of the law and the call to repentance. Here it means "solely the preaching of God's grace." Its purpose is to comfort. Its significance is that it is good news. *The Book of Concord*, ed. by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 559.

highfalutin' and noble. We may hear words such as 'freedom' or 'rights' or 'dignity'. Yet, as we are being taught that we as individuals are important, our importance is understood primarily as consumers.

If we turn to the surrounding religious milieu, what we find is a combination of self-indulgence and spiritual ladder climbing.

Advertisers and retailers treat us with apparent dignity, but such dignity is a smoke screen to cover their plan to snatch our pocket books and family assets. If we fail to penetrate the smoke screen, we inhale this affirmation of our importance and direct our own lives accordingly. We try to make all our experiences serve our own self-esteem, fulfill our own insatiable desire for pleasure. The gruesomeness of a divine figure hanging from a cross becomes incomprehensible, and the call to take up one's cross to follow becomes even more incomprehensible. Those Christian souls over the centuries who tried to respond to the gospel through self- sacrifice and taking vows of poverty or celibacy seem odd, even foolish, from the perspective of a consumer dominated culture.

Non-Christian religions are not going to present the gospel either. If we turn to the surrounding religious milieu, what we find is a combination of self-indulgence and spiritual ladder climbing. In new age spirituality, for example, the self is identified with God. Each one of us is divine. Or, to use revived gnostic vocabulary, our inner most self is a spark of the divine, and our spiritual task is to fan that spark until it burns with the bright flame of divinity. In the neo-pagan variant, the feminine principle is identified with the divine power of mother earth. Our women are then invited to turn to the self and thereby to realize the goddess within. The function of the divine here is to give us self-esteem and control over our lives and destiny. The result is a great sense of empowerment, to be sure; but this is a far cry from the gospel, which begins with forgiveness and empowers by grace.

Although we would not expect the surrounding secular or religious milieu to present the gospel, the problem is exacerbated because we cannot even count on our Christian brothers and sisters to do it. If we turn to the message of Christian spokespersons and church involvements, what we hear at best is the law of God. The story of Jesus is told, to be sure; but its significance for God's grace does not come through. The evangelicals in independent churches and the mass media, for example, promise a high minded personal morality aimed at cleansing our hearts and purifying our minds so as to ready us for the healing presence of God's Spirit. Those who flee the evangelical camp complain that this promise goes unfulfilled. What they actually end up with is a sense of guilt that makes them vulnerable to manipulation.

Legalism is by no means the patent privilege of evangelicals. The law also replaces the gospel for many liberals in both Protestant and Roman Catholic circles who have adopted the world political agenda as their own. They seek to inspire us with the

call to justice and to the liberation of the oppressed everywhere. Yet when we find ourselves hopelessly mired in injustice and in bondage to tyrants, they have no message of spiritual comfort and can but repeat the same cry for economic justice and political liberation.

Even Pope John Paul II offers us little more. During his whirlwind tour of September 1987, he bounced from city to city speaking to millions. He laid down the law of God with all the force of judgment: don't surrender to the culture of self-indulgence! Don't violate human rights! Don't abort unborn children! Don't do this! Don't do that! If he preached the gospel at all, it was only once at Mission Dolores in San Francisco where he used Jesus' parable of the prodigal son as his text. Otherwise, what we heard from the single most important Christian spokesperson in the world was law, law, law.

The bottom line is this: *if we in our own church do not commit ourselves to the proclamation of the gospel of God's grace, there is no guarantee that anyone else will.*

God's left hand: the law

The gospel, to be rightly proclaimed, cannot be proclaimed all by itself. It needs to be accompanied by a presentation of the law of the holy God. If God has two hands, and if the gospel is on the right, then the law is on the left.

The idea that God has a law and commands us to obey it does not sit well today. It seems to fly in the face of the secular seduction into self-indulgence. It also seems to contradict the new age gnosticism which sees our self as itself divine, as so united with God that God's holiness is erased. From the point of view of the modern mind—whether secular or religious—the biblical call to obey God's will seems to risk self-alienation, risks denying one's true self in order to become dependent upon God for our self-worth. But we might note two things here. First, the modern assumption that law in general or God's law in particular is alien to true selfhood is false. The Christian claim is that it is only through harmony with the divine will that true selfhood can be achieved. Second, we might borrow an element from emerging postmodern consciousness that could help make the concept of law meaningful again. That element is the desire to escape the ghetto of autonomy and self-indulgence, to realize that the self belongs intrinsically to other people through love and even to the cosmos through a unity of being. It includes the realization that no person is an island. To be *a part of* the community means life; to be *apart from* the community means death. God calls us to community and to life, and this call comes through God's law—that is, God's law in its first or political use.

The political use of the law plays an important role in Christian preaching. We begin by summing it up as Jesus did—that is, we proclaim that we should love God and love one another. In proclaiming the law of God, then, our church's preachers are not delivering news, not telling listeners about an event. The purpose of preaching law is rather to create or sustain human community. The nature and scope of the community the preacher has in mind on a given day will determine the illustrations used and the direction of application. For example, a certain kind of preaching is appropriate for the *Gemeinschaft*, for smaller communities where individuals know one another face to face and in which intimacy is possible. Community in the form of family life or friendship or professional comradeship or congregational life can be fostered by the pastor through encouraging mutual respect,

sensitivity, affection, an attitude of caring, and, perhaps even the ultimate gesture of love: self-sacrifice.

If, however, the community the preacher has in mind is the much larger *Gesellschaft*, then attention will be turned toward the impersonal but equally important social institutions, corporations, religious organizations, ethnic traditions, nations, and humanity as a whole. Here the law of God is expressed through such concerns as justice, peace, health, and sustainability. This is the public, social, and political dimension of preaching the kingdom of God. We must lift up high ideals, cultivate values that promote civility, evoke a sense of responsibility for one another's welfare, and create a cultural mood wherein deeds of charity are encouraged and socially reinforced. We must be unrelenting in our constant demand for fair and enabling legislation, for justice and humane treatment by the courts, and for executive leadership that draws our resources into the pursuit of peace in our world. And because there is but one God for the whole of reality, we must proclaim that above and beyond all our *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* loyalties there is a single ecumenic and universal humanity which is the object of God's love and, hence, should be the object of our love as well. Such preaching is hearable and understandable—whether it is acknowledged or ignored—because the law of God present within the human soul resonates with its universal truth. It is embedded in creation.

But, we must ask, what happens when we fail to love our neighbor and fail to attain the community envisioned in God's law? At this point the vision of community becomes the measure that reveals our failure. This marks the transition from the first or political use (*usus politicus* or *civilis*) of God's law to the second or theological use (*usus theologicus*), sometimes called the spiritual or pedagogical use (*usus spiritualis*, *usus paedogogicus*). In its second use, God's law functions to accuse, judge, and condemn.

> We live with the delusion that we have digested and now embody the righteousness that belongs solely to God.

To illustrate the transition from the first to the second use of the law, we might recall entertainer and comedian Will Rogers opening a speech before a bankers' convention. He began, "Loan sharks and interest hounds! I have addressed every form of organized graft in the U.S. excepting Congress. So it's naturally a pleasure for me to appear before the biggest!" The bank executives and millionaire stock holders laughed. What they were hearing was Rogers reaffirming what they already knew, namely, that honesty and integrity are necessary for our social community to hold together. They were also hearing a word of judgment, namely, their unsavory practices had been exposed. In the unthreatening context of a comedian's speech, those being judged could laugh.

Laughter is not the norm, however. Sometimes—in fact, most frequently—when the law is applied in its second use it meets resistance. Nobody likes a failure exposed through judgment. So we hide. Yet God's left hand sweeps away the camou-

flage. The law seeks us out in our place of hiding and exposes us to the full light of God's justice. Like Adam and Eve covering themselves with fig leaves, no one likes such exposure. So we try to prevent the truth from becoming known.

Why the resistance? It is due to the subtle way in which sin works. As Prometheus stole fire from the sun so that humans could have it, so also do we seek to steal God's justice and try to possess it for ourselves. Instead of thinking of the law as "thy will," I like to think it is something I myself have legislated and executed "within my heart." It is the move out of community with God and the attempt to establish myself as autonomous, as a law unto myself. What is good about this is that divine justice has an appeal to us. It is a "delight to the eyes," so we wish to imbibe. But the problem is that we do not want to share the delight. We prefer to possess it. Like stealing an apple off our neighbor's tree, we wish to take what is divine, digest it, and make it constitutive of our own being. This can never be successful, of course, because God cannot finally be robbed. If we are to enjoy true justice and true righteousness, we can do so only in community with God. We cannot do it on our own. Yet we live with the delusion that we have digested and now embody the righteousness that belongs solely to God. The task of the second use of the law is to unmask this delusion.

It is sometimes said that the function of the law is to reveal our sin and open us up for the grace of the gospel. This is true, but it is true in a certain way. It does not reveal just any old sin. It exposes our fundamental unwillingness to be dependent upon God. It exposes our reluctance to glorify God and to give God thanks. We all know how on some occasions it may be difficult to admit that we are wrong. But cracking the delusion is even more difficult. In fact, it is possible to be confronted with incontrovertible evidence of our guilt that leads us to confession and contrition, yet we may still live on in the delusion that we ourselves are righteous. This is because hypocritical righteousness is a state of mind, not just an action. It is the assumption that because I know what justice and righteousness is, it follows that I am just and righteous. Even in the case where I confess a particular sin and seek absolution, I may approach the matter with the haughty pride that I know confession and absolution are themselves the paths to righteousness. What we end up with in this case is the curious paradox that when I am in the midst of admitting my sin I am actually affirming my righteousness. The more I dwell on my guilt the better the person I am.[3]

Consequently, the second use of the law cannot be identified simply with bringing someone's fault to his or her attention, nor can it be equated with social criticism. Such fault-finding is a necessary activity, to be sure; but in itself it is not a sufficient condition for the second use of the law to be effective. What else is needed? A dialectical relationship with the gospel is required. Essential to the gospel is forgiveness. It affirms that our true justness comes from God through what he has done in the event of Jesus Christ. It is not the product of what we have done. The justness of the innocent Christ—the righteousness of God himself—is given us independently of what we have done. That which we wish to possess,

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[3]This curious dynamic produces what Hegel identified as the "unhappy consciousness," an entanglement of virtue and vice that poisons piety and from which a conscientious soul cannot extract itself. Only a clean severing of the strands of entanglement by the knife of gracious forgiveness can free us.

justness, becomes present not as our achievement but as a gift. In faith the kingdom of heaven with its fulfillment of justice is present to us. We do not possess it. We cannot take credit for it. But it is present. This is the good news.

The gospel begins of course with the life of Jesus of Nazareth, whom we occasionally describe as 'sinless', which some people interpret to mean that he did not make the same mistakes we do. We more or less assume he was never caught shoplifting, never engaged in gossip or told a fib that hurt someone else's reputation, nor looked at an attractive woman as a sex object. Perhaps this is true. But thinking this way does not catch the heart of what is at stake. It is Jesus' obedience to the first commandment that is at stake. Jesus never forgot his utter dependence on God the Father. He yielded his will completely to the Father's will even when he was tempted to do things on his own (Mt 4:1-11; 26:39). It was Jesus' tenacious loyalty to God which, when turned around on the cross, becomes God's tenacious loyalty to us. In this man the law is fulfilled for all of us. His righteousness becomes our righteousness as a gift. What Jesus did on Good Friday and what God did on Easter become Christmas gifts for us.

Conclusion

For our church to identify with the gospel it must engage in gift-giving. The most important gift it can give is the story of the greatest giver, God, and the event of greatest giving, Jesus. Our task is to tell whomever will listen the story of Jesus with its significance. The significance is that our God is gracious. This is the gospel.

Closely tied to the gospel, of course, is the law. The law too is a gift, and we respond to it by trying in every way possible to give whatever will contribute to building world community. We love. This means we *actually* love, not merely talk piously *about* love.

In the event that we confront a failure to love or a failure to achieve the community for which we strive, then we should permit the dialectic of law and gospel to lead us into a deeper apprehension of God's grace. Rather than hide behind a shield of self-justification, we then open ourselves to God's forgiveness and the free gift of a justice undeserved. It is this dynamic in God's grace that reconciles us with divine holiness and empowers us to love one another again with renewed vigor.

An Open Letter to Robert Bellah

Scott J. Dunfee
Pastor, St. Luke Lutheran Church
Walnut Creek, California

"Have you read the latest issue of *Currents in Theology and Mission*?" a colleague asked me. "No, I haven't," I replied. "Well," my colleague said, "You had better, because you're in it!" Imagine my surprise to find a reference to myself, to the congregation I serve, and to a component of our annual financial stewardship program on page 186 of your article in the June issue of *Currents* (Robert Bellah, "The Role of the Church in a Changing Society," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 17:3 [June 1990], 181-91). There we are held up as a sorry example of having yielded to the pressures "from market forces that become too coercive, that invade our private and group lives and tempt us to a shallow competitive individualism that undermines all our connections to other people" (183).

Needless to say, I must respond! I will begin with confession, "a fundamental Christian insight which the Lutheran tradition has understood better than most," to use your words (182). I must confess that there are ways in which I am "both a victim and a supporter of the system" (from your quote of Timothy Garton Asch quoting Vaclav Havel, 182). Nevertheless, there are ways in which your article misrepresents me, the people of St. Luke's, and our mutual ministry. The newspaper article to which you refer is a short and partial quote conveniently omitting those things that would challenge your purpose. For example, you removed midsentence my statement that "We want people to discover that stewardship is about faith, not money," as well as all the references that were made to Scripture. Your unnamed student's claim that my only comment to his or her remonstrance "was that the program seemed to be popular" (186) is simply false. Indeed, the very newspaper article to which you refer contains public statements by me that are directly contrary to your mystery student's account. I did receive one phone call from a Lutheran pastor in November of 1988, the time the newspaper article appeared, and we had quite a lengthy conversation involving Scripture, theology, and our personal experiences. While we did not come to any agreement on the issues, I found the dialog healthy and helpful. It is toward a similar end that I direct my comments now. If you or others would disagree with the "God's guarantee" program, let the criticism be of the facts and not some "straw man" created for other purposes. Let the arguments be

based upon the sure foundation of Scripture, and let there be open dialog involving the discussion of theology and mission and the sharing of personal experience. Is that not to be part of the "indispensable role" you say the church has "to play in the renewal of community"? (186)

I will begin with Scripture. I cannot allow to go unchallenged your unnamed student's claim, and your apparent agreement, that there is nothing in the Bible "compatible" with a money-back guarantee. Scripture does not use those words—for they are of our modern culture—but there are numerous places in the Bible where the promise is made to the effect that we cannot outgive God. In Malachi 3:10, God speaks through the prophet: "Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house; and thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing." In Luke 6:38, Jesus declares: "Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back." The apostle Paul makes this claim to the Corinthian believers: "You will be enriched in every way for great generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God; for the rendering of this service not only supplies the wants of the saints but also overflows in many thanksgivings to God" (2 Cor 9:11-12).

Clearly, these passages suggest that those who give can expect God to provide. Indeed, they will discover that they cannot outgive God, they will discover an "overflowing blessing," "good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over." They will be "enriched in every way."

At this point I can hear the cries of some readers: "That's works-righteousness! What about grace?" I will respond to that, but at this point let me ask: why is it in the Lutheran Church that in our attempts to avoid the heresy of works-righteousness we sometimes avoid Scripture? This is the Word of God and should be of paramount importance to us! Is it really an endorsement of works? I think clearly it is *not*, as I hope to demonstrate. In our zeal to preserve and protect the word of grace, let us not ignore or dismiss the Word!

Jesus frequently used the images and metaphors of his culture to proclaim the gospel. He was not always over and against the culture but could stand with and in it to meet people in their need, to meet people where they are. That is our desire at St. Luke's in using what we call "God's guarantee." Believing the witness of Scripture, we made the following offer to first-time tithers: tithe for ninety days and, if at the end of that time, you think you made a mistake, had a financial crisis, or did not receive a blessing, St. Luke's will refund your money upon request.

Often I am questioned about the time limit of 90 days. We were simply looking for a time period long enough to experience the rhythm of tithing, but not so long as to frighten or otherwise create a barrier to those struggling with the decision to tithe for the first time in their lives. It is that struggle we wish to address. Many people considering tithing for the first time are afraid it will create a financial burden or crisis; they find it difficult to trust the promises of God when it comes to something as concrete and specific as money. We want to encourage them to step out in faith by clearly expressing our faith in these very promises. The "God's guarantee" program is offered at St. Luke's as a bold witness to the grace of God.

In your article you stress the importance of community and the role of the

church in the renewal of community: "before we can preach to the world we must to some degree exemplify what we believe" (190). I agree, and that is precisely why the "God's guarantee" program is appropriate to St. Luke's ministry. I am not necessarily recommending that other congregations use this method. I only know that because St. Luke's is, as you say, "a community in which individual and group diversity is valued as long as it is accompanied by competent and responsible contribution to the common good," that "God's guarantee" has validity and integrity for us. St. Luke's has an outreach and intervention ministry in the area of family dysfunction and co-dependency that is unique to our geographic area and may well be unparalleled in the Lutheran Church. We are significantly committed to working for the healing of community. St. Luke's giving to benevolence and other social ministry programs, as well as being mission partners with an inner-city congregation, witnesses to our part "in the effort to create an institutional structure that will support community."

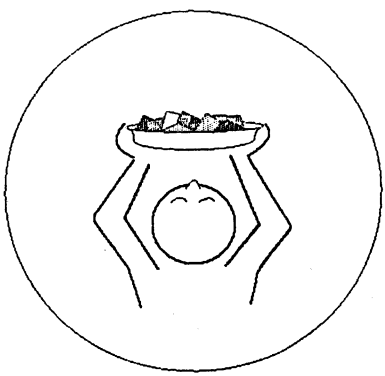
It has been exciting to watch how people have responded to these efforts and this program. "God's guarantee" is only one part of a total stewardship program at St. Luke's—all of which is grounded in grace. God's gracious gifts to us are what makes tithing possible in the first place. We tithe, give 10 per cent, of what God has first given us. All that we have comes from God. This grace of God is unconditional, unlimited, free. God's grace is sufficient for us to tithe. At this point we do stand over and against our culture and make the bold claim that we will not be found lacking because we have chosen to give to God by giving to others. We cannot outgive God. And so begins an endless rhythm of grace in which we receive to give, only to receive again to give, only to receive all the more to give all the more; "from His fulness have we all received, grace upon grace" (Jn 1:16). How sad that the zeal of some in the Lutheran Church to protect and preserve the grace of God has actually led to a limiting and even an undermining of it. Why is it that we cannot speak of all aspects of this grace—including the biblical concepts of blessing, prosperity, and abundance—without being accused of having sold out "to the constraints of power and money"? (182)

> Those who give can expect God to provide. Indeed, they will discover that they cannot outgive God.

The "God's guarantee" program at St. Luke's has been a vehicle for people to discover with joy and delight the grace of God. Some have experienced financial blessing—truly the "windows of heaven" have opened for them—but to suggest that their joy is simply a reflection of self-interest is both insulting and false. Without exception, every person who has reported a financial blessing has been most moved by the meaning this experience has had for them. It pointed to God. It was for them an experience of the reality of God's grace; in many instances a healing, freeing experience contributing to significant growth in faith and the giving of self to God and others in even more ways. For still others, "God's guarantee" has opened them to the fulness of the biblical concept of "blessing." The

promise of a blessing, without defining in any way what form that might take in each person's life, created an atmosphere in which people became focused upon and sensitive to God's grace in all kinds of new and wonderful ways. Their level of awareness of God's working and God's blessing in their own lives, the lives of others, and the world has been greatly increased. People have become aware of God's blessing and grace in measureless moments with family, friends, strangers, pets and wild animals, flowers and trees, ants, and the ocean. They have been renewed in their understanding and appreciation of the sacraments, of hymns and prayers, the noises babies and little children make during the worship service, sermons, sharing the peace, and the written Word. The grace was there all along; they just hadn't seen it, and in the seeing they were blessed. And they found themselves being blessed in situations they'd never imagined: in the midst of personal problems, stopped at a red light, standing by a death bed, sitting by a bus stop.

This journey into grace has begun for many with "God's guarantee." People need to discover that God is trustworthy and true to his Word. This is a critical issue for people raised in dysfunctional families and struggling with co-dependency. Their anxiety regarding financial security is not a sign of American cultural self-interest, so much as it is a symptom of the craziness of their families of origin and an expression of their woundedness. Remember, it was in a community that they were wounded. It was in a community that they were taught there is never enough. The church needs to create a community where it is safe enough to risk trusting, to risk receiving, to risk giving. That is what we are about at St. Luke's.



Journey to Freedom™ Creation to Easter

Don Reiter
Lutheran Church of the Redeemer
Melbourne, Florida

How's your confirmation class going? Do you have any students in class who have had eight or ten years of Sunday school training? Great! They should be able to help you teach the class! After all, they know all the stories: Noah and the flood, Jacob and Esau, Moses in the bulrushes, and Joshua at the battle of Jericho.

But wait! None of these children knows how all of the stories fit together. Worse yet, they don't even know *that* the stories fit together! How can you teach them? Time lines work for some, but they can be tedious and boring. Lectures and books are even worse. Isn't there anything that junior highs can relate to which will help them see the "whole picture" of God's story for us?

Yes, there is. A way to teach people the story of the Bible from creation to Easter. A way for people (adults, too!) to learn the story of the Bible without enrolling in Bethel, Crossways, Through the Bible, or Disciple (Cokesbury). **Journey to Freedom™** is a "board" game in which the players travel through time to the places where the biblical events occurred. Along the way they learn the sequence of the events as well as the names of the major participants. Each event is located as close as possible to the place where it actually happened.

Description

The game consists of a large (33" x 39") vinyl "board" which depicts maps of the Holy Land and Egypt. Players start at a section called THE BEGINNINGS, moving along the "arrow spaces" on the board by throws of the die. Then they read aloud the last space on which they land. This space may be a description of an event (Adam and Eve Created), an instruction (Go Ahead One Space, Lose One Turn), or a "safety space." The journey begins at creation, continues throughout the Old Testament, briefly summarizes the Gospels, and finishes at Easter.

Throughout the game players come to spaces marked "Take a Journey Card." Examples of Journey Cards are:

"You Refuse to Pay Tribute—Lose 2 Turns"
"Get Out of Captivity Free"
"Send All Other Players Back 2 Spaces"
"You Catch a Ride on a Caravan—Go Ahead 4 Spaces"
"Bad Weather Slows You Down—Go Back 2 Spaces"

Some Journey Cards are also "Money Cards." These include shekels, half-shekels, denarii, and drachmas. They can be used to pay penalties ("One of Your Servants Takes Ill—Pay One Shekel") or to purchase free spaces along the journey. All players are provided a certain amount of money at the beginning of the game. More can be accumulated by collecting additional money cards along the way. (An explanation of the background and value of the money is given on the game board.)

There is also another type of Journey Card. An example reads, "Marauders Have Attacked You—Pay Each Player One Shekel OR Have Another Player Read an Oasis Card to You." The Oasis Cards provide opportunities to avoid penalties. Each card says, "Your Penalty is Revoked if You Can...." Then the cards ask the player to provide certain information. Examples are:

"Name the First King of Israel."
"Give Another Name for Jacob"
"Tell Who Sold His Birthright to His Brother"

A correct response removes the Journey Card penalty. All of the facts asked for by the Oasis Cards are given on the game board, but a player may not peek at the board in order to come up with the correct information.

When players arrive at the "Exodus" space, they are faced with several options. Since the exact route of the Exodus is not known, and since numerous suggestions have been offered, four different alternatives are available. The longest route (the "Traditional" Route) is also the safest. The shortest route is the most hazardous, containing the greatest number of penalties. All of the routes end up in the Mt. Nebo area, site of the death of Moses.

Of the more than 115 spaces on the board, 63 contain descriptions of biblical events. Each of these is numbered to correspond with the list of Biblical References printed in the lower right hand corner of the board. For example, if a player lands on the "Golden Calf" space, numbered 40, he can refer to number 40 on the list of references to find out that the story of the Golden Calf is in Ex 32:1-20.

The game board contains nine vivid colors, many of which are symbolic and all of which are designed to help players remember the major characters and sequences of the Bible. Thus Abraham and the significant events in his life appear in yellow, Isaac's color is orange, Jacob's is green, and Joseph's is red. With Moses the color returns to yellow. Even though this color is the same as Abraham's, Moses is separated from Abraham by such a great period of time and distance that players will be able to distinguish the two at a glance. Other colors are also meant to reflect the events to which they are attached. For example, the period of the kings is colored with purple (symbolizing royalty), the exile is black, and the time from after the fall of Israel through the intertestamental period is blue, the color of hope.

The game is packaged in a 3" x 37" mailing tube. The vinyl board rolls up inside the tube, and the game cards and other pieces are also placed inside the tube in a small bag. The label around the outside shows a map of the Middle East from Egypt to the northern end of the Persian Gulf. It includes areas and cities too distant to appear on the game board itself (e.g. Haran, Babylon, and Ur). A caravan journeys across this map towards Jerusalem.

Uses

Journey to Freedom™ was originally designed to be used as a Lutheran confirmation tool. Soon it became obvious, however, that there were many other applica-

tions as well: home use for families, as a wall display for reference, in small groups, Sunday school classes, etc.

A special feature of the game is that it can be used by teams of players. Two, three, four, or even more people can make up a single team. If there are too many players to huddle around the board, it can be mounted on a wall or easel. Different colored camel stickers serve as the playing pieces when the game is used in this fashion. A "moderator" can stand by the board to read the spaces and move the camel stickers for each team.

However the game is used, its effectiveness is limited only by the creativity of the players. Play may be stopped momentarily at any Biblical space to look up and read the corresponding biblical reference. In classroom settings a teacher may assign reports for students to do about certain biblical stories. Events may also be acted out. In addition, new rules may be invented. For example, it may be agreed upon that players will lose a turn if they cannot recount the biblical events mentioned on spaces where they land.

Although all of the major events of the Old and New Testaments are "mapped out" on the game board, not *everything* is included. Space limitations do not permit following Abraham into Egypt or the spies into Canaan from Kadesh-barnea. Of necessity other subjects also are condensed, e.g., the role of the prophets, the return of the remnant, and the life of Christ in the Gospels. These limitations, however, provide opportunities for special projects and can be easily "added" to the "journey." Students and players can be asked to investigate and explore Abraham in Egypt, the saga of the spies, the names and messages of the prophets, the rebuilding of the temple, etc. Here again, creativity is the key and can greatly enhance the "**Journey to Freedom**."

Journey to Freedom™ is available by sending $39.95 plus $3.75 for postage and handling (Florida residents add $2.40 sales tax) to:

Journey to Freedom™
1360 Lake Washington Rd. #8
Melbourne, FL 32935

Book Reviews

THE GREEK MINOR PROPHETS SCROLL FROM NAḤAL ḤEVER (8ḤevXIIgr). By Emanuel Tov. With the Collaboration of R. A. Kraft and A Contribution by P. J. Parsons. DJD 8. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1990. x and 171 pages, with 20 plates. Cloth. $125.00.

This is the scholarly publication of one of the manuscripts discovered in the Judean desert in 1952-1954. It came from Cave 8 of the Naḥal Ḥever and contains portions of half of the books of the Minor Prophets. The text is Greek, not Hebrew, and consists of a revision of the Old Greek (the Septuagint) toward a Hebrew text that was similar to, but not identical with, the standard Masoretic Text. It is dated, by Parsons, to the last part of the first century BCE.

In addition to complete descriptions of the manuscript, this volume contains printouts of the words appearing on the leather and an attempt to fill in the many lacunae. Tov, who is responsible for most of the book, also studies in great detail the translation technique used in this revision and compares the underlying Hebrew text presupposed in the Septuagint and in this revision. Similarities are noted between this manuscript and the text of the Minor Prophets in Symmachus, Aquila, "Theodotion," Quinta, Codex W of the Septuagint, the biblical text quoted by Justin, and the Coptic translations. The volume concludes with indexes (all words in which at least one letter has been preserved) and 20 plates containing photographs of the manuscript. Readers will be amazed at the clarity of the script and the highly fragmentary state of the manuscript.

In an earlier, preliminary publication, Dominique Barthélemy had shown that this recension was related to several portions of the Septuagint published in the standard editions. He called these portions the *kaige* recension, because of the peculiar way in which it translated the Hebrew particle "also." My doctor father, Frank M. Cross, used these data and his own research to reconstruct a revolutionary history of the development of the Septuagint, showing how there were a series of revisions of the Septuagint, each designed to bring the Greek closer to the changing Hebrew text.

Tov avoids such theorizing and narrows his focus to this manuscript. He provides an extraordinary amount of material that will make possible the verification or correction of the Cross hypothesis and the use of this manuscript by scholars around the world for other text critical study. Much of the information published here was made possible by the use of sophisticated computer technology at the University of Pennsylvania (R. A. Kraft). Such careful work takes many years—hence the current controversy over the delay in publishing this and other "Dead Sea Scrolls" often misses the point.

Let the record show that Tov has made a truly spectacular contribution to our knowledge of the biblical text.

Ralph W. Klein
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

TALKING ABOUT GOD IS DANGEROUS. By Tatiana Goricheva. New York: Crossroad, 1989. 103 pages. Cloth. $11.95.

Here is compelling theology. It is the diary of a woman who, over the course of a decade, moved from a life mired in "acquiescent atheism" into full and vibrant Christian faith. She did this as an active intellectual, a university student in Russia before the time of Gorbachev, *perestroika*, and *glasnost*. She lives now in the community of Russian exiles in Paris.

Goricheva's book is full of *bons mots*, little insightful comments at the conclusion of a chapter of her story which are worthy of being made into placards or banners. These brief comments

bring you to the edge of your seat and humble you with their penetrating insight.

She tried to find a way out of the emptiness of official Soviet atheism through study, which led her to existentialism and into yoga practice. But, she says, there was no fulfillment in either the philosophy or the physical practice. She yearned for that which would fill her life with meaning. She found it in Christ.

Led on by gifted priests and startsy, those ancient spiritual directors of the Russian tradition, she emerges through repentance and the word of forgiveness to the fullness of life in Orthodoxy. It is an amazing story of understanding the centrality of the cross and the gift of resurrection for her life.

"I try to tell my Western friends that the church is the most living thing in the world, that it is the mystical body of Christ.... I talk about Christianity in terms of existentialism and psychoanalysis, say that in Christianity we have overcome our infancy and one-sidedness and have become mature people with full worth."

This book is definitely worth the read. JCR

PRAYERS OF THE COSMOS. By Neil Douglas-Klotz. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990. xi and 91 pages. Cloth. $4.95.

Douglas-Klotz has taken the Syrian Aramaic text of the Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes, and several of the sayings of Jesus and rendered them in periphrastic translations which stretch the potential meaning of the Aramaic as far as he can, to break open new meanings in the mind of the reader. Beyond this, he suggests "body exercises," which use the Aramaic text as a source of mantras by which you can internalize this expanded meaning of the sayings.

From a linguistic perspective, the book contains errors. For example, Douglas-Klotz says the roots for "holiness" and "cleanliness" (*qdsh* and *kshr*, respectively) are related; this is simply not true. Furthermore, the whole book rests on the demonstrably shaky scholarship of George Lamsa, who tried to pass off the Syriac version of the New Testament as the original words of Jesus many years ago.

Theologically, what's going on here is the collapse of the eschatological tension which we find in the Beatitudes; the Beatitudes emerge without a context in the social dynamics of Jesus' age (which is shown in the Lukan version perhaps more clearly than in Matthew). Thus Douglas-Klotz offers us beatitudes which have been wholly taken into a mystical framework.

The translation is a fanciful paraphrase which may lead you into cosmic thinking, but the scholarship is questionable—and that makes this reviewer exceedingly uneasy. I accept that the quest for a rootedness to "creation spirituality" in the words of Jesus is a noble enterprise, but this book is one step forward, two steps back, as far as I can see. Unfortunately you have to have a working acquaintance with Aramaic rendered in the Nestorian Syriac alphabet to see this, which means that not many people in the projected audience will catch the errors. Unsuspecting people will buy the book, thumb through it and say, "Wow! Look at this funny writing. This guy must have really done his homework."

The book will be sold in ordinary book stores and new age shops, so when you hear your people quoting it, remember that you were told about it in these pages. JCR

HEALTH, MONEY, AND LOVE & WHY WE DON'T ENJOY THEM. By Robert Farrar Capon. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990. 179 pages. Cloth. $14.95.

Capon is one of the great antidotes to dour theologizing. From *An Offering of Uncles* forward, his brand of literate, snappy, and insightful theological commentary offered in an offbeat, whimsical, crisp style has never failed to capture this reviewer's attention. Whenever I feel that theology has become ponderous and overbearing, I prescribe a re-reading of one of his many books. He makes it all into holy play again, and I'm relieved for another stint of time.

This is one of his best books. He's up to the same tricks, but he constantly re-works his approach to keep you laughing and, in the silences below the laughter, you learn another way to be a priest and theologian of the church.

Religion is the name of the game which *doesn't* work. He unmasks the current religions which hide under the search for health, money, and love. Christianity is not a religion, it is the end of religion. Here Karl Barth and Martin Luther are in the background as court jesters in the castle of God. Religion is out to control the world, but it never succeeds, so of the making of religions there is no end. The only End, or Point, comes when we understand the outrageous capacity of the "incompetent God" to turn all accidents into purposes and bind up the world in his creative process. As God calls the universe into being as a kind of holy play, so we are invited to a playfulness that leaves the need to control at the door.

This is a treatise on grace which proceeds from a renewed understanding of *creatio ex nihilo* and what that means for our search for health, money, and love. As always in Capon's work, original sin is interpreted yet one more time and Christ comes among us in a new guise. Capon is a theologian of the grand catholic tradition, but traditional theology just doesn't get much more creative or palatable than this. Read it. JCR

CHRISTIAN ANARCHY. By Vernard Eller. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987. xiv and 267 pages. Paper. $13.95.

Vernard Eller has worried the relation of church and state for over thirty years, and in this book he sums up his argument as a member of the Anabaptist tradition (specifically, the Church of the Brethren). Eller's style is always breezy, but underneath it lies a wealth of scholarship and familiarity with the resources that relate to whatever he is writing about.

The title intrigues you, of course: Christian anarchy. Is this an oxymoron? Is it merely a cute title? Far from it, this is a precise definition of Eller's mature understanding of how the powers and principalities are to be subjugated from a Christian perspective. The key: "Christian anarchy is the faith in God's primacy as sovereign Lord and orderer of history which is given such weight that all the big claims of self-confident human scheming and power-play become sheer distraction."

Eller speaks of secular powers in relationship to spiritual powers which have been illegitimized (his term) in Christ, and he calls all the manifestations of these powers "arkies," his rendering of the Greek *arche*. His thesis is that Christian anarchy, the de-throning of the powers and principalities in Christ, has been a major force in church history. Armed with the victory of the cross, Christians have had the good sense and the *hilaritas* to disregard the powers because they have no ultimate significance in the light of God's activity. "Disregard" is the correct term (Kierkegaard spoke of "infinite indifference"), because Eller contends that *both* unthinking obedience a la simplistic exegesis of Romans 13 *and* revolutionary disobedience are misunderstandings of Christian action in the world. Since the powers are oriented toward control and function through the principle of denial or death, Christians ought not legitimize them by either opposition or submission. They are *dethroned*, and our true choice is to disregard them.

Christian history tells how people struggled to disregard the human arkies. Eller traces this struggle through the early church, through the anabaptist movement, and he finds in Kierkegaard, the Blumhardts, Barth, and Bonhoeffer, fellow-travelers, the seeds to sow a contemporary understanding of this radical discipleship (although he is highly critical of Bonhoeffer's waffling between parts I-III and part IV of *Cost* and his move toward traditional christology in the *Ethics*.

The point is that theology and politics do not mix. Eller is equally as hard on the liberationists and the Sojourners crew as he is on the acquiescent culture religionists. Neither one has got it right. Understanding himself this way, Eller admits that he cannot accept even the label *pacifist* any more, because pacifism is a political program to which Jesus gets tacked to make you a "Christian pacifist." Hence he refers to himself as given to "anarchical nonresistance," though he recognizes the clumsiness of the term.

By joining with Eller in an re-understanding of the powers, Lutherans can find new meaning in their traditional position of the two

kingdoms. At least to this reviewer, the walls become quite thin between Anabaptist and Lutheran understandings in Eller's work, through of course the *nature* of the church remains as a crucial difference. JCR

DANIEL: AN ACTIVE VOLCANO. REFLECTIONS ON THE BOOK OF DANIEL. By D. S. Russell. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989. 139 pages. $11.95.

This is a collection of twelve meditative essays on selected chapters from the book of Daniel. Though the author is not dealing with all the chapters of the book, he has covered all its concerns. The book of Daniel comes out of a critical situation in the history of Israel. Though several attempts were made, Israel could not get rid of the overlordship of Rome. On the contrary each ruler extended his grip on the socio-political-religious aspects of the life of Israel. The book is concerned with providing hope to the people in a miserable and frustrating situation. Daniel, using the history of Israel during the time of the exile, tries to comfort the people, saying that even in the context of miseries and tribulations God is in control of history. To Russell, this is a powerful message to the crucial problems of modern society.

Russell has taken a very realistic approach to "Daniel." The strength of the book is the way in which the author has related the history of Babylonian captivity, which Daniel takes as a model to explain his own situation, with Daniel's own time and with the problems of the modern world. Russell has dealt with several issues of our time with much care and objectivity. The language of the book is simple and articulate.

This is a useful book for pastors, preachers, and lay persons as well for understanding the message of Daniel.

Rajan J. Murimakil
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

ANCIENT ISRAELITE LITERATURE IN ITS CULTURAL CONTEXT. By John H. Walton. Library of Biblical Interpretation. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989. 249 pages. $19.95.

There is a subtitle to this text which reveals its genre: *A Survey of Parallels between Biblical and Ancient New Eastern Texts.* Written by a scholar who characterizes himself as "evangelical," this book attempts to give an objective, basic introduction to the comparative method, which will also be palatable to conservatives.

Nine of the ten chapters reference and synopsize major pieces of Ancient Near Eastern literature in nine major categories such as cosmology, legal texts, covenants and treaties, prophetic texts, etc. At the end of each chapter Walton discusses "cases of alleged borrowing" where he tries to give a balanced view of the priority of literary images occurring in biblical and extra-biblical traditions. His final chapter presents a summary and conclusions.

This is a useful compendium, and his referencing system goes beyond that of Pritchard's *ANET* for those texts included. However, the book suffers from the lack of any index. It is necessary to page through the sections to locate a particular synopsis by title of text.

Steven A. Knapp
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

SWALLOWING THE SCROLL: TEXTUALITY AND THE DYNAMICS OF DISCOURSE IN EZEKIEL'S PROPHECY. By Ellen F. Davis. JSOT Sup 78. Sheffield: Almond, 1989. 185 pages. $35.00.

This work is another in a spate of dissertations that challenge the methodological principles of form and redaction criticism. Davis prefers a "functional approach" which examines the usage of language within an historical situation and not its possible sources. Toward this end she tries to correlate sociological data and formal literary analysis.

Rejecting the notion of "redactional layering," she puts forth several arguments in defense of her proposition that the book of Ezekiel was first and foremost a written composition, with a perspective and set of emphases of its own. To support this, Davis undertakes an examination of the cultural forces that gave rise to the use of written literature as a medium for introducing change and not merely for documenting the past. First person discourse, heavy use of quotations, reliance on sign figures, and archival speech all intend to engage *readers* in the literary process. There is an excellent six-page discussion of literacy in exilic Israel.

Davis has some thought-provoking ideas, but her final characterization of the prophetic task and her assessment of the authority of written composition seem more conjectural than substantive. Nonetheless, her conjectures merit consideration, and the book is a worthwhile contribution to Ezekiel studies for that reason.

Steven A. Knapp

PROBING THE REFORMED TRADITION. Historical Studies in Honor of Edward A. Dowey, Jr. Edited by Elsie Anne McKee and Brian G. Armstrong. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989. 461 pages. Cloth. $27.95.

After three years at McCormick Theological Seminary, E. A. Dowey spent thirty years teaching church history and theology at Princeton until his retirement, as marked by this fine volume of historical studies. After articles by K. Froehlich on medieval Pelagianism and T. Torrance on Erasmus, the heart of it considers the Reformed theologians of the sixteenth century, notably the six items on Calvin. The contributors are a global "who's who" of Reformed scholarship: Torrance, Neuser, Ganoczy, Gründler, Büsser, Kingdon, Gerrish, Leith, and Gäbler (with an eye-opener on Philip Schaff's parentage and youth), joined by younger historians now taking their places in this tradition.

The accent on Calvin is fitting, for Dowey's own scholarly career was launched and sustained by his interpretation of Calvin's *Institutes*. By showing how Calvin lodged the difficult question of predestination within the topic of faith (namely, why do some have faith and some do not?), Dowey contributed mightily to the distancing of Calvin's own thought from the immediate formation of "Calvinism" which locates predestination under the doctrine of God and God's eternal decrees. In this respect, Calvin (and Dowey) had profound affinities and affection for Luther. Dowey's Princeton course on Luther converted many lukewarm Lutheran students to a deep appreciation for their own tradition. Alas, not a single essay reflects Dowey's interest in Luther, or his ongoing work on Heinrich Bullinger, or his decisive influence on Presbyterian theology through the Confession of 1967. The man's theological scope exceeded even this broad collection.

Paul Rorem
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

LITURGIES OF THE FUTURE. THE PROCESS AND METHODS OF INCULTURATION. By Anscar J. Chupungco, O.S.B. New York: Paulist Press, 1989. 220 pages. Paper. $9.95.

This book follows as sequel to Chupungco's book *Cultural Adaptation of the Liturgy*. Its purpose is to apply the adaptations envisioned by his earlier book to the specific liturgies of the sacraments and the shape of the liturgical year. Yet to be addressed in a future volume (we can hope!) is the cultural adaptation of the divine office, the sacramentals, and various blessings.

Chupungco, professor at the Pontifical Liturgical Institute in Rome, works from the premise that the classical Roman liturgy of the fourth through the seventh centuries was written to suit the cultural context of the Roman people. As the Roman church expanded its influence, its liturgical rite accumulated local rituals which, when brought together into one Roman rite, resulted in an overburdened and repetitive liturgy reflecting no one culture well. Chupungco sees the work of the Second Vatican Council as

having developed an *editio typica*, a basic Western rite, by which each culture might now adapt the Roman rite to its own expression. This he sees as the second stage of the council's liturgical revisions. In this stage the church admits elements of the local culture into the liturgy as long as such elements "are in keeping with the true and authentic spirit of the liturgy and are not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error."

Chupungco explains the need for "acculturation" (the comparative encounter of Christianity with a particular culture) as the preliminary step to "inculturation" or true absorption of cultural thought, language, and patterns into Christian ritual.

Written primarily for Roman Catholic liturgical scholars and pastors as they attempt to adapt the reforms of Vatican II to their own contexts, liturgical theologians from other traditions will, however, find this book most provocative and engaging. Since all the major Christian liturgies produced since the Council are heavily dependent upon its reforms, the issues the author raises affect us all. For instance, he asks his church whether the classical shape of the eucharistic celebration is the ideal shape of a church that is culturally pluralistic, and whether there can be only one order of mass in the entire Roman church. Answers to these questions are urgently needed by non-Roman churches as well, as they seek to minister to members from diverse racial, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds. Last minute, stop-gap rewriting of liturgies by individual pastors to meet the needs of the moment is surely not the best solution.

Chupungco's suggestions for the adaptation of the basic Roman model, which each culture must make its own, are sensible. Yet the ability to test for those cultural elements truly compatible with Christian faith and ritual is no easy task. For those in churches with a defined magisterium, such a teaching office can prove both a help and a hindrance in this pursuit. For those in churches without such structure, how can local adaptations be made while yet preserving a clear sense of unity in mission and ministry?

Though perhaps a bit too technical for beginning students of liturgy, Chupungco's instructive book is insightful reading for all who intend to do liturgical ministry within the increasingly diverse cultures in which the church finds itself.

Theodore W. Asta
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

ICONS—WINDOWS ON ETERNITY. Theology and Spirituality in Colour. Compiled by Gennadios Limouris. Faith and Order Paper 147. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990. Paper. $17.90.

To commemorate the 1200th anniversary of the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 1987, the World Council of Churches has belatedly issued this uneven collection of essays on the background and theology of that council and the meaning of icons for today.

There are four parts. The first offers ecumenical perspectives on the history of iconoclasm and the Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787. Entitled "Icons and Theology," the second section provides the theological substance, with studies by George Dragas on John of Damascus, Georg Kretschmar on the Reformation and icons, and Christoph Schoenborn on "Theological Presuppositions of the Image Controversy." The third section rather haphazardly collects a dozen essays and notes about various iconographic traditions, notably "Iconography in non-European Christianity" by Paulos Mar Gregorios and a long chapter by the volume's compiler, Gennadios Limouris. The fourth section, comprising eight "Living Experiences," is an eclectic and impressionistic testimony to the spiritual value of icons.

The bibliography is extensive, but it neglects to supply information about the English translations of major volumes. Indices would have revealed the repetitions and gaps in this almost random compilation. Its strengths are the essays mentioned, the sixteen color plates of historic and modern icons, and the various ecumenical perspectives on the subject. Yet even here, at its strength, it welcomed only supportive

and appreciative views, not the frank exchange of confessional differences so essential to true ecumenical progress.

Paul Rorem

EUCHARIST. A THANKSGIVING CELEBRATION. By Leo Hay. Volume 3-A in Message of the Sacraments, edited by Monika K. Hellwig. Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1989. 159 pages. Paper. $12.95.

This enjoyable and informative volume on the nature of the Eucharist as celebration is one of eight volumes in this series. The second volume of the series to deal with the Eucharist, this study focuses on the central concept of the Eucharist as celebration: the celebration of the "Christ story" become our story.

In order to better appreciate the context of the Eucharist as story, the author begins by speaking about the nature of human celebration. He continues by speaking of the Word of God as the One who celebrates among us and then outlines the means by which God's wondrous creation is celebrated in the eucharistic action of the offertory. Having set the stage for the eucharistic meal itself, Hay explicates the meaning of the church's eucharistic celebration using the categories of prayer, thanksgiving memorial, sacrifice of praise, forgiveness of sins, and worship in spirit and truth. Finally he concludes his presentation with a look at the missiological implications of the church's eucharistic celebration.

Hay's book is a worthy addition to this series. Easy to read and positive in tone, it is an up-to-date refresher for pastors and a light introduction for students new to the study of the Eucharist. Lay people interested in the topic will also find that its lack of excessive detail and technical terminology makes the book accessible. Short bibliographies at the end of each chapter are well-chosen directives for further reading. Though written for a Roman Catholic audience, Lutherans will applaud Hay's emphasis on the real presence of Christ in the proclamation of the Word and his eye to re-shaping problematic terminology and understandings of previous eras. His discussion on the nature of the Eucharist as sacrifice, for example, is most helpful as is his elaboration on Schillebeeckx's model of eucharistic presence as interpersonal encounter. Ecumenical dialogue groups would find the mutual study of this volume a most productive and enlightening endeavor.

Theodore W. Asta

BAPTISM, EUCHARIST & MINISTRY. 1982–1990. REPORT ON THE PROCESS AND RESPONSES. Faith and Order Paper No. 149. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990. viii and 160 pages. Paper.

For those who try to keep up with the latest implications of the *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (BEM) document, this book will be a necessary addition to the already published resources on this most significant work. The book endeavors to present the highlights of the 186 official responses to the document in hand at the time of writing. The full responses can be found in the six-volume *Churches Respond to BEM*.

The book is divided into three parts. The first describes the BEM process and the general responses to each of the three major sections of the document. The second is concerned with the clarifications requested by various churches on each section as well as comments on the need for more in-depth study in the areas of Scripture and tradition, sacrament and sacramentality, and various perspectives on ecclesiology found in the churches' responses. The final part is devoted to appendices.

While the book is quite useful as a reference tool, as one might expect it is somewhat tedious when read from cover to cover. Nevertheless, in this time when many seem to feel the ecumenical movement has lost its momentum, it is most heartening to hear the overwhelmingly positive reactions to the document from all corners of the Christian church as well as the helpful and enlightening criticism which is properly offered. What is particularly interesting is the comparison of the responses within traditions where one sometimes finds more disagreement than across

confessional lines. The significantly dissimilar reactions between two of the predecessor bodies to the ELCA is a case in point.

Overall, a valuable tool for one's ecumenical library.

Theodore W. Asta

IN QUEST OF AUTHORITY: THE "TRACTS FOR THE TIMES" AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TRACTARIAN LEADERS, 1833-1941. By Rune Imberg. Lund: Lund University Press (Bibliotheca Historico-Ecclesiastica Lundensis 16), 1987. 248 pages. Paper. $35.25.

In this volume it is again a Swedish scholar who provides an excellent resource for study of the 19th century British Tractarian movement. (The other volume from Sweden, superlative in this field, is *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*, by Alf Hardelin, 1965).

The title, *In Quest of Authority*, has a double meaning, though the author may not have intended it. First, the prevailing theme of the book and the *Quest* which Imberg apparently intended, is the quest of Tractarian leaders John Henry Newman, John Keble, and Edward Pusey, during their Tractarian period, for a church and an episcopal authority which would be thoroughly catholic and apostolic. As Imberg points out, Newman found them in the papacy when he became a Roman Catholic in 1845. Keble, who remained an Anglican, greatly respected his own diocesan's authority but probably "did not pay as much attention to what the Bishops said, as Newman did" (190). Pusey, who also remained an Anglican, was a Hebrew scholar who had been considerably influenced by Lutheran theology. He is quoted as saying, "I never attached any weight to the Bishops. ... I threw myself on the English Church and the Fathers as, under God, her support" (194).

The second sense in which Imberg's book is *In Quest of Authority* is his own quest for an authoritative text of the 90 "Tracts for the Times." This "quest" is the great scholarly achievement of this book. Imberg's attention to the Tractarians' quest for authority is well done and a needed, significant contribution. But his text-critical analysis of the Tracts, and his conclusions, make this "quest" as significant as his account of the other. In his effort to find original manuscripts, first editions, and revisions of the Tracts, Imberg searched throughout libraries in England, Sweden, Denmark, and France, sometimes finding texts which had been "lost" because they were miscatalogued. The fruit of this labor is the book's first two chapters (43 pages), copious footnotes throughout, and appendices (39 pages), in which he shows many variants in the Tracts' texts through the course of re-publications. These variants, Imberg contends, are changes made by the authors, reflecting their changing theological positions.

Imberg devotes 100 pages to mainly Newman's evolving thought (Newman was editor of the series and wrote most of the Tracts); 15 pages to Keble; and 19 to Pusey. In these pages the Tracts themselves are Imberg's primary source, though he does refer to the Tractians' other works and to secondary literature. The final chapter, on the other hand, draws mainly from correspondence between the three writers from 1838 to 1843, during which few Tracts were published. Entitled "The Parting of Friends" (an expression taken from Newman's final sermon as an Anglican), it focuses on their attitudes toward episcopal authority and why Newman left the English church while the other two remained.

The book contains numerous apparatus, a rather detailed table of contents, and an extensive bibliography (13 pages), but it lacks indices of subjects or people, which would be helpful. On the whole, this is a valuable contribution to scholarship on the Oxford Movement, and necessary for serious study of the Tracts.

Andrew F. Weisner
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

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Preaching Helps

The Resurrection of Our Lord—Seventh Sunday of Easter, Series B

Easter Matrix

Easter, that explosive day, is the great matrix of our lives as new beings in the Christ of God.

Matrix denotes the receptacle in which a thing or person is cast and molded. Matrix is nurturing place of origin and development. Matrix means mother.

Talking about Easter is both complicated and extraordinarily simple, because it is so very much like trying to describe our mothers. Trying to announce, in terms sufficiently affectionate without getting totally sentimental, not just the historical but the ongoing meaning of "mother." Trying to declare without shame or embarrassment our debt to our mothers. Easter is like that.

Ron Roschke, pastor of Peace Lutheran Church in Manhattan, Kansas, offers a "Matrix Method for Homiletical Creativity." He describes a method and then applies it to the texts of the Easter season. Some of the ideas Ron offers here he first developed in a seminar of the Society of Biblical Literature. He has also written a book-length manuscript (as yet unpublished) called *Text and Mind.* Readers who take the time actually to practice the method will find unexpected treasures in what appear to be old, familiar texts. Here is the promise of renewal for your preaching!

Jack Leininger of Trinity Lutheran Church and Student Center in Pullmann, Washington, has contributed the Pastoral Reflections for this Easter season. Jack probes, gently but ever so insistently, and he clothes his thoughts in image and story drawn from personal and pastoral experience. He borrows and adapts the slogan, "Just do it." And he practices what he himself preaches.

Once again we have paragraphs of Prophetic Voice from the pen of Pastor Don Prange of Winchester, Virginia.

I trust that Easter Day, Easter texts, and our Easter writers will father and mother messages of Easter joy!

Peace to you and yours,

Robert H. Smith
Editor of Preaching Helps

A Matrix Method for Homiletic Creativity

A number of scientists who have studied brain function suggest that the brain goes "off line" in sleep and dreaming in order to process new information and compare it with the vast array of images and memories which have been woven together through an individual's lifetime. Freud called the largely untapped reservoir of memories "the unconscious," and Jung elaborated upon Freud's initial model. Texts are "woven things" (Latin: *textus*) which serve not only as models of our brains, but also as patterns of the way we understand the structure of reality. Furthermore, whenever we human beings encounter texts, we enter a "textual trance" which is related to dreaming and which allows us to "cross reference" the text-world with the other models of reality stored in our brains. Although you may not usually think of it as trance, reading a book (or watching television or seeing a movie) is somewhat similar to daydreaming, a "tour of imagination" in which an author entrances us and leads us into a parallel universe, an alternative world. Good preaching—preaching that "works"—does the same thing, leading worshipers into the alternate universe we call "the dominion of God."

I have devised a matrix method which seeks to uncover images and connections in the lessons for the day which the preacher can use within the homily to help the congregation dream the gospel, both consciously and unconsciously.

Because the method is rather complex, I won't present a complete analysis for every day of Eastertide. Instead, I will do a rather thorough analysis of the texts for The Resurrection of Our Lord so that the reader can "see how it's done." Then, for the other days of Eastertide, I will suggest what a matrix-method analysis uncovers about each set of pericopes, and I will leave you with an encouragement to experiment with the method yourself. RR

The Resurrection of Our Lord March 31, 1991

Psalm 118:1-2,15-24
Isaiah 25:6-9
1 Corinthians 15:19-28
Mark 16:1-8 or John 20:1-9(10-18)

To begin a matrix analysis you will need a large sheet of newsprint and a lectionary—preferably in the translation which will be read in worship. I will be using the Revised Standard Version for my analyses. The first step of the method is to divide the First Lesson into discrete phrases and images. Each of these phrases is called a *lexeme*. The lexemes are written along the left edge of the newsprint, from top to bottom. Horizontal lines are drawn across the page between each lexeme. Thus, each lexeme defines one horizontal row within the matrix. The Second Lesson is written lexeme-by-lexeme across the top of the sheet, from left to right. Vertical lines between each lexeme define the columns of the matrix. The intersection of one lexeme from the First Lesson and one lexeme from the Second Lesson defines one cell of the matrix.

The definition of lexemes is rather arbitrary, and different divisions of the text do not undermine the integrity of the method. When I worked on this text, I wrote out about 20 lexemes down the left edge (=First Lesson) and about 20 across the top (=Second Lesson). You might have written fewer or more.

Once we have a matrix defined we can begin to search for potential links between images and phrases from the First and Second Lessons. I call these links *semantic holes*. I begin with the first lexeme from the Second Lesson and compare it with each lexeme from the First Lesson. That is, I begin with the upper-left cell in the matrix, and work down through the entire column. If a potential link exists between two lexemes, I outline that cell with a colored felt-tip marker. In other words, I study the matrix from top-to-bottom and left-to-right, a column at a time. When the analysis is done, the colored squares on the sheet identify the

semantic holes created by the intersection of the First and Second Lessons.

To illustrate from the lessons for Easter: the first lexeme of the Second Lesson (let's call it S.01: "If for this life only") seemed to interact with one lexeme from the First Lesson—F.06: "And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples...." Why did I consider these two lexemes to be "semantically linked"? There were a couple of reasons. First, "*this* life" (S.01) was linked with "*this* mountain" (F.06); both lexemes "point" toward something. Second, "*only*" (S.01), which serves to *limit* S.01, is contrasted to "*all*" in F.06, which is *expansive*. "Expanding" and "limiting" are opposites, but the opposition links the two lexemes. In other words, either similarity or opposition reveals a link.

The easiest links to identify have to do with *common words*. Points of similarity may also be defined by *common actions*. The most frequent of these will probably revolve around the verbs of saying or speaking. *Prepositions* can also point to potential semantic connection and thus define a semantic hole. Thus, one lexeme may speak of Yahweh enthroned "above" the cherubim, while another may speak of Jesus lifted "up" on the cross. While the cherubim and the cross may not be directly linked, something is being communicated through the notion of "up." What is it? What commonalities exist in our language and culture as we use such images? And image is the key. In order to be able to define semantic holes, the homiletician must develop a sensitivity for image. Semantic holes within the matrix of the lessons suggest that there may be a conjunction of images that may provide a heuristic catalyst for tying these two lessons together.

After we have identified semantic holes through the intersections of the First and Second Lessons, we next divide the Gospel into lexemes and "read it through" the semantic holes of the matrix. Thus, the homiletician will take the first lexeme of the Gospel (G.01) and will proceed to search for a potential link with a semantic hole, that is, with one of the colored boxes which have been traced on the matrix. If she can locate a correspondence, she will write the words of the Gospel lexeme in that box, and thus "fill" the semantic hole. The homiletician may find that more than one semantic hole relates to a given Gospel lexeme; in that case she would write part of the Gospel lexeme in one box, and the rest in the other box, and connect them in some way, for example, with a dotted line. After this, she would proceed to G.02 and again search, and in this way proceed through all the lexemes of the Gospel. If a later Gospel lexeme should create a potential link with a semantic hole that has already been filled, that is fine; the two Gospel lexemes can "share" the cell.

In some cases, a Gospel lexeme may act as a catalyst between lexemes from the First and Second Lessons which, up to this point, had not been related. For example, consider this intersection of lexemes from the lessons for The Resurrection of Our Lord:

F.11: for the LORD has spoken
S.15: Then comes the end.

When I first did my analysis of the matrix I saw no relation between these two lexemes. However, when I encountered the first lexeme from the Gospel

G.01: When the Sabbath was past

I saw a new link: in the Priestly creation account the sabbath was the "last day of creation," "the end." And in Genesis 1, the universe is created through "the speaking of the LORD." Thus, I created a new semantic hole at the intersection of F.11 and S.15 and inserted the words of G.01 in that box.

It is also possible that a Gospel lexeme may interact with a single lexeme, either from the First or Second Lessons, and not with a pair in a semantic hole. In that case, the homiletician would create a new semantic hole at the end of the column or row defined by the lexeme, just beyond the edge of the matrix (in the "margin"). If there are no connections between a given Gospel lexeme and the rest of the matrix, that lexeme will be passed over.

Figure 1 shows the set of "filled semantic holes" I identified through the intersections of the pericopes for The Resurrection of Our Lord. I have tried to indicate some of the reasons why I made these "links" so that the reader can begin to

Figure 1: Filled Semantic Holes in Easter B

Gospel	First Lesson	Second Lesson	Comments
WHEN THE SABBATH WAS PAST	THE LORD HAS SPOKEN	THEN COMES THE END	The sabbath here is seen as the "last day of God's speaking," the seventh day. Also, "was past" from the Gospel connects with "the end" from the Second Lesson.
ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK	ON THAT DAY	THEN COMES THE END	"First day" (GS) connects with "the end" (SL), while "day" in FL and GS connect.
WHEN THE SUN HAD RISEN	HE WILL SWALLOW DEATH	CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED	"Risen" (GS) is connected to "raised" (FL), while the risen sun connects with the end of death's rule in the FL.
THEY WENT TO THE TOMB	THE VEIL	WE ARE MOST TO BE PITIED	"The tomb" in GS is seen as a place of pity, with echoes of Jesus' pity at various tombs; the veil (FL) becomes a good visual symbol of mourning.
THEY WERE SAYING	IT WILL BE SAID	BUT WHEN IT SAYS	Various connections between the appearance of the word "say."
...THE STONE...	MOUNTAIN	UNDER HIS FEET	"Mountain" (FL) and "under his feet" (SL) are connected in an image of "standing on stone."
...THE DOOR...	HE WILL SWALLOW	PUT ALL HIS ENEMIES UNDER HIS FEET	"The door" (GS) is seen as the portal of death, the place of "swallowing" (FL), where we are put "under" (SL) the dominion of death.
VERY LARGE	ALL PEOPLES/ ALL NATIONS	ALL DIE/ALL MADE ALIVE	The word "all" (FL/SL) connects with "very large" (GS)
AMAZED	LO!	BUT IN FACT	"Amazed" creates connections with other exclamations: "lo!" in FL and "but in fact" in SL.
TELL HIS DISCIPLES	IT WILL BE SAID	THE KINGDOM OF GOD	"Tell" (GS) connects with "said" (FL), while "disciples" creates links with "kingdom of God" and the preaching of Jesus which called them into discipleship.
AND PETER	MOUNTAIN	UNDER HIS FEET	The connections which created "stone" above can now create additional connections with "Peter" (GS) = *petros* = "Rock."
HE IS GOING BEFORE YOU	WE HAVE WAITED FOR HIM	THEN AT HIS COMING	The people of God had "waited" (FL) for "his coming" (SL), as now the disciples will wait since Jesus "goes before them" (GS).
THEY FLED	TAKE AWAY	HE DELIVERS	"Flee" (GS) connects with "take away" (FL) to create images of escape and "deliverance" (SL).
FROM THE TOMB	TAKE AWAY THE REPROACH	...RULE, POWER, AUTHORITY...	"The tomb" is both the place where loved ones are "taken away" (FL), where we feel "the reproach" (FL), and where we experience the "rule, power, authority" (SL) which enthralled humankind.
TREMBLING AND ASTONISHMENT	THE VEIL THAT IS SPREAD (the tomb)	...RULE, POWER, AUTHORITY...	Why do they "tremble"? Why are they "astonished" (GS)? Because, the "rule/power/authority" (SL), the "veil" that enthralls (FL), has had its power broken!
THEY SAID NOTHING	THE LORD HAS SPOKEN	BUT WHEN IT SAYS	Different occurrences of "say" are connected here.

sense the criteria I use in creating and filling semantic holes.

What we are modeling in this step of the matrix method is how the Gospel for the day interacts with the semantic space created by the First and Second Lessons. We are reminded that the Gospel is not read into a vacuum but into a semantic space in which words and images have already arrived before it. Hearing several lessons read in worship prepares our brains for the most important task: finding ways in which the Word for this day can be woven together with the words of our life which surround us. The power of the Gospel will be released as it is permitted to be understood in the context of the words of daily life. To say it another way, we want the Word to be woven into the fabric of our life in such a way that the canonical patterns of these texts become the pattern for our life. The weaving of these three texts in worship is an important first step toward that goal.

By the time we have completed the method to this point, we will have produced a graphic depiction of the semantic space created by the intersection of the lessons as they are read in worship. In its present state, however, it may be difficult to "read" the matrix. We will probably have a matrix consisting of several hundred cells and a dozen or more semantic holes. In order for us to begin to discern significant relationships within this space we need to perform some kind of operation whereby we can comprehend the relationships and what they mean.

One way to do this is to simplify the matrix, creating a smaller matrix made up only of those lexemes which contribute to semantic holes filled by the Gospel. Figure 2 (next page) shows such a simplified matrix for this day. Whereas my original matrix numbered over 460 cells, the simplified matrix has only 90. Yet even after we have simplified the matrix, we are still left with the task of analyzing it. I have found several useful methods for analyzing semantic matrix space. One method I use is to trace how the Gospel "moves" through the semantic space. To do this, I would try to read the pertinent Gospel lexemes in sequence and follow them through the matrix. I might even do this with a pencil, tracing the path on the chart and numbering the lines. Next, I would project this movement on to each of the first two pericopes. For example, I notice that the three opening lexemes of the Gospel ("When the sabbath was past...they went to the tomb") move us from the lower-center area of the matrix to the upper-left corner (see Figure 2). Thus, the women's journey to the tomb carries us "backwards" through the First Lesson and the first half of the Second Lesson. What might that mean? The First Lesson tells the story of Yahweh's ultimate victory over death, the removal of the "veil." The first half of the Second Lesson recounts that "as by a man came death," so through the Christ we have seen the first fruits of a story that "at the end" will lead to life for all. To move "backwards" through these texts, then, is to move from the joyful climax of the story *back* to the initial point of despair ("pity"—Second Lesson, "the veil"—First Lesson). The matrix, then, encourages me to think about how the women's journey to the tomb "when the sun had risen" was, for them, a "backwards journey" from what should have been the joyful "ending of the story" they had anticipated, back to the initial point of despair. To tell this part of the Easter story, I might consider telling of other "backward journeys of despair and pity" where people had to confront their failed hopes and dreams.

However, I also notice that when the women are told the Easter gospel and they flee from the tomb, Mark's narrative follows a path that leads backwards through the First Lesson (from bottom to top of the matrix), but forward through the Second Lesson (left to right), as Paul speaks about "the end...when he delivers the kingdom...and places every rule under his feet." Thus, the intersection of images leads us, at one and the same time, through the "backwards journey of despair" but also forward to the final victory over every "rule, authority and power." This helps me understand the women's trembling and astonishment: it is not just that the "veil" is removed, that good overcomes evil—but that the very journey of despair becomes the victory procession for the triumphant Christ. To this the women can "say nothing"; they are silenced not by death but by the utter incomprehensibility and absolute astonishment of this new age. They are "silenced by life!" (Could this be a title for our sermon?)

Figure 2: Pertinent Semantic Links in Easter B

	pitied	But in fact	Christ has been raised	all die/ all alive	at his coming	Then comes the end.	when he delivers the kingdom	after destroy-ing every rule...	under his feet...	...But when it says...
mountain									stone/ Peter	
veil	...they went to the tomb.							trembling and astonish-ment		
all people				very large						
swallow death			when the sun had risen						door	
and take away the reproach							they fled...	...from the tomb...		
for the LORD has spoken.						When the sabbath was past,				...they said nothing
It will be said on that day...						On the first day of the week,	"Tell his disciples"			They were saying...
Lo		amazed								
waited					going before you					

The matrix method will help to uncover and suggest images which might be useful in preaching—clusters of phrases, metaphors that will allow us to speak about more than one lesson at the same time. But most of all, the matrix method serves as an encouragement for us to develop a new narrative which will extend the universe ("domain of God") created by the intersection of these pericopes in the collective consciousness of the worshiping community which will hear them. A homiletic narrative would invite worshipers to let the Word for the day act as a catalyst, to weave our own memories and experiences in new "resurrection patterns," and to prepare us to look for the risen Christ in our own encounters in the coming week ("He is not here; he is going before you"). On the basis of this matrix analysis what might such a narrative look like?

I would be encouraged to consider a story about journeys—perhaps consider a woman making a journey, driving a car, going "back" to a place where she had not planned to go, back home for her grandmother's funeral. It is daybreak and the morning is beautiful, but as she drives she is consumed by grief and a sense of the transience of life. Images pass through her consciousness. "Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day...." I would try to introduce the image of a veil; she remembers the black veil her grandmother wore at a previous funeral. But the veil reminds her of lace, and the lace reminded her of the handkerchief her grandmother had given her when she was seven. It was a very nice handkerchief, expensive. She felt grown-up and important for having it. It had become a symbol to her of her life one day as an adult ("the hope," the "happy ending"). She carries the handkerchief with her now, in her purse, her very adult purse, to place into the cold hands of her dead grandmother. She will give this gift back, but in doing so she realizes that, now adult, she no longer has the "hope for adulthood" she had as a child.

How would the resurrection be experienced in this narrative? It would need to include the "double motion" that we saw when the women confront the messengers at the tomb. It would not be a simple eclipse of grief by realizing something about "eternal life" or the "immortality of the soul." Our main character would need to realize that it is precisely in this "journey back home through death" that death itself is to be destroyed. Perhaps, when she places the handkerchief in her grandmother's hands, she looks at her grandmother's face and sees her own, not simply as an "hallucination" but as a clear familial similarity—the nose, the chin. She feels herself lying in the casket, but it does not engender fear within her; no, rather it brings a sense of calm and homecoming. She remembers her grandmothers' own faith, and she recalls the words of another hymn:

> When we on that final journey go
> That Christ is for us preparing,
> We'll gather in song, our hearts aglow,
> All joys of the heavens sharing,
> And walk in the light of God's own place,
> With angels his name adoring.

A relative comes up to speak to her, but her emotion is so strong she can get no words out. The relative thinks she is overcome in grief; in reality she is overcome with this feeling that everything will be all right, for herself and her grandmother. The relative walks away to leave her alone, but it is all right. There will be time to speak tomorrow.

This is not the only possible narrative which could be generated by our matrix. There are other interesting possibilities with the veil. How does it suggest parallels with the winding sheet and the shroud? (It might be interesting to consider the Johannine alternate Gospel and what that would do to a matrix analysis!) We could also consider the constellation of images surrounding "stone" and "Peter" (Gospel), "mountain" (First Lesson), and "under his feet" (Second Lesson). Consider questions such as these: Where do we stand? The Greek word for *resurrection* is *anastasis*—"to stand again." Jesus took a stand, but then he could stand no longer; he was hung, and then he died. Now he stands again. Peter, on the other hand, tripped and denied Jesus. He landed flat on his face. If Peter is to enter the new reality of Easter, he will need to experience his own resurrection of forgiveness. We might also consider images of mountains—the "green hill far away," the "rocky hill" into which the burial cave was sunk, the mountain of Yahweh's ultimate victory and anticipating the mount of ascension which will

eventually symbolize Jesus' ultimate victory and ascending the throne. Searching for contemporary images and personal memories may lead the preacher into finding homiletical hooks that can become occasions for prolonging the discourse of these lessons into our own space and time. We, too, can be surprised ("Lo!") and silenced in our own incredulity. Easter will happen again, even as we celebrate—and perhaps even in our silence and our inability to get the words out right. RR

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

It's the no-frills Gospel this year. There's no teaching, no comforting, no Easter brunch like we find in other Gospels. Jesus is gone, lickety-split.

Had the empty tomb been discovered by the farmers I grew up with, one would have quickly asked, "What in hell is going on here?!" That's a lot better question to ask than many we are plagued with, like how can we get more people to worship, or should we serve coffee after church?

Sometimes I think our addiction to feel-good, program-oriented, sweet-and-simple church life is part of our own denial of the story that got us here in the first place: the death and resurrection of Jesus. What in hell is going on here?

Jesus dead or alive is never where we expect to find him. That's troublesome if we've packaged his death and resurrection like another Bob Hope special, but for those who ask the farmer's question there's nothing better to hear.

What in hell is going on? Jesus continues to be about the business of destroying the last enemy, which is death in all its forms. All the hells are entered by this one who was crucified, but now is risen, and are conquered one by one.

Recently I overheard a child and her mother talking. "I hate you," the child said. "I love you," the mother replied. Over and over the child said her words in a playful, happy voice. Over and over the mother said, "I love you," with tenderness and joy.

I suspect this conversation first took place when the child was angry, but now it had become a litany of trust, of resurrection. The hell of hatred had been overcome by persistent, undeserved grace. Love, not hate (death) had the last word.

What in hell is going on? In one of my favorite novels by Walker Percy, *Love in the Ruins*, the main character has been committed to a mental hospital. It is the day after Christmas. The television is on but the picture's going flip, flip, flip, and no one seems to notice. The character narrates his thoughts: "I felt so bad that I groaned aloud an Old Testament lamentation AAAAIEOOOOW! to which responded a great silent black man sitting next to me on the blocky couch: 'Ain't it the truth though.' After that I felt better. We love those who know the worst of us and don't turn their faces away."

The hell of estrangement, loneliness, and uncontrollable problems is met with the surprise of resurrection. The hell of our idolatry, our sin, our rebellion is entered once again by Jesus. Its power is broken. Death is on the run, even the death of the grave. God has known the very worst of us, and has not turned his face away. JL

PROPHETIC VOICE

Mark's narrative of what Jesus was about ends up where it began; the empty tomb produces "amazement" (Mk 16:5), and the first witnesses are "frightened out of their wits" (16:8). It connects with the "astonishment" of Mk 1:7 and the "amazement" of 5:20. And if followers of Jesus were "terrified" and "utterly and completely dumbfounded" (6:50,52) before, how can you top this ultimate new and different thing they have experienced?

Maybe the fact that they are silenced (16:8), which also has some parallels in the earlier part of the narrative, says something about a proper approach to celebrating Easter. Perhaps more quiet reflection is in order, and not so much of a triumphal celebration. The latter can easily turn us aside from some of the deeper implications of the resurrection. What does it mean that "Death" is *destroyed* (Isa 25:8, 1 Cor 15:26) or that "God may be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28)? And what is the significance of the vision of a "messianic banquet" (Isa 25:6) of the "stone rejected by the builders that proved to be the keystone" (Ps 118:22, Mk 12:10,11)? Does it all relate to how we might to a new and different thing in confront-

ing the forces of Death today? Or that we might begin to build and organize communities reflecting the ideological content in the mission of the Christ? Does it scare us? We're entitled to be frightened out of our wits! DP

Second Sunday of Easter April 7, 1991

Psalm 148
Acts 3:13-15,17-26
1 John 5:1-6
John 20:19-31

A matrix analysis uncovers several strong constellations of images from the lessons. One constellation centers on the theme of *family and faith*. Faith is a family affair: the God of "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (Acts 4:13) is the "Lord God" (Acts 4:22) who is also confessed by Thomas ("My Lord and my God," John 20:28). Disciples are also "sons [and daughters] of the prophets" (Acts 4:25), as well as "children of God" (1 John 5:1), and Jesus' commission brings them into the family ("as the Father has sent me...I send you," John 20:21). Thomas' indecision about believing gives a curious twist to his nickname, "Twin"—the "double-minded one" (John 20:24), while the Second Lesson speaks about familial love (1 John 5:1), and the First Lesson abounds in familial imagery.

A second constellation revolves around *ignorance and witness*. The people of Jerusalem "acted in ignorance" (Acts 3:17), as did Thomas ("Unless I see...I will not believe," John 20:25). On the other hand, disciples are called to be witnesses (Acts 3:15, as well as 1 John 5:2—"...by this we know..."). In all three lessons the witness is basically within the family, and the unbelieving world is "overcome" (1 John 5:4) through faith (see also John 20:29,31). This position of privilege demands responsibility as well: Jesus is sent "to you first" (Acts 3:26) and thus *we* are brought into the witnessing community ("that you may believe," John 20:31).

One additional theme revolves around *coming*: the promised one is sent (Acts 3:20f and 1 John 5:6), as were the prophets, and as the disciples are now sent by the risen Christ. The Holy Spirit is sign both of the sending as well as the receiving. RR

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Dr. Menninger once asked, *What Ever Became of Sin?* We might ask ourselves today, "What ever became of faith?" I sense that some of us have become uncomfortable with faith, more specifically, faith in Jesus.

Our Sunday school material is full of puzzles, clever stories, and culturally sensitive illustrations, but sometimes it seems to fail to get at the story and scandal of faith in Jesus, the Son of God. Have we shied away from preaching the death and resurrection of Jesus for fear of alienating newcomers who visit because they "heard we were friendly," or because "we have a support group" of some kind?

Friendliness, support groups, or other "programs" may be fine, but they are not the stuff that overcomes the world.

What then? How about this word from 1 John? "Who is it that overcomes the world but those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God?" These are strong words, and offensive to many. Even some within the church find such words inappropriate for these times.

Most of us who preach have been distracted by monkey business or busy-ness in order to keep our churches afloat. Luther charged that his hearers were prone to the sin of novelty, and we may have inherited this sin in its fullest manifestation as we suckle the breast of everything which promises "church growth" or other "success."

During this Easter season we are called to consider again faith in Jesus, the crucified and risen one. The proclamation does itself to us and to those who hear it. It doesn't need to be dressed up to make its appeal.

When I was nineteen, I suffered the death of my father and one of my very best friends in less than a year. The following summer I was working in a salvage yard breaking open car batteries with

a hatchet, draining off the acid, and throwing the lead guts into a box car. It was awful. One day I noticed an old battery sitting on a pallet. Out of one of its holes a skinny, spindly dandelion was growing and in flower. It became my personal icon, a reminder of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I doubt if it would have struck me if I hadn't already heard about Jesus the Christ, Jesus the risen one.

Back to the lesson: "Who is it that overcomes the world?"

Keep in mind grieving nineteen year olds who may never tell you what's on their minds—but who will be listening for gospel on Sunday. In our contending with daily death and dying, we are not going to be helped by snazzy liturgies or clever entertainment. Jesus Christ gives us the victory. JL

PROPHETIC VOICE

Who knows what *really* happened? The biblical narratives about the resurrection aren't specific, and no one ever asks that question, not even Thomas; he just wants some proof. But what is quite clear is that something new and different did happen, and it had a tremendous impact, and still does, on what was going on in the world.

Of major importance is that a new and different dialogue opened up within a faith system and a religious tradition. But the most important thing was that it had *material* significance. There is a distinctly new and different reality among the persons who had been close to Jesus for three years. Fear, amazement, and astonishment give way to a "faith" which begins to "overcome the world" (1 John 5:4), not faith in accepting something hard to believe, but a living faith which took seriously what it meant to be "heirs" of a "covenant" designed to be a blessing to "all the families of the earth" (Acts 3:25). It was a living faith which began to both understand and put into practice the meaning of the word, "As the Father sent me, so I am sending you" (Jn 20:21), a faith with the capacity to initiate a "universal restoration" (Acts 3:21) of the world. To be sure, it calls for everything and everyone to "praise Yahweh!" (Ps 148). DP

Third Sunday of Easter
April 14, 1991

Psalm 139:1-11
Acts 4:8-12
1 John 1:1–2:2
Luke 24:36-49

These pericopes, as last week's, also demonstrate several strong constellations of matrix image links. There is an obvious theme of *healing*: the crippled man is healed (First Lesson), as are the readers of the Second Lesson, who are invited to be "cleansed from all sin" (1 John 2:7). In the Gospel, the disciples' own disbelief is also a sign of dysfunction which Jesus "cures" by "opening their minds" (Luke 24:45).

It is important to note how *healing and suffering* are related. The early Christian kerygma is quoted explicitly in the First Lesson (Acts 4:10) and Gospel (Luke 24:46), in which suffering/dysfunction is tied to healing/resurrection. Note the parallels with the Second Lesson where the "blood of Jesus cleanses us" (1 John 2:7), and where confessing our sin/dysfunction leads to life, while the attempt to hide sin leads to even greater dysfunction. The way to life passes always through the cross. In the First Lesson, a cripple's disability becomes the occasion for a proclamation of the Good News of the new age.

A related cluster might form under the title *let's get physical.* The risen Christ is no ghost or ethereal spirit (Luke 24:39, but contrast this to *Holy* Spirit at Acts 4:8), but a physical body which can be seen and touched (1 John 1:1 and also Luke 24:39). Healing also is physical, whether it be the First Lesson's cripple or we ourselves, invited to "walk in the light" (1 John 2:7).

A final set of images cluster around *name, word, and witness.* The name of Jesus must be named (Acts 4:10) since it is the only such name (4:12) for the "whole world" (1 John 2:2 = "under heaven" in First Lesson). The witness of disciples (highlighted in the First and Second Lessons) as well as the Scriptures (Gospel, but also the "writings" of the Second Lesson: see 1 John 1:4; 2:1),

are made possible in the risen Christ, who opens minds and fills with a new Spirit (Acts 4:8). RR

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Physicist Freeman Dyson makes some curious observations in his book, *Infinite in All Directions*. He discusses three important inventions or technologies which have shaped the world. The first is haying (cutting grass in the summer and storing it in the winter). Haying was first practiced in little villages of Northern Europe during the so-called Dark Ages.

The Romans did not need hay, because in the warm Mediterranean climate grass grew all year long. Hay allowed populations to grow and civilization to flourish among the forests of Northern Europe.

The second great invention was knitting. Knitting emerged later than haying. Knitting made it possible for the first time to keep small children better warmed during the winter. Knitting decreased infant mortality and allowed parents to become emotionally more involved with their children. The increasing attachment of parents to children led to the appearance of the modern child-centered family.

The third great invention was the spinning wheel. Spinning led to a vast increase of cheap linen, to the manufacture of paper, and to the invention of the printing press.

Even as inventions we take for granted led to unimaginable political and social changes, so has the preaching of repentance and forgiveness led to great and shattering human change. As we hear in 1 John, our joy is complete by passing on that which we have heard from the very beginning.

In the Gospel the terrified disciples meet face to face the one they had abandoned to die alone. There was no denying what they had done. But they were forgiven, and they were filled with joy and wonder.

I remember a dear friend who confronted me with the truth about my bad attitude while we were at seminary. I had become a lousy friend, but I was blind and unable to recognize it. When he told me that our friendship was on the verge of being over, I could have argued or attacked him. But it was true. I repented and was forgiven. And so our friendship continues, and seventeen years later it is one of the great treasures in my life.

We've tried to be junior psychologists, or creative worship leaders, or evangelists of favorite causes. Some of us get caught up with spiritual gurus and spiritual methods, but how good it is to hear what we heard from the very beginning. How good to hay, knit, and spin through the preaching of repentance and forgiveness, death and resurrection, Good Friday and Easter. JL

PROPHETIC VOICE

No length of time will ever change the reaction of communities of faith struggling with all the implications of the resurrection. There will always be alarm, fright, agitation, and doubts (Lk 24:37, 38). If you are somehow relating to the faith story tradition, there is no escape from the "spirit" of Yahweh (Ps 139:7), and new and different things will begin to happen.

New and different things began to happen to Peter and the other disciples as they were "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 4:8). But alarm and doubts gave way to a courageous spirit compelled to speak of the realities which had been "seen and heard" (1 Jn 1:3). The difficulties in perception remembered by Mark (8:21) gave way to a new and different understanding of the content of the Good News. The call to a conversion to the jubilee of a "forgiveness of debts" (Lk 24:37) became the "keystone" (Acts 4:11) of their teaching and practice.

Where the dialogue goes on, the new and different discovery is still being made. DP

Fourth Sunday of Easter
April 21, 1991

Psalm 23
Acts 4:23-33
1 John 3:1-2
John 10:11-18

A matrix analysis may be especially helpful for this day, where connections between the lessons are not so evident at first. The image of the *shepherd* is the obvious historic center for "Good Shepherd Sunday," but Cycle B does not sustain some of the strong links with the First and Second Lessons which we find in the other cycles. The strongest link may not be at all obvious to worshipers, and the preacher might consider making the link explicit: in the ancient Near East the shepherd was a royal image. From Sumeria and Egypt on, kings and gods were pictured as caring shepherds. David's career as shepherd (see Acts 4:25) was thus a fitting apprenticeship. There are also links, then, to "Sovereign" (v. 24), "kings of the earth and rulers" (v. 26), "Herod and Pontius Pilate" (v. 27), as well as with the theme of hidden identity in the Second Lesson (1 John 3:1). These links raise for the hearer some interesting questions: How is strong leadership related to nurture, care, gentleness, and self-sacrifice? How are current examples of "strong" leadership really variations on the theme of "hireling"?

The other significant cluster of images has to do with *own and other*. The care of the shepherd and his familiarity with the sheep should not lead to an illusion of exclusivity. "I have others," he says (John 10:16), and the internal links on the word "own" in the Gospel (see vv. 12 and 18: "whose own" and "my own accord") lead to some interesting links with the early Christian community, which "owned everything in common" (Acts 4:32), as well as with the Second Lesson and God's "ownership" and claim on Christians as "my [God's] children." In this new flock/community, the lines between "mine" and "yours" may become as blurry on the horizontal plane as they are on the vertical! RR

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Communism appears to be on the verge of collapse, and at the time I am writing this capitalism isn't faring that well, either. The money I hoped to have available for something special is going to be drafted to bail out those who thought they could play the Savings and Loan game. One is tempted to find a way to live apart from either form of social order. Both forms demand that people live in some kind of union with each other.

Still, I find myself marveling at the lesson from Acts where "the company of believers were of one heart and had everything in common." We dismiss it as impossible, and yet one should not dismiss it so quickly. Stories abound where Christians still express their faith in such a way.

I offer a story of my mother as an example. Since my father died in 1967 she has continued to drive big cars. I would tease her occasionally about her "tank," but no more. Several years ago she went out to buy a new car. She was all set to buy the one she liked, but before she did she told the dealer she would have to bring her friends to the dealership to see it.

The next day she trooped into the dealership with five of her friends. Before she would buy the car she made them sit in all five passenger seats to see if they would be comfortable. She would buy the car only if her friends were comfortable in it. After much commotion and bouncing around, and not a little laughter, she bought the car. It meant nothing to her unless she could use it for the hospitality of others.

Hidden in her decision was her confession of faith. It showed what's at the root. We ought not dismiss too quickly the story of having all things in common as having real possibilities for an expression of Christian life today.

A mechanic philosopher who belonged to a congregation I once served was proud to say that the last part of him to become a Christian was his pocketbook. When he discovered the joy of sharing what he had with others, he became a much happier person. Those who live by faith cannot help but live for others. The gospel of Jesus makes its way into the most unusual of places, even into automobile showrooms in central Montana.

We hear the echo of this text in these words of Albert Schweitzer, "One thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve." JL

PROPHETIC VOICE

The new and different "table" (Ps 23:5) envisioned by some peasant centuries earlier became a reality. The "house of Yahweh" (Ps 23:6) became what God intended it should be in terms of the "good life." But such a reality doesn't happen without good community organizing and good shepherding (Jn 10:11ff.). It all raises up the positive side of the concepts of sacrifice and servanthood, not as ritual or some kind of cultic observance (you can hire someone if that's all you're after) but as a social and national reality.

Where communities gathered around the forgiveness of debts and daily bread, where everything "was held in common" (Acts 4:32), there was also "great respect" (Acts 4:33). DP

Fifth Sunday of Easter
April 28, 1991

Psalm 22:24-30
Acts 8:26-40
1 John 3:18-24
John 15:1-8

Although the Gospel presents another strong controlling image with *vine*, my matrix analysis does not reveal many immediate and obvious links between this image and the other lessons. However, there are other constellations of images which may lead us along some intriguing paths.

For example, there is an interesting cluster centering around the theme of *converge and withdraw*. In the First Lesson, the eunuch appears as an "outsider" both in terms of geography as well as social standing in Israel (see, for example, Lev 21:16-23). Philip is commanded to "join" the chariot (Acts 8:29), which he does. Later, they "both" go down to the water, where the "outsider" is baptized and thus brought "into" the household of faith before Philip is "caught up" and disengages at the close of the pericope. The Second Lesson's command to "love one another" (1 John 3:23) not only relates Christians to each other but is a sign of mutual indwelling (= convergence) between God and the believer (v. 24). This theme of mutual indwelling is also picked up by the Gospel through the image of vine-and-branches, as well as repeated use of the word "abide." The preacher should remember that the image is vine-and-branches (and thus interconnectedness, whole-and-parts) rather than stem-and-branches!

This leads to an interesting reflection on the theme of *fruit and barrenness*. Is it intentional that the First Lesson's story of the eunuch is placed beside the Gospel which says "apart from me you can do nothing" (= "bear no fruit")? Likewise, the use of "children" in the Second Lesson (1 John 3:18) creates another ironic link with the eunuch who could have no children, but who finds himself part of a new family (and thus connected!) in baptism.

Finally, the preacher may want to note the variety of links around the theme of *know and understand*: the eunuch who learns (FL), little children who know (SL, vv. 19 and 24), and the "organic knowledge" which would come from mutual indwelling and which would constitute "proof" of discipleship (GS, v. 8). RR

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

In today's Gospel we hear Jesus say that the branch which does not bear fruit is cut off. In Acts we meet an impotent man. The two texts create a wonderful kind of tension. In Acts we also hear a fascinating story where the universal meets the particular, that is, the universal mission of the gospel breaks through the greatest of cultural, ethnic, political, and ecclesiastical barriers one person at a time.

The eunuch has been unfairly portrayed by most accounts of this story. We all can remember that he was a black African who was impotent, but

we usually don't make much of the fact that he was a person of obvious success and position. He was "a minister of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of all her treasure." Try reading this phrase slowly, as if you are beginning to narrate a story about a great leader from the past. It rolls off the tongue with the taste of royalty.

Here is someone who should have no complaints. Impotency is something many people have learned to live with. This person has achieved status, power, responsibility. He has the trust and ear of the queen. He would have been envied by many. Shoot, he had one of those jobs where you get to travel to interesting places on a first-class ticket. I picture him on the front cover of *Time* magazine, or at least in one of the stories which feature up and coming faces in the world's leadership.

In John Updikes' fine memoirs, *Self-Consciousness*, he writes, "Celebrity is a mask that eats into the face." I imagine the eunuch to be someone who strived very hard to achieve and overcome great odds, but the more he achieved, the more aware he was of his own impotence. He could mask it from others with his success; he could not mask it from himself, and it ate into his conscience.

He was impotent, and so are we. He could never become enough, do enough, excel enough, to break free. He could never bear the kind of fruit Jesus calls us to do, and neither can we. He was as good as dead, and so are we when our focus is on our own fruit. Dare we even add that we are as good as dead when our focus is on our own "growth"?

Philip does not enroll him in a self-help course, or give him steps to follow to grow spiritually, or tell him how to work on his self-image. Only death will put a stop to the eunuch's nagging SELF-consciousness, and a death is given. He is put to death in baptism, and resurrected, too.

Jesus' words have the same power. They at once put us to death and raise us up. By his declaration, "You are already made clean by the word I have spoken to you," Jesus gives us what he demands. We are free to admit our impotence and, abiding in this word of Jesus, free to live and bear great fruit. JL

PROPHETIC VOICE

"The rest of the story" on the resurrection side of Good Friday's cry, "My God, my God, why have you deserted me?" (Ps 22:1) is that "the poor will receive as much as they want to eat" (Ps 22:26). The "Good News of Jesus" (Acts 8:35) may go through some "bad-news" struggles before it is realized, but where new and different Christ communities go beyond "just words or talk" to "something real and active" (1 Jn 3:18), the "fruit" of authentic discipleship (Jn 15:8) begins to grow. DP

Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 5, 1991

Psalm 98
Acts 11:19-30
1 John 4:1-11
John 15:9-17

One conspicuous cluster of images for this day centers on *love*. There are obvious affinities in the two Johannine pericopes: those "beloved" of God are both loved and commanded to love (Second Lesson), while Jesus in the Gospel states the same theme again. Although love is not specifically named in the First Lesson, there are two dramatic illustrations of love-in-action: as Cypriot Christians break through ethnic barriers and preach gospel to Greeks (v. 20) and as the disciples determine to send relief to famine-stricken Judea (v. 29).

There is another Johannine parallel which we might designate as "*not this but that.*" We see it in the Second Lesson as "...not that we loved God but that [God] loved us" (1 John 4:10). It appears in the Gospel in two ways: "no longer do I call you servants...but friends" (John 15:15), and also "You did not choose me but I chose you" (v. 16).

The theme of *sending* anticipates the approach of Pentecost. The church at Jerusalem sends Barnabas to Antioch (v. 22) and relief to

Judea (v. 29). The Second Lesson reminds us that "God sent his Son" (v. 9). And the Gospel says that disciples are "appointed" to "go" (v. 16).

Finally, there is a theme around the phrase "*of God.*" We are "of God" (1 John 4:4), knowing that love is "of God" (1 John 4:7), just as Barnabas discovered the grace "of God" in Antioch (Acts 11:23).

A possible intersection of these themes would consider how being "of God" might send us on a mission of love that would encourage us to explore new alternatives in the world ("not this but that") and inspire us to become more responsive to the needs of others. RR

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

If we test the spirits as 1 John calls us to do, most of us will find that we have developed a certain fondness for confessions of faith or public policies which are "not of God."

Has the call for "inclusivity" become another gospel, or another captivity, and the law? Is the United States flag displayed at the very front of some of our churches no less a form of idolatry than the golden calf of Baal? Has the rush to use the language of native American ritual, paganism, or pop-psychology come to indicate a departure from the faithfulness to which we have been called? Sometimes when I think about positions I once held about faith and life I am glad to know and trust in the forgiveness of sins. We are all vulnerable to the sweet seduction of spirits not of God. On this Sunday we may want to ask ourselves and our people some hard questions.

But note how Gospel and Epistle hold both polemics and love together in a kind of necessary unity. One may not exist apart from the other.

Perhaps no one says this better than St. Augustine. From the fifth century his words still inspire: "Once for all, then, a short precept is given you: love, and do what you will: whether you hold your peace, through love hold your peace; whether you cry out, through love cry out; whether you correct, through love correct; whether you spare, through love do you spare: let the root of love be within, of this root can nothing spring but what is good."

The kind of love we are considering here is not the kind we can simply acquire as a matter of personal will. This love, as well as the discernment to test the spirits, comes from Jesus who has chosen us.

The goal of preaching this is not to explain what it means to be chosen, or teach what it means, but to actually *do it* to the hearers. The Gospel along with the Lord's Supper are matched beautifully as they convey the "for *you*" aspect of the grace of Jesus. In the language of the Nike shoe commercial, don't explain the gospel, "Just do it!"

G.W. Chadwick's hymn (#473 in the old red *Service Book and Hymnal*) remains the best proclamation of gospel I have ever heard concerning John 5:16, and remains one of the best hymns to sing or hear at a funeral: "I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew he moved my soul to seek him, seeking me." JL

PROPHETIC VOICE

Authentic Christ communities are governed by a new and different spirit which puts the notions of "sacrifice" and "atonement" in the right perspective. Jesus did not "lay down his life" for God but "for his friends" (Jn 15:13). It is this "greater love" (Jn 15:13), a demonstration "that Jesus the Christ has come in the flesh" (1 Jn 4:2), which separates the authentic spirit of Christ from "the spirit of Antichrist" (1 Jn 4:3). The latter knows and uses all the right language, but it is not committed to a proclamation of "the Good News" (Acts 11:20) in the flesh. When Yahweh "comes to judge the earth" (Ps 98:9) the spirit of Antichrist will be exposed for what it is. DP

The Ascension of Our Lord
May 9, 1991

Psalm 110
Acts 1:1-11
Ephesians 1:16-23
Luke 24:44-53

Since the First Lesson and Gospel are basically two versions of the same story, we find an overabundance of semantic holes that may at first mask significant links. However, there are several areas that may commend themselves to further exploration.

One such area we might call *space and time*, and is related to a second constellation we would call *continuity/discontinuity*. The ascension of Jesus is obviously a spatial metaphor, with many vivid images in the Second Lesson. However, the English phrase "*raised* from the dead" (Gospel) may suggest that the ascension of Jesus is actually an extension of Easter, and that the entire movement of Eastertide is "upward." This would then suggest that ascension is in continuity with the mission and ministry of Jesus. However, Jesus' ascension also "takes him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9) and thus separates disciples from their Lord. There is also a continuity-discontinuity in time, as the disciples, on the one hand, cannot know "times and seasons" (Acts 1:7), but must "stay" (Luke 24:49) and "wait" (Acts 1:4). They have been waiting, with all Israel, for God's restoration (Acts 1:6); they will wait some more (continuity), but there is now a new twist to the story (a discontinuity).

...which brings us to another constellation of images: *heaven/future/hope*. Jesus is received into heaven, and it is from heaven ("power from on high," Luke 24:49) that the disciples await the fulfillment of Jesus' promise. "Heaven," then, is the way to describe this spatially; "future" is the way to talk about it temporally; "hope" or "promise" is the way to speak of it existentially. This hope brings believers with Jesus into his new day ("power in us who believe," Ephesians 1:19), and this bridges the gap/discontinuity which Jesus' ascension at first seems to create. "Why gaze?" There is work to be done, a future to be anticipated.... RR

Seventh Sunday of Easter
May 12, 1991

Psalm 47
Acts 1:15-26
1 John 4:13-21
John 17:11b-19

This day exhibits several strong interlocking constellations of semantic links. One of them revolves around the sense of *belonging*. The word "among" is used repeatedly in the First Lesson, as the disciples try to deal with the loss of Judas and their need to replace him. Please note that the unity of the twelve cannot be broken, and that already the "company" of disciples had grown tenfold to 120 (Acts 1:15). These concerns are matched by the Second Lesson's concern about "abiding in him and he in us" (1 John 4:13,15f), and its sense of how love of God reflects itself in the community's familial love (vv. 19-21). These concerns are also present in the Gospel, with its concern for unity in the name.

A related theme is *perfection* and its polar opposite, *perdition*. The Father's word is perfect truth (John 17:17,19), reflected in the fulfillment of Scripture (Acts 1:16, but also John 17:12) and in the community's perfected love (1 John 4:18). Judas, on the other hand, becomes the sign of imperfection and failure (Acts 1:16,20 and John 17:12), the one outside the truth (and thus "the liar"—1 John 4:20). In this way, Judas aligns himself with the *unbelieving world* (John 17:13-16).

A final cluster of images revolves around the theme, once again, of *witness*. Judas' replacement (First Lesson) must be a witness in the double sense: one who himself "saw" (Acts 1:21, compare with 1 John 4:14) and who would now proclaim what he had seen (Acts 1:25, compare with John 17:18). The community is also to be a witness to the world through the quality of its love and care (1 John 4:21). RR

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

In whose name shall we be kept? In whose name shall our life have its meaning, its hope, its purpose? Jesus says, "Holy Father, keep them in thy name... that they may be one, even as we are one." 1 John says, "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God will abide in them, and they will abide in God."

As we come to the end of the Easter cycle one can't help but notice the power and importance of names, especially the name of our God. Jesus does not pray, "Father, fill my disciples with a sense of self-worth." He does not pray, "Father, grant them worldly success and good health." He prays, "Father, keep them in thy name." What he does not say is as important as what he does say.

In whose name do we worship, speak, laugh? In whose name do we work, play, or waken to? Luther's explanation to the first commandment in the *Large Catechism* merits being read before beginning the sermon for Easter 7. There, in part, we read, "Your god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need.... That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, your God."

Syncretism and pluralism appear to be forging their way into the life and teachings of the church. Pagan prayers are being offered at church gatherings with little or no question about the inherent danger. When I attended the Rutger's University Summer School of Alcohol Studies several years ago, I was interested to note that god was spoken about quite often, and dismayed to hear that god happened to be any name, *any* thing, *any* word you happened to prefer. We were encouraged to choose our own name for god and free it from anything we didn't like. We were told that if we looked deep enough, and worked hard enough, we would discover that at our very center we would find god. WE would be god!

The church has a long practice of hanging onto the coattails of current fashion. Could it be that the latest fad is immersing ourselves in mysticism (spirituality), gnosticism, and paganism? If so (read again 1 John 4:1 for Easter 6), then the Christian church in America faces its most dangerous hour.

In whose name shall we be kept? In whose name shall we worship and draw our strength? The builders of the tower of Babel answered these questions by saying, "That's easy, we'll make our own name. *We'll make a name* for ourselves." And they became confused, scattered.

Think of today's lessons by looking back to the Babel story, and by looking forward to Pentecost, which is the reversal of Babel. Easter 7 is a pivot point. JL

PROPHETIC VOICE

To be a "witness to the resurrection" (Acts 1:22) as an objective, historical event is one thing. To witness to the truth of the resurrection in terms of its ideological and strategic content and implications is another.

The "truth" (Jn 17:19) to which Jesus was consecrated calls us to a new and different witness to the truth of the resurrection. This truthful witness is not preoccupied with understandings which relate only to orthodoxy or to some 'correct' understanding of the resurrection (or any number of other events which have been converted into 'doctrines'). This truthful witness relates to an understanding of the resurrection, and of the mission of Christ communities, which leads to ortho-praxy!

Such a witness understands truth in terms of relationships, not in terms of distinguishing reliable information from falsehoods. And its new and different way of looking at relationships embodies a truthfulness to other human beings and to the creation, a truthfulness in egalitarian values and caring for the earth and its resources, a political and economic truthfulness rooted in a "perfect love" (1 Jn 4:18) which transcends all fears and insecurities, a truthfulness of peace and justice. DP

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Dear Reader

From time to time, it is necessary for us to stop and think: What is the mission of *Currents*? Are we meeting it? We had a special two-hour meeting of our editorial board recently to focus on these two questions. These colleagues—pastors and lay leaders like you—clarified their own thinking but admitted that none of us really knows what *you* think.

In our view here are some things that characterize *Currents*:

We try to do theology in such a way that it enhances your ministry or expands your personal horizons.

We strive to publish articles that are accessible and that take your experience into account. We try to edit out jargon and needless esoteric matters; we encourage writers to cast their articles in a way that whets your appetite and invites your interest. While we hope you keep *Currents* forever, we actually intend to provide materials that you want to read right away and not just put away for future reference.

Currents publishes what the French call "high popularizations." If someone writes something obscure or overly technical or full of footnotes, we urge her or him to send it to one of the standard scholarly journals.

We have no special axes to grind and have avoided partisan editorials. Of course, we want to enhance biblical learning in the church, enrich its worship experience, and advocate for an understanding of Lutheranism as a reforming movement within the body of Christ. "Theology" and "Mission" are not only words in our name, but also concepts that relate harmoniously to one another. But we like to publish articles that take different points of view from each other, and we therefore trust you to sort out what is right for you.

We want nothing to do with ELCA-bashing. Sure, our church has its faults, as does your congregation and our seminaries. But the saints-and-sinners who serve nationally and locally are for us signs of the Spirit's presence and evidence of God's promise. The fact that we are published by three seminaries, each with its unique character and mission, is an essential part of what we are: advocates of the church's mission and ministry; promoters of its unity.

Early on we made a decision to make each issue a smorgasbord: the six or seven articles would be on a variety of topics. Other journals focus on one issue at a time. Each strategy has its pluses and minuses. The trouble with the single issue approach is that if you are uninterested in that particular issue, that month's copy seems irrelevant.

Each issue contains both long and short book reviews. Many of you write that you especially like reviews that give a quick digest and show a book's significance and/or reviews that help you spend your limited book budget. In some scholarly journals, reviewers presuppose that the readers have already seen the book. Occasionally we publish a lengthy essay on a book that is of dramatic importance.

The Preaching Helps section provides exegetical, pastoral, and even prophetic hints for the weekly sermon. We try to provide

competent writers for all of those aspects. Several of you write that you wish Preaching Helps was still published as a separate publication. We understand, but production problems and especially soaring postage rates make that impossible. We hope you understand.

What do you think about all this?

Are there topics that you would like to hear more about? Are there changes that you would suggest? What are your favorite parts of *Currents*? What could we leave out as far as you are concerned?

We would like to hear from you! Please address your letters on editorial policy to me. Make them long or short. Tell us good news or bad news. Both are helpful.

We always invite written contributions from our readers.

If you want to publish an article, send it to me. It's very helpful if you include a diskette if you use a computer. That saves both time and money.

If you would like to review a book, send your name and the area of theology that you would most like reading to Jay C. Rochelle at LSTC.

If you would like to work on the Preaching Helps section, contact Robert Smith at PLTS.

We also invite you to encourage others to read *Currents*. How about the colleague in the neighboring parish? Is *Currents* in your church library? Are there lay people who might want to become subscribers?

Be of good cheer!

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