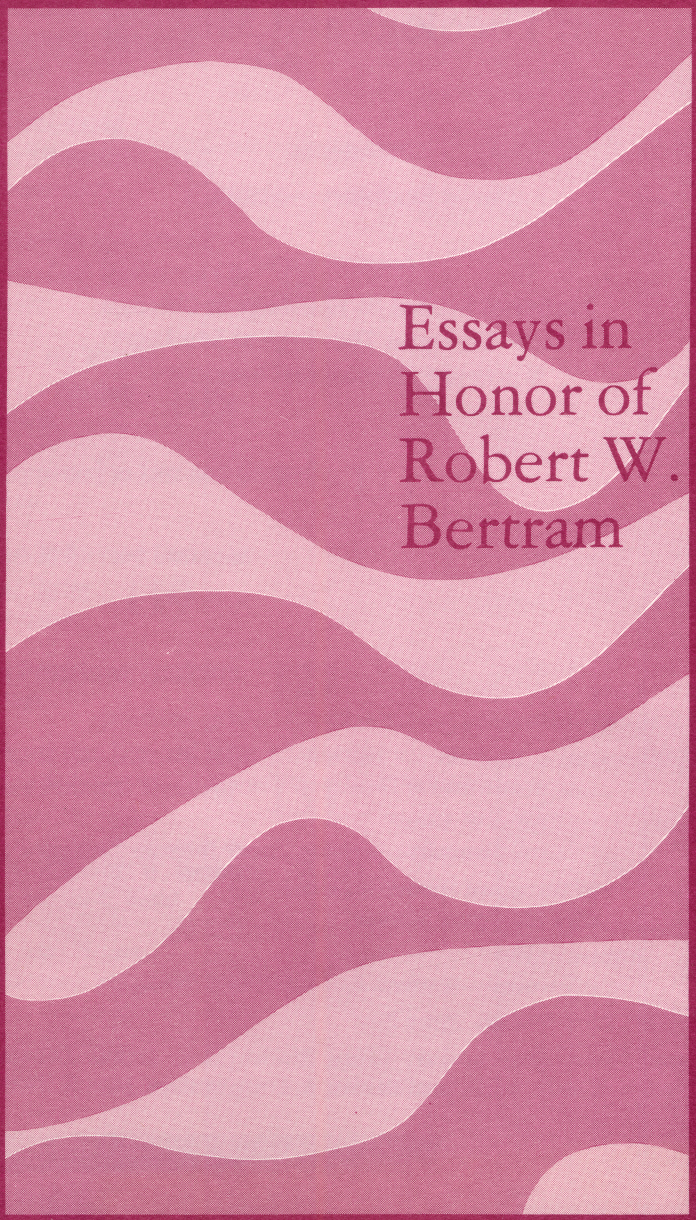
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in Theology and Mission

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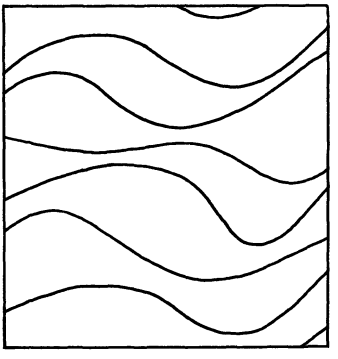
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Just Look Around

Christopher Wren transformed the city of London in the 17th and 18th centuries architecturally. Pride of place among his many buildings goes to the magnificent St. Paul's Cathedral, in whose basement the architect is buried. His tomb is altogether simple, plain, and seemingly totally inadequate. But up on the wall beside it is a plaque which reads: "If you are looking for a monument, just look around!" Look around at St. Paul's, look around at London the city he transfigured; see how he changed his environment.

Robert W. Bertram, in whose honor the essays in this and the next issue of *Currents* were written, has been about the business of changing his environment. As a systematician at Valparaiso University, Concordia Seminary, Christ Seminary—Seminex, and LSTC, Bob has introduced students to the "promising tradition," to an ecumenically attuned law-gospel dynamic, and, above all, to the one thing needful. He has helped students confess with him in moments of crisis in church and society; his best students start to sound like him. Their speech betrays them.

Bob has been an essayist at numerous significant gatherings around the world. He has edited several books and written a number of articles (also for *Currents*), but his "monument" as scholar does not consist of several shelves of books. Rather, it is the transformed students, pastors, friends, colleagues, and lay people who have heard his penetrating questions and his memorable articulations of the gospel and never been the same again. If you are looking for a monument, just look and listen and read around!

When **Arthur Going** and **James Wind,** joint editors with me of this issue, came to me with the idea for it, we were already too late for Bob's sixty-fifth birthday. But we knew—thanks to Bob—that for Christians time has much more to do with *kairos* than *chronos.* The next two issues are *the* hour to honor, belatedly, Robert W. Bertram for sixty-five years and more.

Edward H. Schroeder writes about Robert Bertram and Martin Luther as Liberation theologians, whose praxis of freedom is based on faith alone. The

freedom given by faith leads the believer into political ministry, and the best political theologies are those which commend political ministry in both church and world in such a way as not to lose faith alone, the freedom of God's cruciform promise.

Richard Luecke holds that the divine future for which humans and the world are sustained is not a return to Eden, but to a city transformed. It may be questioned whether we have yet taken the measure of the modern industrial city—and whether faith will be clear and active again until we do. Jesus gave a preferential status to the poor, not because of any special merit in them, but because they were more ready than others to let any claim to merit or anything else go. Freedom is having nothing more to lose.

Cathy Ammlung explores the words "vocation" and "confession." The only way we can confess God as caller is to have our nay-saying self dealt a death blow through the cross. Since confession means "saying with" others, vocation is a multivocal response that leads us into new pathways of community and obedience. To will and to work that God's will should be fulfilled are the highest service we can give to our neighbors. She even applies the grid of vocation-confession to the question of the ordination of women and the vocation of retarded children.

Carl E. Braaten offers thoughts about the all too frequent absence in preaching today of law and gospel. Homiletical theories that ignore the proper distinction between law and gospel are not to be trusted when they ignore the anthropological stipulations of the confessional writings, particularly those bearing on original sin and free will. Along the way, the author reviews various homiletical models (liturgical, narrative, spirituality-related) and offers his own theses on what makes for good preaching.

Joseph A. Burgess proposes guidelines for evaluating bilateral dialogues, ecumenical strategies, the Lutheran-Reformed agreement on Eucharistic presence and ministry, and the Lutheran confessional stance itself. He shows how agreements have been achieved by contemporary dialogues even when the old terminology (that proved divisive) is not used in the articles of agreement, and how advances gained in one dialogue can be assumed, and need not be reinvented, in the next dialogue.

Richard Lischer reviews Martin Luther's use of the sermon as a means of narrating the promise. While Luther often used narrative as only a preface to preaching, in other cases it was the main mode. Narrative is needed because God

revealed himself by means of a historical life whose deeds and purposes unfolded over time and were attested in narrative form, and because of the nature of human beings: the sacred story repeats itself again and again in a series of antitypes in our lives. Later generations of Christians are participants in the continuing story of the gospel. Luther's elaboration of the biblical narrative reaches its climax only when the goal of the story, the promise, is unfolded with intensity and clarity for those present in the congregation.

Allen O. Miller writes as an avowed Calvinist, who learned more about Calvin from an avowed Lutheran, Robert W. Bertram. Luther left the church the treasure of disciplined evangelical piety and the theological dynamic for apostolic ministry; Calvin left the church the treasure of Christian social passion and an ecumenical spirit. Both the church and the state are vehicles for law and grace. The church ministers the love of God through the word and the sacraments, and it ministers the judgment of God through the presbyterial order. Civil government ministers the judgment of God through the sword of the magistrate, and it ministers the love of neighbor through representative democracy and the responsibility for human rights.

Steven C. Kuhl has pulled together a bibliography of the writings of Robert Bertram. This was a labor of love and legerdemain since a number of the items are yet unpublished, and the bibliography had to be compiled in secrecy so that this issue could be a surprise to the honoree.

If you want a monument for Robert Bertram that you can hold in your hand, try this description, by Richard Luecke, of how Bob articulates the mystery of the righteous God who justifies the unrighteous:

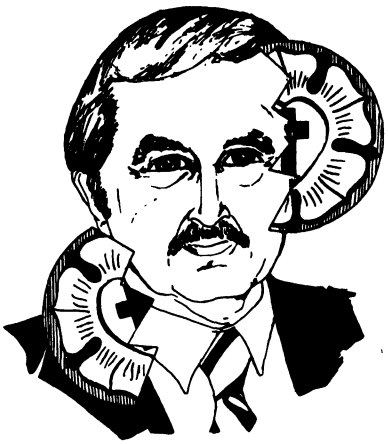
"There is nothing like a Bertram exposition of this point of points, circling that center, fending off misunderstandings, making words serve new meanings, until it seems language itself is no longer under the law."

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

A Time for Confessing Is a Time for Liberating

Edward H. Schroeder
The Crossings Community, St. Louis, Missouri

Bob Bertram became a Liberation theologian in the course of the Missouri Synod controversy of the 70s. Yet neither he nor anyone else noticed that until some years later. Even today in 1987 the confessing movement in Missouri seems so pale in comparison with "real" Liberation theology movements in the Third World. Yet it is Third World Liberation theologians themselves in dialogue with Bob and his theological work—more of them from Africa and Asia than from Latin America—who corroborate the claim: The time for confessing in Missouri was our time for liberation. Bob's analysis—social and theological—during and after the apocalyp-



tic events parallels their own, they say. Some have even gone so far as to say he has helped them understand and clarify their own. Bob's dialogue with them has been mutually fruitful. He learned from them and they from him. His distinctive gift: clarity for seeing and articulating the *sola fide* (justification by faith alone) as the bottom line in times for confessing and times for liberation.

Bertram Among the Liberationists

In the decade of systematic theology at the St. Louis Seminex, 1974–1983, confession and liberation moved into priority position in classroom instruction. Bob Bertram was the prime mover in this refocusing of the curriculum. The last of several curriculum revisions during those years required only two courses of students in "dogmatics." They were "Christian Confession: Classical" (the ecumenical creeds and the confessing at Augsburg) and "Christian Confession: Contemporary" (20th century movements beginning with the Kirchenkampf in Hitler's Germany, our own LCMS experience, and the confessing in Liberation theology movements of today).

The procedure was to extrapolate from the historic confessions those features which are "classic": the Christology of the ecumenical creeds, the *sola fide* of the Reformation confessions. The second step was to use them, as the catalog stated, critically to appreciate today's theological movements and appropriate them for our own theology.

By the time of Seminex's departure from St. Louis, five or six features formed the matrix. Bob's first presentation of them came in 1977 at a conference on the 400th anniversary of the Formula of Concord. Bob's assignment was to "do something" with the adiaphora issue in Article Ten of the Formula of Concord and its relevance for today. That arcane article of the second generation of Lutheran confessors served to open the door to the insight that times for confessing are times for confronting coercive authority run amok within the church of Christ. And the best response is the Gospel's own freedom grounded in the unenforceable authority of the cross and enacted *sola fide,* by faith alone.

In the matrix for "Christian Confessions: Contemporary" in the early 80s these features were spelled out as follows: Times for confessing when—God forbid—they should be given to us are: 1) Times for *martyria*: Christians thrust upon the witness stand in conflict situations, with martyrdom clearly at hand; 2) Times for protesting "gospel-plus": saying no to imposed alien addenda that wilt the freshness of the genuine Good News; 3) Ecumenical appeal: appealing to the Gospel's own goodness as sufficient grounds for the church's oneness; 4) Redefining authority: protesting coercive authority within the church by speaking and living the Gospel's own cruciform clout as "authority enough"; 5) Appealing to and for the oppressed: since all false gospels by definition reinstate oppression, every fresh confessing of the Good News unfolds in solidarity with the oppressed; 6) Ambiguous certitude: the confessors' words and actions are never immune to the vexing doubt whether they said or did the right thing. *Sola fide* praxis is always full of risk, not only that the venture will succeed, but also that the venturer is right (= righteous) in the venturesome act.

In classroom instruction the two required courses intersected to show that present-day

defenders of the church's classical confessions need help to see the liberation praxis flowing from the heart of classical Christology and Reformation *sola fide.* Conversely, Liberation theologies today often need help in their christological and *sola fide* groundings. The axiom is: The best theologies—confessional and liberational—are those grounded on justification by faith alone.

Bob's theological work for the last 15 years has been a set of individual exercises on this axiom. His not-yet-finished book on *A Modern Time for Confessing* will, *deo volente,* make the case for this claim in a full-scale monograph. Until that blessed book-event arrives, we shall have to work at the connection with the essays and addresses he has already given us. This essay is such an attempt.

The best theologies are grounded on justification by faith.

The time for confessing in Missouri was without a doubt the prime mover in linking confessing and liberation in Bertram's theology. Another was the fortuitous appointments he received during these years to ecumenical positions. One put him in the U.S. Roman Catholic/Lutheran dialogue group, another put him on the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. With the former came the long years of hard work on the *sola fide,* the classical fork in the road between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. With the second came first-hand contact with Christian leaders in liberation movements around the world. In both assignments Bob did not stay in the back of the bus.

Another nudge came from Asian and African theologians who came to Seminex during the 80s. They not only brought their own Liberation theology and experience to us, but also sharpened the Seminex community's vision for our own liberation movement. In fact, two Liberation theology seminaries confessed their solidarity in the names they chose for themselves, Korean Seminex in Seoul and Aoyama Seminex in Tokyo. Thus Bob (and others of the St. Louis Seminex as well) encountered first-hand and face-to-face Makato Midzuno, Hiroo Sekita, and Kenichi Kida of Aoyama Seminex, Suh Nam Dong, Ahn Byung Mu, and Stephen Moon of Korean Seminex, along with Kosuke Koyama (Thailand and Japan), Motlalepula Chabaku (South Africa), Patrick Kalilombe (Malawi), M. M. Thomas (India), Masao Takenaka (Japan), Kofi Appiah-Kubi (Ghana), Dom Helder Camara (Brazil), and Francisco Claver (Philippines).

Not surprising from this listing, it is Asian and African theologians who have played the largest role in Bob's recent work, more so than those from Latin America. He has undertaken research travel to both continents recently to pursue the dialogue with Christians there.

Bob Bertram's first public venture into Liberation theology was probably his 1970 essay presented, as he says in the foreword, "in Germany (to) a conference of students, including an impressive representation of

Marxist-Leninists" who asked him to respond to their question: How free are the American churches? Note the date. Gustavo Gutierrez' classic manifesto, *A Theology of Liberation,* was written in 1971. The English translation appeared in 1973.

I never heard it quite that way before.

The locale, the context, the question, and above all, the answer Bob gives in this early essay are "quintessential Bertram." The locale: Bob hob-nobs around the world. Rome, Munich, Odessa, Bangalore, Strasbourg, Stavanger, Johannesburg, Windhoek, Geneva, Tokyo, Taipei, Seoul, Manila, Lima—to name just the ones I can remember—are where he has been for theological work in recent years. The context: Bob is in theological conversation with dialogue partners most of us never even meet: Buddhists, Jews, high-tech scientists, Marxists, philosophers, as well as the Christian ecumenical waterfront from Russian Orthodox to Mennonite, from liberationists to theological right-wingers. The question: Bob has antennae for the Zeitgeist. Liberation was "in the air," he says, in 1970 and he just happened to be some place where he was asked to make it his agenda. The answer: Bertram regularly changes every question he receives before he answers it. This time the change was from "How free are the American churches?" to the better question: "How are the American churches free if and when they ever really are free?"

In responding, Bertram takes Martin Luther King's classic *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* and reads it for his hearers to show *how* churchly freedom happens, if and when it does. But in, with, and under the exegesis of King's letter is the Bertram fillip: as good as MLK's own liberation theology is, the freedom he is preaching and that he embodies is "even better than that." So Bertram amplifies here and there "as the author himself surely would have done, had he gotten around to it," by tracking MLK's theological resources back to their own primal source, the Liberating Christ of the New Testament confessors. When you get to the double entendre that regularly comes with the last line, you have in hand "a fresh preaching of the Gospel" (Bob's own proposed translation for Melanchthon's *evangelium pure docetur* in the Augsburg Confession). This fresh rewording makes the thesis quite credible: The churches of America are free—if and when they ever really are—*sola fide.* It elicits the reader's response, "I never heard it quite that way before."

Bob's most recent venture into Liberation theology, as of this writing, is his January 1987 presentation to the Society for Christian Ethics in Boston, entitled, "The *crux* of Philippine Liberation Theology." It is a *tour-de-force*: the locale, the context, the question, and above all his answer. The *crux* of Philippine liberation theology is, of course, the role that the Cross (of Christ) plays in it. A prime example for this is the Philippine Jesuit, Bishop Francisco Claver, little known in the West but a giant in the movement. How does the cross become the *crux* of Claver's Liberation theology? Answer: *sola fide.* What

makes this Philippine Liberation theology distinct in comparison with other liberation voices today? Answer: the clarity of Claver's grounding in *sola fide,* which also removes blinders for his tracking and then crossing the unfinished liberation movement in his native land.

If *Sola Fide*, then Luther a Liberationist?

We could seek to construct from Bertram's essays and addresses the *sola fide* grounding that unites Christian confessing and liberating. But instead, we opt to draw on Luther. Bob, after all, borrowed heavily from Luther, who borrowed heavily from John and Paul, who borrowed heavily from their Lord and ours. For our reconstruction here, we will also borrow, this time from a 1986 doctoral dissertation by a United Church of Christ pastor, Willard T. Pierce, one of Bertram's Seminex graduate students. Pierce's work carries the title, *The Value of Freedom in the Political Theology of Luther and its Promise for Contemporary Political Theology.*

That *sola fide* was the center of Luther's theology is a truism. It is also taken as a truism that Luther's *sola fide* has no possible connection to today's Liberation theology. If one were to say, as we shall, that Luther's *sola fide* not only grounds a theology of liberation, but did so already in the 16th century, one would not find many allies in the current guild of theologians, especially American theologians—even American Lutheran ones. The standard wisdom against this thesis regularly raises the flag of the Peasants' War that supposedly closes the case against Luther as a liberationist. So in academe today Juergen Moltmann, as Pierce says, "speaks for many": Luther is OK on theology of the cross, not OK on political ethics, let alone Liberation theology. Luther, he claims, "unburdens" Christians from the praxis of freedom in the political arena.

Pierce makes a compelling case to show that this view does not do justice to the *sola fide* at the center of both. *Theologia crucis* works only when you trust it; i.e., *sola fide,* not *sola imitatio.* It is the *sola fide* that opens the door in Luther's theology for moving out liberatively into the public arena. It is *sola fide* that sustains a Christian liberation praxis.

The sequence is not hard to track in Luther. 1) Sinners (un-free under the law) trust the crucified Christ as God's last Word to them. 2) That Word is an offer of a "sweet swap": this crucified God-man in exchange for your sinner-self. 3) The swap works *sola fide,* only if you trust the offer ("Glaubst du, hast du; glaubst du nicht, hast du nicht"). 4) When you trust him, the offered one, you have him and all his benefits, and he has you and all your deficits. 5) When you have made the swap, you are free from your deficits and possessor of, and possessed by, Christ's freedom. 6) When you are free, your public person puts freedom into praxis.

In a sermon from 1534 Luther called this offer of justification by faith/freedom by faith "eine seltsame, ja aergerlich Predigt," an odd, even aggravating proposal. "How can that count for our freedom when we contribute nothing and are set free by believing in a third party, who died on a cross as an accursed and condemned human being?" The secret, of course, lies in that Third Party. What makes *sola fide* work is not the strength of the faith on the believer's part,

but the strength of faith's object, the Christ who is the partner in the sweet swap. In Bertram's own doctoral dissertation he devotes an entire chapter to the mechanics of the sweet swap, how it works and why it works. That chapter has been printed separately (see bibliography) under the title: "How Our Sins Were Christ's." We shall not rehearse that here, but instead develop the freedom theme in *sola fide.*

When the Christ is trusted, a threefold resource for liberation unfolds. First there is liberation from the all-pervasive necessity to justify oneself. Second, there is liberation from the drive to carry out this justification at the expense of others, the iron-clad law that self-justifiers are compelled to follow. Third, there is liberation from anxiety about death, the grim nemesis that drives oppressors willy-nilly into inflicting unfreedom on others. Another one of Bertram's doctoral candidates, William Yancey, made this set of themes the focus of his recent dissertation.

> What does Christic lived freedom look like?
>
> 1. It is freedom *from* the law, not freedom *for* the law as Kant maintains.
>
> 2. The locale for that freedom is in our relationship with God. Christian liberty is free access to God.
>
> 3. How does one live out a law-free life? Is it law-less? Libertine? No. But that danger can never be removed without returning to life "under" the law. The Pauline alternative to "being under the law" is "being led by the Spirit." All roads of the new creation lead to the open space that is law-free. Clearly no "rules" can be set down, therefore, for the praxis of this freedom. That is part of the eerie, "odd, yes aggravating" character of life in freedom *sola fide.* It can be lived out only in case-by-case praxis with the free person herself enacting it on location.
>
> 4. So it is, on the one hand, "believed freedom"—trusted even in the face of evidence to the contrary—and, on the other hand, "acted-out freedom." It asserts itself in specific and particular situations of unfreedom. This makes it powerful, for oppression is *the* place where Christian liberation arises. Its power is the personal presence of the Risen Christ in God's new creatures defying every kind of interference from the old world of law, sin, and death. It is radically subversive because it is actively at work to bring down all the structures of the old creation and replace them with the Kingdom of God. The metaphors that Bertram likes to use of "underground infiltrators, guerilla warriors" are not out of place for describing the children of God and their liberation agenda. Their commission is cosmic.

Pierce's summary on Luther says it well: "Christian political ministry is the praxis of freedom. It is grounded in the gospel of justification by faith alone, framed within the dialectic of law and promise and worked out in both kingdoms of God's world."

If that is so, why did Luther fudge on the Peasants' revolution, the liberation movement of his day, complete with a Liberation theology supporting it? Admittedly, the players in that complex tragedy and the events themselves are one of church history's prime jigsaw puzzles. But this much needs hearing: Luther did not object to the Peasants' cause and the justness of it. What he rejected was the sort of Liberation theology they followed, inevitably leading to the same issue that is largely unresolved in today's Liberation theology, viz., violence. For Luther, faith in a crucified Christ could not result in crucifying someone else, even if the other person is your oppressor. His cry to the peasants, "Suffering, suffering, cross, cross" was his

encouragement to them, not his program for what to inflict on the oppressors.

With such a motto, however, how would Luther's theology effect liberation? One source for answering this question is his correspondence, that voluminous collection of letters that he wrote (without word processor!) in daily "political ministry" to all sorts and conditions of people.

The last thing you could say of these letters is that Luther "unburdens" Christians from a liberation praxis of their *sola fide.* On the contrary, in case after case he scores the oppressors and counsels the oppressed not only about their rights, but also about faith's grounding for their own courageous acts of resistance and opposition. He often calls for radical structural changes in the political economy, though he is, admittedly, not sanguine about their chances of success. His correspondents are urged to model not Superman, but the crucified God, in kenotic solidarity with their fellow oppressed. With all due respect for the structures, ordained of God and all, Luther first calls for action to make the structures conform to the rubrics of Romans 13—*for* justice and *for* the preservation of life. And he also pushes for occasional undermining even of the well-functioning structures of the old creation with some experimental infiltration, to subvert them by replacement with the new order of the new creation. But that newer one can never be coerced, for coercion is a trademark of the old. It can only be risked, *sola fide,* of course, as a third option in the face of any of the either/or's that the old age seems to lay before us (e.g., either resistance or servitude).

Luther's classic document on Christians in the political arena is his treatise, *On Secular Authority, How Far It Should be Obeyed.* This document remains one of Lutheranism's best-kept secrets. It starts by giving the biblical grounding for both of God's kingdoms in this one world of ours. And the kingdom that needed the most help in Luther's day (ours too?) was the secular one, that multiplex network of worldly work to which God calls each of us. That turf and its systems are not first of all demonic; they are a gift of God. The authority in praxis there, even when it goes to coercive means, is godly in origin. It is to be exercised in a way that secures justice and preserves life for all those encompassed in its particular realm. Since it comes with such credentials, the last thing *sola-fide* Christians can do is "unburden" themselves of their secular ministry there.

Christian political ministry is the praxis of freedom.

In the second section of the treatise Luther raises the question of the limits of this secular authority, how far it should be obeyed. To the surprise of most contemporary readers, Luther discusses the limits question with reference to the church, not to the secular world. In the church of the 16th century, supposedly Christ's new turf of freedom, coercion was *modus operandi.* Measured by the Gospel's *sola fide,* that was clearly illegitimate. There is *no* place in the

internal governance of Christ's people where secular authority (the power of some "sword" to enforce or coerce an action) is authorized. It is off limits in every case. *Sola fide* is, first of all, a praxis of the heart. The "sword" can reach the heart only to destroy it. So the first limiting of the extent of secular authority is to remove it completely from the church's internal political praxis.

Justice is replaced with mercy, fairness with forgiveness.

But what then are the limits in the old creation for the legitimate God-given "power of the sword?" That is Luther's concern in the final part of the treatise. Here he personally addresses Duke John, heir apparent to the Saxon electoral throne, the one to whom he dedicated the writing. Luther reminds the prince that he is a steward, God's caretaker of an office and a people who inhabit the land that John rules. Furthermore, it is the prince's calling "in Christ" to be devoted to the well-being of his subjects. That means the political realm in which John operates does not exist for John's benefit, but for the benefit of those he rules. With example and encouragement Luther draws out for John the twin threads of faith's freedom and kenotic solidarity for the political ministry that John will soon assume. In short, Luther calls on the prince to lead the Liberation theology movement in his own realm, and as John does so, counsels Luther, the dear holy cross will not be far away from his own back.

The treatise *On Secular Authority* thus articulates a *sola fide* praxis of freedom in both church (Part II) and world (Part III). The Christ-trusters who are the church live simultaneously in both of God's regimes—the new and the old. God's own differentiated modes of operation in these two realms mark the difference for *sola fide* practice in each. In the old eon God manages affairs under the law of fairness. Justice means people get what they have coming to them. The divine assignment to the *sola fide* political minister is: practice justice; preserve life.

In God's new eon management model, justice is replaced with mercy, fairness with forgiveness. As God does, so does the political minister—and the dear holy cross will not be far away.

The value of freedom in Luther's theology vis-à-vis churchly oppression is a new resource for recent Roman Catholic theology. Especially Liberation theologians in that tradition now going public with their own fresh praxis of that "odd, yes aggravating" Gospel of freedom find Luther a winsome ally for liberation within the church. One such Roman theologian from Africa confided at last summer's LWF Liberation theology seminar in Strasbourg that his just-published first book in English was "full of Luther." Luther's theology undergirds his cry that African Catholics be liberated from Rome's oppression to assume *sola fide* responsibility for their own church life. But there is nary a footnote to Luther anywhere in the book because "I'm already suspect enough in my own communion for the Gospel I'm proclaiming."

But Luther's theology as a resource for political liberation? That is a new horizon

with not many looking for light to come from that direction. There are a few, however, in both the northern and southern hemispheres, some of them Bob's colleagues, others his students, who—in Pierce's words—see the "promise for contemporary political theology" coming from Luther's theology of freedom. I paraphrase Pierce's conclusions as my own to this essay:

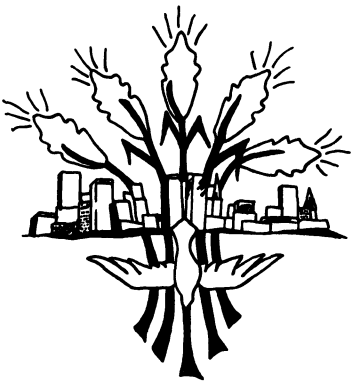
> 1) Justifying faith is prerequisite for any Liberation theology. 2) The freedom given by faith leads the believer into political ministry. 3) The dialectic of law and promise provides the framework for political ministry's analysis and action. 4) Justification by faith alone calls forth the new human community, the church, men and women directed by their Lord out into the world as little Christs. 5) Christians practicing such freedom in the world actualize Christ's new kingdom in and with, but no longer under, the old creation. 6) Thus the best political theologies are those which commend political ministry in both church and world in such a way as not to lose *sola fide*, the freedom of God's cruciform promise.

One of the blessings of the person and work of Robert W. Bertram is the freshness with which he has sought to show us that "this is most certainly true."



Gospel Confession and Arts of Ministry in the Late Industrial City

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When seventeen year old Louis Sullivan got off the train in Chicago, the city was digging out after the great fire of 1871 and getting ready to rebuild as though from empty space. Later he described that first encounter with this paradigmatic industrial city:

> Louis tramped the platform, stopped, looked toward the city, ruins around him; looked at the sky; and as one alone, stamped his foot, raised his hand, and cried in a full voice: "THIS IS THE PLACE FOR ME!"[1]

[1]Louis H. Sullivan, *The Autobiography of an Idea* (New York: Dover, 1956), 197. This book was first published in 1924, the year in which "Sullivan, who gave Chicago its good name as the architectural Athens . . . died on skid row dreaming of the City of Man"—Studs Terkel, *Chicago* (New York: Parthenon, 1986), 86. Chicago boosters, media, industrialists, and many fictional characters like Sister Carrie who came to Chicago by train, all shared an enthusiasm for Chicago after the fire, a feverish excitement for the new industrial city—and foreboding.

Do any of us still respond to the city in this way?

This paper honoring a gospel confessor and teacher of confessors in that city will ask whether and how we can at least say "Here I stand."

A certain fascination for the city seems needed simply to understand Hebrews 11. Without some hope for the city we might lack a sense of its depravity—no angels, no devils. When the first Christians looked around for a word with which to designate unbelievers, they chose the term "pagans," a Latin word for country dwellers. For lack of biblical wisdom about the city—fascination for it and hope for it—the pagans' view was likely to be too simple. They were "rubes" in this sense—wherever they lived.

Before bringing such wisdom to a much later industrial city than that to which young Sullivan came, we should take account of two possible misgivings. The first is that talk about the city might appear to leave out the suburbs where many people and pastors live, not to say the country where some people still live and the wilderness where a few souls have gone to live. None of these is thereby exonerated from what follows. If by "city" we mean the characteristic large human settlements of any time, that includes the way those populations related themselves to the countryside and wilderness. Suburbanization is accordingly a primary characteristic of the modern city; during the past decade, in fact, suburbs surpassed centrally incorporated cities in population and political power. It would prove comparatively easy for us simply to cite certain horrendous and mounting statistics of deprivations in the central city and then ask suburban congregations to be a bit more generous. But the question of the city today is much more fundamental and engaging for biblical people than that—for all of us and not just the social action committee.

A second misgiving is that in talking about the city with people of faith we might deflect attention from the personal and interpersonal nurture which is basic to congregational life and which we neglect to our peril. For this, fortunately, we now have some hard data. A study conducted in the triangle cities of Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill during the early 1970s undertook to investigate the level of public participation or apathy in middle America. To this study Donald Shriver, now president of Union Seminary, and sociologist Karl Ostrom added a sidecar on church people. They began by designating certain "marks" of biblical behavior in society for the purpose of seeing whether and where this traditional complex of dispositions and actions is to be found today. (Anybody who wondered whether there *were* any such identifiable social marks of faith, as distinct from ecclesiastical marks, was invited to consider the alternative: what if there *aren't* any? And to recall the words of Jesus: "By their fruits you shall know them.")

Beyond the public act of worship, church people in this study did not rank higher than the general population in manifesting those designated biblical marks of public behavior. They in fact ranked a bit lower on the scale of intentionality toward strangers, including racial openness. But there were churches and there were churches. In congregations which included consideration of social issues in their programs, members did express more tolerance in racial matters.

A third set of scales produced startling, mutually confirming results: in congrega-

tions where members practiced some alternating movements between intra- and extra-congregational activity, all the scales went up together. Most surprising (except on reflection), political practicalities were consonant with a lively sense of the forgiveness of sins. The authors cited Augustine's *City of God:*

> Our very righteousness . . . is yet in this life of such a kind that it consists rather in the remission of sins than in the perfecting of virtues. Witness the prayer of the whole city of God in its pilgrim state, for it cries to God by the mouth of all its members, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."[2]

Get busy in public and there's no way to avoid joining that cry.

The City as a Focus for Faith

In every age biblical people have been required to come to terms with the city, and with their own particular cities, simply by way of clarifying what their faith means and what it does. Jacques Ellul has shown this in a typical syntactical way with respect to the various ages traversed within the Bible itself. In the Genesis saga the first city builder was Cain, the first murderer, who fabricated a city east of Eden in a spirit of mutually reinforcing pride and fear. The people of Babel sought to make a name for themselves and became a byword for non-communication, which is traceable to pride and fear no less than to differing natural languages. Nineveh, "that bloody city" according to the prophet Nahum, became in Jonah a sign that repentance is both needed and possible. (The Ninevites remained bloody "rubes" to Jonah.) Jerusalem, chosen for the sake of David, became a city of promise.

Jesus, great David's greater son, entered an occupied Jerusalem bearing the burden of the curse of Cain but remembering the divine regard. He went to the streets with the poor of the city by way of saying these were not *ex*cluded but *in*cluded in the city that was to come, a city that was already present with him. In the end all the fearful-prideful powers of the old city attacked him—and were nailed with him to a cross outside the city wall. Now for the biblical surprise: the divine future for which humans and the world are sustained is not a return to Eden or a Golden Age, it is not Green Pastures or Cloud Nine; it is for a return to a city transformed. As Jerusalem was chosen for the sake of David, the human city is chosen for the sake of Christ. For Ellul, what the Bible said about "urban dynamics" can refer to forces whose effects were never more apparent than they are today. What it says about the neutralization of "the powers" and the possibility of significant action in Christ can un-

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[2] *City of God,* xix.27. Shriver and Ostrom reviewed their study in a follow-up book, *Is there Hope for the City?* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977). On the congregation as a bridge to public life we have Parker Palmer's congregationally useful *The Company of Strangers* (New York: Crossroad, 1983). Many will testify to a fresh vitality and efficacy that come to the prayer of congregations which pray not only for the sick or for world peace but over practical decisions they will themselves be making which affect the life of their community. When the Eucharist is celebrated in the context of a real meal and real societal issues, which sharpen the apostolic warning against holding this observance where "some are full and some are empty," there may come a richer realization of the real presence of the paschal, betrayed, but liberating and community-creating Lord. Pastor Fred Reklau of Grace, Evanston, IL, has sent me the testimony of Brian Wren, "Justice and Liberation in the Eucharist," *Christian Century,* October 1, 1986.

derlie Christian style even and especially in modern industrial cities.[3]

This biblical faith helped to produce the very different responses of Romans 13 and Revelation 13, accommodation under Christian emperors and the "two cities" of Augustine. Monastic communities set the model for towns in the middle ages; but when Italian merchant towns and those of the Hanseatic League began to blow another spirit, church reformers (in the phrase of Max Weber) brought the focus down from the monasteries into the streets—where no less a calling was to be practiced and *could* be practiced through forgiveness of sins and a theology of the cross.[4] An elder Martin Luther complained that the German burghers were glad enough for the first part of this but inclined to forget the second.

The human city is for the sake of Christ.

By the time of Ben Franklin, if we accept a historical judgment by the authors of *Habits of the Heart,* work was being defined in secular terms rather than as calling, and society in individualistic rather than communitarian terms.[5] Daniel Rodgers has described a series of nervous responses made in the course of a steady retreat before advancing industrial successes.[6] First (to summarize) critics questioned: Was industrialization right? Divines compared the new assembly lines with slave labor and their communities to houses built on sand. Near the end of the 19th century, with new products flooding the markets and with labor fomenting fearful disputes, the question changed: Could it last? Near the end of the 20th century there came a third response: If we don't produce in this way, somebody else will! This brings us to the late industrial city.

Since *De rerum novarum* in 1891 (the very decade during which "unemployment" became a public word), Roman Catholic pontiffs and councils have warned that industrial progress should not be allowed to disrupt actual communities; today John Paul II is still saying, in *Laborem exercens* and more insistently in subsequent speeches, that the organization of work is "key to the entire societal question." Church bodies, clergy, and theologians have supported in some degree all three major movements of the present century to offset worker displacement and community disruption in the industrial city. William Carwardine (a Methodist preacher in Pullman), Walter Rauschenbusch, Reinhold Niebuhr and others espoused the labor movement; though labor organization has not succeeded in stabilizing communities in the face of footloose factories and resulting unemployment. Today

[3]Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), especially 163–82.

[4]For evidence that the reformers, free church preachers, and Puritans resisted many impulses thought to belong to "the spirit of capitalism" see, among others, Kurt Samuelsson, *Religion and Economic Action* (New York: Harper, 1957), 27–80.

[5]Robert Bellah *et al., Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 33.

[6]See Daniel Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America 1850–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), chaps. 2, 3, 6.

it represents a declining percentage of the work force and suffers a declining influence. Clergy marched with the Civil Rights movement but that seems now to have lost much of its fervor and clarity, and the statistics of racial segregation and deprivation in Chicago as in other cities are worse today than they were in the 1950s and 1960s. Finally, religious bodies have joined in multiplying public and philanthropic remedial services for the casualties of industrial society; yet in every category (health, mental health, juvenile justice, family services, community services) resources have doubled and tripled as percent of GNP since 1960—and so have the number of clients. A question arises: Have we got the question straight? "The worst and most corrupting of lies is a problem poorly stated" (Georges Bernanos).

Let this hop-skip-and-jump look backward serve to suggest that in every age the church has sought to clarify and activate its faith with reference to the city in which it was set down. It may be questioned, however, whether we have yet taken the measure of the modern industrial city—and whether faith will be clear and active again until we do.

Bringing the Industrial City into Focus

On the face of it, the modern industrial city has been formed by two great migrations. The first was a massive movement inward from the land as the mechanization, chemicals, and capital of agribusiness took turf from beneath the feet of farm families and removed tools from their hands. That this is now an international phenomenon may be seen in the streaming of families to Third World cities and in the numberless boat people afloat in the world—the North American story on a fast reel.

The second was a movement outward from the city. Earlier European migrants to North American cities came infused with a desire to work in indentured ways for a time and then open a shop of their own. But new machinery and capital, especially in times of war, caused little shops to merge into big ones, and not only to merge but to move—from city to suburbs (at two times the rate of workers) to neighboring states to sunbelt and overseas in search of cheaper labor or greater productivity, with workers running to catch up at every step along the way right down to the water's edge—leaving devastated human communities behind.

Bertram's word has been "confession."

An urban ideology grew up in support of these trends. During the 1920s and 1930s there arose at the University of Chicago a school of urban sociology taking its model not from politics or civics but biology.[7] A

[7]This model was developed by Robert Park, Ernest Burgess, and Roderick McKenzie in a nearly canonic text, *The City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925). Thorough exception is taken in a paper by Calvin Bradford, Leon Finney, Stanley Hallett, and John McKnight, "Structural Disinvestment—A Problem in Search of a Policy" (Evanston: Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Studies, Northwestern University, n.d.).

"human ecology" picture of urban development was adapted from social Darwinistic theory, in accordance with which stronger species take over a space, use it up, and then move on, to be followed on that used-up land by lesser species with lesser tools. Corresponding doctrines were then propounded including the following. 1) Neighborhoods like all things biological have a natural life cycle; they grow up, they grow old, they decline and die. Gone was the idea of self-renewing communities, let alone "eternal cities," having a capacity to pose new problems and resolve them. 2) Racial change is a primary cause of such decline, some races causing it faster than others. Real estate appraisal and training documents actually listed races in terms of their value-destroying capacities, until user associations were threatened with a lawsuit in 1977. 3) The most viable communities are those in which sleeping places and working places are far apart. Did we believe these things? —We *saw* them! Generations of graduate students went out and proved them over and over again. People devoutly believed these things who abhorred the name of Darwin. They became truer all the time.

Such ideas had consequences. Money now flowed from city to suburbs to sunbelt and overseas seeking largest fiscal returns—like water running down the mountains to the seas. Actual city communities were left high and dry. The very idea of community, except in demographic terms, became vague.

The result is a central incorporated city in which we find new numbers and new kinds of homeless persons, in which most children are born to single mothers and many of the latter live on used-up spaces in large enclaves of single mothers. An entire generation of minority youth is virtually excluded from the going work world or from earning enough to sustain a household. Together with Hispanic and Asian newcomers these will constitute overwhelmingly the citizenry of that city in the future. They are treated in terms of their serviceable needs rather than their unused capacities. The time comes when, in view of investments needed for salvific new markets and military expenditures required to defend them and a way of life, we can no longer afford those burgeoning services for which clients are unable to pay.

A necessary middle term seems missing but there are obstacles to sight.[8]

Gospel Confession in Public

During the early years of this writer's learning with and learning from Robert Bertram, "social ethics" was a familiar and favorite phrase of seminarians, including some who wanted to become something besides clergy. Bertram's word, however, has been "confession" which he explicitly distinguishes from ethical expression or protest "with the volume turned up." His teaching has helped Lutherans think of themselves as

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[8]In his 1985 *Social Service Review* lecture at the University of Chicago entitled "Cycles of Deprivation and the Underclass Debate," William Justus Wilson recalled a time when poor people and professionals used the same churches, schools, streets, stores, and parks. Paul Ricoeur, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Stanley Hauerwas have been reminding us that working communities afford the unique and necessary space and time for developing character and virtues—that there is no substitute for this in monolithic public schooling or in abstract moral principles.

a "confessional" movement in Christendom and Christ Seminary—Seminex to call itself a "confessional" movement in Lutheranism. "Confession" could help give substance to the word "new" in "the new Lutheran church" (with its new metropolitan synods), though up to now, perhaps, there has been more talk about constitution than confession.

We are rectified by a righteousness *extra nos* in Christ.

The New Testament words for "confess," *homologeo* and *martyreo,* mean coming to say together whatever it takes to express, and not to deny, the nature of faith in Jesus Christ and (especially in the latter term) to do so in such a way as to stake our lives on it. While a fairly uniform *kerygma* may be isolated in the various New Testament writings, this was never actually separate from confession which assumed a somewhat different form in different situations. Differences in the gospels (these are never "harmonized" without loss) may be understood as part of a confessional history within the Scriptures themselves.

In the context of first century Judaism simply to say "Jesus is the Christ" was enough to make clear what faith entailed and this in fact incurred the persecution and imprisonments recounted in the Acts of the Apostles. In the Roman Empire it was sufficient to say "Jesus is the Lord" and Polycarp offered his life by doing so. Early Christian confessions, as Oscar Cullman showed in a work so titled, differed in statement but existed alongside each other. Something more universal came to be needed along the road to Chalcedon and the Nicene Creed, lest the full mystery and centrality of Christ be diminished in the face of conflicting formulations. No less was at stake, in the view of the confessors, at Augsburg in 1530: the very truth of Christ (and therewith the truth of God and of humans) was at issue in the article on justification. In Christ we have not only a disclosure of divine love but the forever adorable and unfathomable accomplishment which alone grounds the mystery of the righteous God who justifies the unrighteous. Therefore we are saved by looking to him and not to ourselves, by faith and not by works; to look to the latter is to *be* in error.[9]

The Augsburg Confession was a testimony given within the church itself. Articles following Augsburg IV, "Of Justification," treated churchly matters—the office of ministry, the nature of the church, the sacraments, usages and ceremonies, the power of the bishops. When these were rejected by Roman ecclesiastical critics, they were all taken up again in the *Apology.* Justified-by-faith-alone-people were not to fall back into the bondage of law and works—not even to a law of churchly works and not even to a law that such works have to be abolished.

[9]There is nothing like a Bertram exposition of this point of points, circling that center, fending off misunderstandings, making words serve new meanings, until it seems language itself is no longer under the law. See Bertram's essay, " 'Faith Alone Justifies': Luther on *Iustitia Fidei,"* in *Justification by Faith,* ed. H. George Anderson and others (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), especially 180–184.

This confession has seemed time-bound to modern critics, who see it as dependent on historically conditioned guilt-feelings or on an overly subjective notion of faith—even after it's been said that what's normative is Melanchthon's confession and not Luther's insides. Turning to Lutheran theologians who have striven to keep this doctrine (or doctrine of doctrines) both relevant and central, Bertram cites a suggestion by Carl Braaten that the language of "righteousness" *(Rechtfertigung)* might serve better than "justification," possibly making use of the modern conception of "rights"—and that this might help this doctrine to be seen as having to do fundamentally "with the standing and falling not only of the church but of the whole of humanity." This understanding of righteousness touches the corollary Reformation theme of freedom and community: Christ both "frees and unites"; the Christian is perfectly free lord of all and perfectly bound servant of all. Not only as individuals but as communities we are rectified by a righteousness *extra nos* in Christ.

Bertram also cites a proposal by Robert Jenson that "justification by faith" serves best in our confession of Christ when it is used not as a formula we have to defend but as a perspective from which to talk about points in our common life where the preeminent value of this confession is being challenged.[10]

Such points or occasions can be prompted by events outside the church. The Barmen Theological Declaration, formulated in May, 1934, at the height of the German Church struggle by representatives of Lutheran and Reformed traditions, began by citing "the creeds of the Reformation." Barmen stood with the Reformation tradition in acknowledging a legitimate sphere of authority by the state. The precise form of the state is, strictly speaking, an adiaphoron (including democracy and free markets). But something more is at stake when that adiaphoron enforces practical denials of freedom and community for those who are in Christ.

Similarly the sixth assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (Dar es Salaam, 1977) charged member churches to consider whether legally enforced apartheid in South Africa and their own enforced complicity in it did not constitute a *status confessionis.* Reference was made to *Formula of Concord* X with its distinction between what is "free" and what is "necessary" and its pointing to a "time" in which what seemed "free" is no longer optional, i.e. when silent compliance would give strength to the enemies of Christ or would mislead the weak. It should be noted that strategic questions concerning divestment and disinvestment were not thereby automatically decided.[11]

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[10]Bertram, "Recent Lutheran Theologies on Justification by Faith: A Sampling," op. cit., 244–45.

[11]Cf. Bertram, "Confessing as Re-defining Authority: Ethical Implications of Augsburg's 'Time for Confessing' " in *The Debate on Status Confessionis: Studies in Christian Political Theology,* ed. Eckehart Lorenz (Geneva: LWF Department of Studies, 1983). My paragraphs are in debt to a paper by Steven Schroeder entitled "Status Confessionis and the Limits of the Confessing Community" read at the American Academy of Religion meeting in Chicago in 1984. He argues from these modern instances that 1) there are times when the distinction between "things necessary" and "things indifferent" must be extended beyond church usages to the "secular" sphere, 2) this in no way implies there will be universal agreement as to when and where this is the case, and 3) ideological totalism seems a key ingredient in transforming "normal conditions" into times of confessing.

We might also think about *de facto* apartheid which remains and grows in our own cities. Or we might consider whether and to what extent nuclear weaponry, like nuclear power plants, is part and parcel of late industrial development, disinvesting and threatening urban populations as never before. Is this "appropriate technology"? Are we Americans victims of ideological totalism, even if there is no manifest tyrant serving to render the situation intractable and bring on a time for confessing? While we cannot expect unanimity in matters like this, we are all required to be "not mirrors but salt."

Arts of Ministry in Congregation and Community

In a book entitled *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Churches* James Smart blamed that "silence" on a multiple breakdown of communication: "between biblical scholars and those responsible for preaching, between preachers and people, and not least between the separate departments into which the faculty of a theological seminary is divided." The lifework of Robert Bertram has been to bridge those divisions and get the traffic moving back and forth again. His preface to *The Lively Function of the Gospel,* celebratory essays for Richard Caemmerer, Sr., began by saying that what is life for theology is life for the church and vice versa. He has repeatedly invented ways of bringing theological disciplines to tasks of ministry—where they all come back together again. Nothing is more needed in the city we have described.

Symbol *and* interpretation. From his earliest teaching days, when biblical scholars were refining historical and scientific methods with the texts (methods he employs as well), Robert Bertram has chosen to teach the pericopes—those anonymously selected, historically separate, and rarely continued lections read formally in the weekly worship of the church. A considerable virtuosity is required to fashion a week of unified lectures from such excerpts, even if we allow for a Lutheran predisposition to find the same thing in all texts. But Bertram was up to this task—and to something more. First he was after community creation and awed attention on the part of both teacher and students; then he sought common reception and mutual instruction.

The primary casualty of the industrial city has been community—if by community we mean not arbitrary cohorts of the sort praised by megatrend boosters as marks of urban freedom (hobby clubs and groupies), but communities of necessity in which God sets the solitary. Such a community, Parker Palmer reminds us, invariably includes the one person on earth we wish least to be with—and when that person leaves somebody else comes immediately to take his or her place. Genuine communities are rare today not least because, as Paul Tillich said, symbols are decayed. Yet no lively tenants' union or community organization is likely to emerge without its own story, heroes, places and slogans. In no other way can they achieve a language of their own to take the place of service diagnoses or technical "uniquack" as a basis for actions of their own which are not lost to some universal technology.

For all that, symbols are also dangerous. They come out of mothballs in times of war; they can turn ordinary disputes into some-

thing like religious warfare. Herein lies the need for a practice of symbolics in both congregation and community—one that identifies and uses community creating symbols, facilitates the birth of derived or secondary symbols needed for communication and argument (genuine disagreement is now a rare achievement), and uses symbols to foster cooperation and peace rather than warfare. That's city living. No need to make the city square naked of symbols.

Interpretation *and* action. It is one thing—and a very important thing—to search a text for what it might have meant to its author or first readers. It is something more to read that text in "symbolic" unity with a great cloud of readers and hearers who have found it a source of life and light. It is yet another thing to bring that light to present engagements. For this it is seldom sufficient merely to repeat or even "apply" the text to a situation it did not itself address—we then find nothing in that situation we did not ourselves bring to it. We read an ancient text, John of Salisbury told his students, "to improve our eyesight." We understand a text when we have so got at its works as to see what it *would* say in a situation it did not itself address and when it uncovers there what we ourselves would not have seen. In this way our present engagements become a pole of biblical interpretation.

In the Crossings Community, served from St. Louis by Edward Schroeder and Robert Bertram, the pericopes continue to join symbol and interpretation within many groups, but they are then also brought to the specific daily callings of participants, not only to their economic tasks but to familial, social, and political responsibilities as well. Not only is some moral or otherwise instructive intersection discovered (a "crossing" in that sense); we may be sure *the* cross is found both as forgiveness and as needing to be taken up within the conduct and organization of many trades and professions today. Edward Schroeder once described what happens when the one article of faith becomes key to the Scriptures, so that they are always read as Law and Promise and nowhere allowed to bury Christ.[12] So far from limiting their scope and penetration in the modern city, such a reading actually uncovers new possibilities for action.

Think what happens when the poor see themselves as justified by faith and not by works—through Jesus, who no longer calls them "servants" who don't know what the master is doing but "friends" who do. Jesus gave a preferential status to the poor not because of any special merit or worthiness in them but because they were, perhaps, most ready to let any claim to merit go. "Freedom," says an old folksong, "is having nothing more to lose." Similarly, Robert Bertram can recall a gospel saying about saving and losing one's own life and then dismiss us with a benedictory "get lost!"

Think what happens when *we* come to see the poor in the light of Christ who "both frees and unites"? It is scarcely a step from that to taking our own stance with the poor of the city, not merely to do them good but to face the future with them. Such actions in congregation and neighborhood extend beyond those disinvesting, faltering, and probably self-justifying services to communalize labeled people. What actions are searched out

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[12]"Is there a Lutheran Hermeneutic?" in *The Lively Function of the Gospel,* edited by Robert W. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia, 1966), 81–97.

by all those gospel passages about risk, about selling everything for the treasure we have stumbled over in the field, if that treasure is justification by faith and not religious or self-saving works? And what about those passages suggesting that we invest in that future we now see as Promise? Ought we not stanch the hemorrhaging of funds from actual communities—to be as wise in our generation as the children of darkness and reinvest for the future those who have been disinvested? (Can we find "investiture" in investment and "credo" in credit?) This is now so simple a step as to escape notice: "When saw we thee naked?" By a heavenly prudence, three Lutheran synods have now designated a portion of pension investments to parish-based or community-based economic projects. Funds flowing down by computer to the greatest short term returns, on the other hand, are mammon and not means.

Action *and* organization. Robert Bertram is, in terms of catalog distinctions, a "systematic" theologian. But his systematic work extends beyond bringing words and ideas into coherence. He has been an organizer of institutions, a theologian who seeks to bring these into coherence with faithful words and ideas as well as with one another.

The organization of Christ Seminary—Seminex required a fresh systemizing of belief, procedures, and institution extending to new relations with congregations and city. This has included making common cause with confessing seminaries elsewhere in the global city. But a systematics of institutions is needed also in the city itself. Isolated actions on city problems do not go very far in grasping the problem of the city, nor do they go far in signifying the Promise for the city. A housing project here, a service project there, an employment office in another place, have seldom served to reverse downward trends. Such actions are limited in advance by ever-present phrases about what's "possible." But possibilities themselves can be enlarged by asking how other institutions can be drawn up to help and by moving more pieces than one. Communities require a coordinated set of functions including financial procurement, economic development, social agreements, decision making, and a cultivation of ideals which are what different institutions comprising a community have in common. Congregations have a hosting and enriching role to play in this, as well as in adjusting their own programs with a view to what is going on in the community, and pastors need to work out their role with respect to community organizers. That is practical systematics, and we know it has done its work well when something belonging to the divine future actually takes its place in the world.

The systematics most needed today is one that reunites those distinguishable but never separate theological disciplines which come together in ministry and are nowhere livelier than in a ministry which looks with improved eyesight to the city. Their names are old but their practice is always new: a *symbolics* of community creation, a *hermeneutics* of interpreting the current scene, a *homiletics* of coming to say and do the same thing and a *systematics* not only of words and thoughts but of actions and institutions. These are the ways in which confessors continue to say, even in a city that is passing away, "Here I stand." Go ahead and say it with Louis Sullivan: "This is the place for me."

Looking Good on Wood: Vocation as Confession

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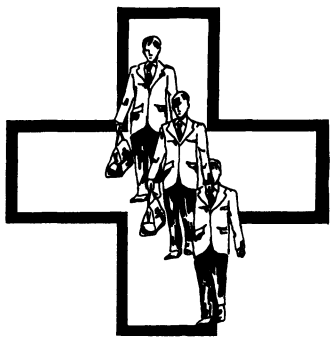
If there is one thing I've learned from Robert Bertram, it is to slow down and *look* at words; to poke and tease at their shades of meaning; to wrestle them until they yield a (usually-unexpected) blessing. That's not a bad lesson to learn in general. When one speaks of the encounter with *the* Word (and most particularly, with the Word made Flesh), the lesson is, as Bob would say, crucial.

This paper deals with the words "vocation" and "confession." There are some commonly accepted attributes to the word "vocation." A primary one is that vocation is a calling, or even a compulsion, to undertake a particular occupation or mission. At times, that occupation has been limited to a religious context (priesthood or ministry; monastic life; the mission field) or to such other helping professions as teaching, medicine, social work, or the like. In general, there is an emphasis upon service, sacrifice, and/or duty; upon a determination that nothing should sway one from one's perceived vocation; and upon a sense that vocation is chosen for the sake of honor or love, not for economic considerations.

Occasionally, "vocation" is used as a synonym for "career" or "whatever it is I do to earn a living, as long as it's legal and I don't really hate my job." At worst, this makes it a euphemism on the level of "sanitation engineer." More constructively, this use can be a refreshingly pragmatic counterweight to vague and elitist understandings of vocation. From this perspective, the phrases "vocational school" and "vocational training" imply honorable preparation for any number of skilled jobs by persons who take pride in good workmanship and in pulling their own weight in society.

However many qualifying features are tacked onto the word vocation, there is the suspicion that they come up short of the reality. The mystery and significance of vocation compel many to dig deeper—especially if they suspect it is a word with which they are wrestling in their own lives. "Should I become a doctor?" "Is the church being called to ordain women—and how do we know?" "Is a career in genetic engineering a proper vocation for a Christian?" "What about my retarded daughter or son—what vocation could they ever have?"

There is no one right answer for these or any other similar questions. Most people look less for a "do this/don't do that" approach than they do for tools to help them puzzle out the nature and significance of the thing called "vocation" when they find themselves faced with it. Thus this paper does not pretend to be a detailed map, a set of guidelines that will set one on "the right path." Rather, it serves more as a discussion of a few landmarks to look for, get one's bearings from, and steer by. Where anybody goes from there is left open.



Calling: that is at the heart of vocation's meaning. It implies first that there is some yet-to-be-determined caller who stands separate from the party called. No matter how intensely internal a call is perceived to be, there is still some sense in which it originates from a source deeper or higher or at least other than either individual or collective subjective consciousness.

Second, vocation-as-call implies that there is a comprehensible message worth hearing and heeding. Further, however far-reaching the implications of either the message or its response, and regardless of whether the call is extended to an individual or to a community, the call is not bulk-mailed "To Whom It May Concern." For it is uniquely personal, peculiar to a specific situation, and indicative of more than just natural interest or inclination.

Third, as it has just been suggested, "call" implies both hearing and heeding—even if the heeding takes the negative form of refusal or of deliberate deafness. Once heard, a call seems to demand *a* response, though it does not usually insist upon *which* response.

The actual *presence* and *content* of a call profoundly shape the identity of the responder. Once any response is initiated, "identity" and "vocation" or "call content" are inextricably linked. It is not simply a matter of answering the question, "Who are you?" with, "This is what I do for a living," either. Instead for many, the answer becomes, "I am doing what I believe I am meant to do, and therefore I am becoming who I am meant to be"—which is by all accounts a subtler and more difficult matter.

Even this simple prodding at "vocation as call" leads us away from understanding it either as a unilateral call to "do this or else" or as a glorified term for one's job description. Rather, we have a first, small landmark to consider: vocation may better be considered as an ongoing and intentional dialogue, as a conversation: *call* and *response.* What really is the intent of the conversation? Is there still something deeper and more significant than the fact of a call, or than its identity-shaping power upon those who respond? And, by the way, just who or what is the dialogue partner—the caller?

As Christians, we may hope to hear the voice of the triune God speaking to us in some vocational dialogue. But how in heaven's name do we know at any given moment

that this is so, and what God is saying, and how we ought to respond, and why we should get all exercised over it? Isn't it adequate to say, "God's call to all of us is to believe in him, read the Bible, obey his commandments, and do the best we can in whatever we're doing?" I suspect that ultimately such a statement *isn't* adequate: not only is it "bulk-mailed," but it also fails to consider the challenging and transformative encounter of God with Abraham, Moses, Jeremiah, the disciples, and so many others who were called into a future not of their own visioning. For them, once they understood themselves called by God, their response choices were limited. Either they could (however grudgingly) say, "Yes, Lord," by which they affirmed their trust and faith in the caller (regardless of their opinion of the call itself), *or* they could say, "No." This negative response is as much a confession of unfaith in the caller as it is an evaluation of the desirability of the call's content.

Therefore it should come as little surprise that another "landmark" might be discerned by lining up the word "confession" with the word "vocation." Dissect the word confession: the root meaning is "to say with; to say the same as (or to say alongside) another." A criminal who confesses says, along with the prosecutor, that the crime indeed was committed by that person. A sinner who confesses says that the judgment of God is indeed true and just. Creedal confessions of faith formally express that "this is what we all say together, what we believe we have heard God saying to us through the Gospel's witness."

As Christians we believe and confess that God will not speak *any* word to us that contradicts that ultimate, Gospel Word, embodied for us in Jesus. That Gospel Word must therefore lie at the heart of any "vocational word" from God.

In a nutshell, the heart of that ultimate Word is that it is God's good and gracious pleasure not to condemn us (as his penultimate word of judgment demands) but to save, heal, and re-create us and all the fallen creation by destroying sin, evil, and death; by reconciling the world to himself; and by establishing the fullness of his righteous rule of love. God chose that this should be accomplished not by divine fiat or conquest, but through the self-giving life, wretched death, and surprising resurrection of the Jewish rabbi whom he called "Beloved Son." The Christian confession, "Jesus is Lord," is our saying, with and through God, that indeed Jesus *is* the beloved Son who accomplishes the Father's will for the sake of fallen humanity and the whole groaning creation, and that indeed the Father's will shall be done, even in our midst, through the Spirit of that Jesus—no matter what.

So far, things sound simple enough. Our half of the vocational bargain means that Christian confession ought always to be a part of our response to God's Gospel-laden call, made to us for the first time in our baptism. It almost does seem that it might be adequate to say, "Our vocation is simply to believe in God. . . ."

The problem is that our natural response to God's voice will always be some variation (however elaborate or pious) on the word, "No." That is what sin is all about—refusal and inability to allow anyone (perhaps most particularly, God) such *carte blanche* in the world. There is something in us which cannot summon the utter, complete, and unending trust and obedience that "*Thy* will be done" requires. Even Jesus wrestled with the

temptation to fudge that petition! The only way we can properly say "Yes," the only way we can *confess* that Gospel with which God forever calls us, is to have our nay-saying self dealt a death–blow, so that God can raise us up anew, clothed in Jesus' obedience, and so that God can sustain us with the gracious gift of the Holy Spirit.

That means that our Christian vocation is constantly to undergo that death–blow against all our best (and worst!) judgments and instincts. We are constantly to be re–created in Christ's image as yea-sayers, whose confession-response to the Gospel's call is that God should *indeed* vanquish sin, death, and evil in the world, even in our midst, no matter what. Our natural selves, though, want at least some tiny shred of our own wills, agendas, or possessions to remain inviolate in the face of God's activity. It seems so absurdly unfair that we should be denied some morsel of existence on our own terms! After all, did we not agree that "vocation" pointed to the fulfillment of identity, not to its death?

Listen to the voice of the Caller: "Whoever would live must take up the cross *I* lay upon them, and follow me. Having heard my voice, the only way in which you will find life and identity is to deny yourself and to die to yourself and to fix ears and eyes and heart and mind and soul upon me alone. There is no other way; there is no other vocation that I shall give you. But follow me, and you shall find your rest and your true vocation and your heart's desire."

If our "half" of vocation is truly confession, then confessing *this* Caller means letting go, every day, of our own plans, agendas, preferences, and demands. *No* one course of action, no career, is normative for us. There is no grand plan for fulfillment—at least, not in any usual sense of the phrase. Instead, we need a constant, fresh return to our baptism. In it, our nay-saying identity is drowned and our new self, the image of the great and obedient Yea-sayer is raised up according to God's gracious and promise-filled call to us.

Admittedly, this makes for a strange picture of life and vocation. In a sense, it means never getting past square one. In a sense, it means being quite unconcerned about career or identity. In a sense, it means considering the possibility that God's vocation for us may call us to Task A today, to Plan B tomorrow, and to doing nothing at all the day after!

From one standpoint, then, "vocation as confession" constantly leaves Christians (indeed, the whole Church) with an incredible variety of options. Neither tradition, nor the world's opinion, nor prior sins or successes, nor concern for future survival, are allowed to stand between the Caller and the called. There is a lot of freedom in this understanding of vocation: once the initial Yes-rather-than-No is said, nothing is carved in stone.

The reason for that freedom is contained within that "original Yes-rather-than-No." All that matters is that God's gracious will should be done and that his kingdom should come. The means by which God's will might be expressed in our midst become, in a way, adiaphora for us: none should be held in either contempt or in excessive regard. But this also implies that our own comfort, preferences, and security cannot prevent us from changing occupations, actions, or attitudes should they be contrary to the Kingdom God is establishing. The crosses we bear are not fictional. They are where some of our brightest hopes and dearest desires (as well as our

darkest sins) are hung to die in obedience to the logic of this singleminded confession. If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. . . .

So what's the payoff? We started by seeing vocation as satisfaction, fulfillment of identity, and service to God and to others. Now that seems tossed to the winds!

No one course of action is normative for us.

But the whole point is that this new understanding is the only one which delineates the true dimensions of service and obedience to God. This notion of vocation as confession provides a prominent landmark by which we may judge whether our paths truly are in service of others. Willing and working that God's will should be fulfilled "on earth as in heaven" is the highest service we can give to our neighbors. Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, healing and freeing and loving the despised, the lowly, and the enemy, preaching and teaching and baptizing—simply because those others are the sisters and brothers God has set among us and whose liberation from every evil God desires—that is always the shape of the vocation to which Jesus calls us. That shape is always cruciform because it is always at odds with our "natural" desires, and because it is the shape of Jesus's own life which was his response to his Father's voice.

As to the question, "what of our identity in such an understanding of vocation?", the only answer can be, "Get used to looking good on wood. Dying to your pious, nay-saying self is followed, thanks be to God, by being raised in the very image of Christ. Your real vocation is to be members of the Body of Christ in the world. What higher identity, what greater fulfillment, is there than that?"

How might the insights we have gained be used as landmarks by which we may chart our ambiguous and yet concrete courses through life? How does this understanding of "vocation as confession" help us wrestle with whether to become a doctor, or to ordain women, or to condemn genetic engineering, or to understand the lives of the lowly, the weak, or the despised in a new way?

The most I would hope for is that we might now be equipped to ask the right questions in any given situation and (in prayer, in community with other faithful, and in "sin-boldly-trusting-Christ-more-boldly" actions), that we might begin to discern God's answer for us. Let us briefly consider two questions: Should the church ordain women, and, what possibly could be the vocation of a retarded child?

Is the church presently being called to ordain women? That is a vocational question that is being asked by many in various denominations. For some, the question has been settled on one side or the other; for others, it has not. If vocation *is* confession, then how do we know if our response to this question indeed represents a confession of faith in the living God, rather than a confession of our own agendas, opinions, or constructions?

Perhaps the first thing to note is that honestly confronting these questions forces us to go beyond Scripture-slinging or tradition-

quoting. However much Scripture and tradition inform our understanding and, ultimately, our decisions, we cannot simply use them to defend our positions. Rather we must allow them to speak to us as fresh encounters with the living Word which may lead us in surprising new paths.

Some questions we might consider, then: What would ordaining (or not ordaining) women say about the sort of Kingdom Jesus brings about? How would such ordination further—or hinder—the work of God to free all God's people from every sort of bondage and evil? Are we understanding this question in terms of "rights" to be granted or withheld, or in terms of discerning the Spirit who bestows the gifts of the Kingdom where God wills? If we choose one way or another, are we prepared to face the possibility that we chose wrongly, and face one another and our Lord in repentance and forgiveness, with the mutual desire to seek together for new answers? These are not easy questions, and they do not automatically point to one answer. Nevertheless, if everyone involved in discerning whether this is a true vocational call to the church asks such questions, perhaps they will not become lost in a landscape of vested interests, rhetoric, power struggles, and the like.

Similarly, we may help parents and friends of retarded children wrestle with the questions of value and vocation. How does Jesus see these "little ones?" What does it mean to say, "of such is the Kingdom of Heaven?" Is it possible to call being a sign of the Kingdom and of the presence of Jesus, a vocation? In what way may the child respond—or do we all respond together on the child's behalf—to the call to be such a sign? Is it possible, therefore, to understand vocation as entirely mutual (not just with respect to retarded children but in general)? "Vocation" is not fully confessed unless and until it is a polyphonic, contrapuntal, "Yes, Lord." From moment to moment, in such a confessional response, and in ever-changing variety, some teach and others learn; some serve while others are served (which is their own acceptable service); some strengthen the weak, while others glory in their weakness; some are cast down and others are lifted up.

Simply reflecting upon the vocation of a retarded child, in the light of the cruciform vocation-and-confession discussion we have engaged in, has therefore led us to some new insights and questions that may serve as new landmarks for everyone who is called by God's name. For us, vocation is always within the whole body of Christ, no matter how "individualized" the call is perceived to be. Confession means, as we have seen, "saying with." In the Body of Christ, we "say with" our Lord, who has made us part of it. We also "say with" one another, for the response of each member affects the whole.

Thus "vocation as confession" has several faces. Certainly it is half of a dialogue between Caller and called. It is a multivocal response, guided by that Spirit who leads us into new pathways of community and obedience. And it is cruciform. It is a cross upon which everything is hung so that through it, the Kingdom of the Crucified One might touch and transform the whole world.

Whatever Happened to Law and Gospel?

Carl E. Braaten
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For Luther ultimately everything was at stake in drawing the proper distinction between law and gospel. He based his clear conviction on the theology of Paul. Law and gospel belong together. They should not be separated; neither should they be confused with one another, but must always be properly distinguished. Otherwise preaching degenerates into moralism or rationalism.

Is it really true that faithful preaching of the Word of God depends on the proper distinction between law and gospel? Is it really true that the nature and structure of God's revelation call us to rightly divide the Word of Truth? Is it really true that we must know the difference between law and gospel in order to preach Christ aright? Does the failure to make the correct distinction between law and gospel have anything to do with the abysmal state of preaching in the churches today? Does anyone have any doubt that preaching has fallen to an all-time low measured by the expectations people bring to the hearing of the sermon? Do you see people prepare themselves for the sermon by sinking back into their seats, getting ready for a boring interlude, or do they lean forward with ears cocked, expecting to hear the most exciting thing they've heard all week? I don't have any reliable statistics, only impressions.

Whatever the case may be, the homiletical rule that preaching the whole counsel of God depends on the fine art of drawing the proper distinction between law and gospel has been largely abandoned in contemporary homiletics. Many accusations have been leveled against the law/gospel theory of preaching. Instead we are being told that preaching is telling a story, bringing together God's story and my story and what not. "Story" is the big word. Or perhaps the big push is for "commitment"—it doesn't matter what you say as long as you're committed to it. Or perhaps the magic word is "spirituality"—the aim of preaching is to help people on their spiritual journeys.

The electronic media give us other models that have become a form of mass entertainment. What makes the television preachers tick? What do they have in common? What is the *sine qua non* of staying on the air? John Tetzel was surely a popular preacher. He told the people what they wanted to hear and sold the people what they

wanted to get. He was a preacher of indulgences, and lots of people swarmed to hear him and bought what he had to offer. If Tetzel were living today, he would be on TV, and he would be telling the masses what they wanted to hear from a psychological point of view, not what they needed from a theological point of view.

I am still committed to the homiletical theory of law and gospel. I ask myself, as one who spends more time in the pew than in the pulpit, "Has Lutheran preaching improved with the nearly total abandonment of the fundamental distinction between law and gospel?" I ask myself, when I listen to a sermon, "Is there anything so good about this sermon that the proper distinction between law and gospel wouldn't make it better?" I ask myself, as I sit there and suffer, "Is this preacher not committing the sin against the Holy Spirit by preaching a message that would not need Christ to make it true?"

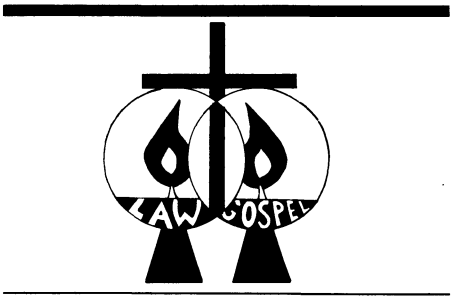
When I studied theology at Luther Theological Seminary in St. Paul, about 35 years ago, the homiletics professor did not have an impressive bibliography to offer. There was but one textbook and we had to outline it, lecture by lecture and thesis by thesis, C. F. W. Walther's book, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel.* I hated the assignment, rebelled against the method, and got a lousy grade for the course. I mention this only to confess that I did not make my first acquaintance with the distinction between law and gospel on a happy note.

When I started preaching regularly, I had spent quite a few years in post-graduate studies of theology, tasting most of the delicacies of modern theology from the Enlightenment to the present time. I began to enter into the major hermeneutical options that provide the preacher with fundamental paradigms for interpreting the Bible and making it relevant to the modern world. The major ones were, of course, Barth's covenant theology of the Word of God, Cullmann's theology of *Heilsgeschichte,* Bultmann's existentialist theology of demythologization, the new hermeneutics of Ebeling, the ordinary language approach of the Oxbridge theologians, the eschatological theology of the theologians of hope, the political theology of Moltmann and Metz, inspired by the Frankfurt School, and more recently the Liberation theologies, all of which have useful ideas and implications for preaching. But they can also be very confusing for the preacher. What is the preacher supposed to do? What is the aim of preaching? Each of these theologies can function like an ideology controlling the mind of the preacher, so that the preacher ends up preaching bits and pieces of theology, rather than the Word of God according to the Scriptures, rightly distinguishing the law and gospel.

I became convinced that Paul Tillich's theological method of correlation can provide the contemporary Lutheran preacher with the best model of interpretation, bringing together the law and the gospel. Tillich does not use language about relating and distinguishing law and gospel, but he does correlate the various states of the human condition with the biblical message. The law of God reveals the human condition in a state of estrangement, unable to reconcile itself to the source and ground of its origin and being; and the gospel of Jesus Christ brings about new life, regenerating, justifying and sanctifying, interpreted according to the Reformation insights of *sola gratia, sola fide, solus Christus.* I believe that Tillich's

method of correlation is a contemporary methodological reformulation of the Lutheran principle of law and gospel.

To speak of the proper distinction of law and gospel is to put the article by which the church stands or falls to practical use. The doctrine of justification is not one doctrine among others to be believed and taught. Rather, it is that article which organizes all the others so that they bear fruit in the church through its words and deeds of witness. If justification were just a doctrine on which we could agree to reunite the churches, or something for theologians to debate, it would not of course be an article of faith by which the church really stands or falls. An article that would determine the standing or falling of the church would have to have a bearing on what makes the church church, and that is the true preaching of the Word of God and the right administration of the sacraments. The distinction between law and gospel is a direct corollary of justification that controls the theory of preaching. Without such a controlling hypothesis, what is there to tell the preacher what to do, what to aim at, and what means to use? I feel sorry for preachers who have to preach at least once a week, but don't really know what they are supposed to be doing, but I feel more sorry still for the lay people who go to church and sit in the pews.



Other Models

I have witnessed the parade of fashions over the last thirty-five years. I have heard very good preaching on the classical model of Lutheran homiletics, drawing the proper distinction between law and gospel. But this classical approach has collapsed in the Lutheran churches today. It has given way to a potpourri of other disciplines that at best were meant to be purely auxiliary disciplines of theology, serving the queen of the sciences, instead of taking over in a palace revolution.

There is the psychological model, which invites us to apply our various psychological theories of human behavior to the texts and stories of the Bible, whether Freud, or Jung, or Rogers, or Harris, or Maslow, or Erickson, and turn the pulpit rhetoric into a display of psychological jargon and counseling know-how. There is the liturgical model, which calls for the preacher to choreograph the dramatic parts of the worship service from the pulpit, to savor the juicy rubrics, and offer comments on the special themes of the day, to heighten the appreciation of the people for the wealth of the catholic tradition. And this is also a good thing. But it gets the preacher off the hook, if he or she doesn't need to worry about law and gospel, but merely direct the liturgical production of the day. There is the social action model, which tells what is happening in the world today, where the challenges are, and what we must do to help, if we will only back up our words with deeds, and change the world for the better. This is also a very good thing. Pastors who stir up their people to action are trying to combat Lutheran quietism. It is easy to make people feel guilty about their racism,

sexism, and classism, so that they will join forces with liberal humanists and social activists on the right side, or perhaps the left side, of the debates of the hour. Again the Lutheran call for the proper distinction between law and gospel is often down the drain, in favor of the most recent technique to kill the pulpit by robbing preaching of integrity and credibility which it is the aim of the law/gospel distinction to secure.

There is the spirituality model, way to the other end of the pole. Here the preaching is trying to model the holy life, by training people in new skills to deepen their spiritual journey on the way to some mountain top experiences. Most of us feel that we live a rather humdrum life down in the valleys of everyday experience, but there is supposedly a spiritual self inside which needs to be helped on its journey. The preacher is called to help people on their spiritual journeys, perhaps to have one or two peak experiences every once in a while, to relieve their everyday experience of its boredom. This is a monkish, ascetical model that reeks with the aroma of a gnostic worldview that has always managed to find a place to hide among the clergy. One of the most common styles is that of the ecclesiastical program pusher, who unloads the packet of activities devised by bureaucrats, not only in the Sunday bulletin, but in such a way that there is no noticeable difference between the announcements and the sermon. Another one is the ideological model. With the combined use of the historical critical method and the critical sociology of knowledge, we are able to retranslate the Bible under the aegis of the ideology to which we are committed, to promote the particular movement that matches our self-interest. Just as we can de-ideologize the Bible to fit the social sensibilities of today's crusaders, we can clean up the Bible's language, wherever it is out of sync with the prevailing Zeitgeist. When it refers to Jews, we cut it out; when it refers to fathers, we add mothers. There is nothing so sick about the Bible we can't cure by linguistic surgery.

Most modern preaching has chickened out.

The law/gospel distinction is the classical Lutheran homiletical principle. Those Lutherans who opt for some other theory have the burden of proof to demonstrate its superiority. Meanwhile I want to stress some of the theological presuppositions, contents, and implications—the over-all rationale—of the principle of law and gospel.

Theses

The first thing that needs to be said is that God has two different words to say to humanity; the Word of God comes to the world and to the church in the twofold form of law and gospel. The second is that the law is prior to the gospel in a fundamental sense. Third, the law is a good and indispensible gift of God, which never loses its usefulness in human society and in human experience, no matter how regenerated or sanctified a person may be. Fourth, Jesus Christ is the end and fulfillment of the law. Fifth, as the law demands and accuses, the gospel gives and forgives.

Both are functions of the Word of God entrusted to the church for the sake of the world. Sixth, the scope of the gospel is as wide as creation, to be announced not only as personal liberation in changing hearts and loyalties, but also as politically relevant in dethroning the powers and principalities, liberating people from idolatory in the name of Jesus as Lord. Seventh, the proper distinction between law and gospel must be worked out as the proper distinction between the two kingdoms to guide the church's public proclamation of the Word of God and every form of ministry.

Now a few comments to explain these theses.

Gustaf Wingren has renewed the importance of the priority of creation and law to church and gospel, the significance of the fact that the first article of the creed comes first, so that the gospel always moves within the orbit of the whole creation, to redeem and renew it.

The law of God is older than the Bible. It is as old as creation, and therefore comes before the election of Israel, the establishment of the covenant, the sending of the Messiah, and the founding of the church. The law of God has been written into the nature of things, and into the heart of every human creature, as Paul says in Romans 2:14. Even if God had never given the law through Moses, the knowledge of God and of God's will could be known (partially) through the revelation of God in creation and through human nature. This is the universal point of contact of preaching to every human being and every human condition. As Luther said, "There is thus a single law, effective in all ages and known to all human beings because it is written in everyone's heart. From the beginning to the end no one can excuse himself, for the Spirit never stops speaking this law in the hearts of all people." This is the basis for the universal, secular, public, and political preaching of the church, in ordinary language that is universally human, in contrast to so much preaching that is religious, churchy, esoteric, and arcane.

First Function of the Law

However, the light of creation that illumines every mind and conscience is being overshadowed by sin. Therefore, the eternal will of God as law must be proclaimed against sin and every human disregard for the ordained meaning of life. Sin changes the very basis of the creature's relation to God, to other human beings, and to the world. Therefore, when we preach the law, we are to preach two functions and purposes of the law. At this point we need not get into the hassle about the third use of the law, which Lutherans continue to debate. Who knows; it may all be a semantic squabble anyway, and no real difference in substance of the Christian life. The first function of the law is the civil, political use of the law. This preaching requires knowledge and courage, but most modern preaching has chickened out. The common opinion is that preachers should stick to religion and spiritual matters.

The other day a Wisconsin congressman was being interviewed. As a member of an ALC congregation, he admitted that his pastor, in fact the ALC itself, had taken a stand against Reagan on military aid to the contras, and his whole Nicaragua and Central America policy. The congressman said it was difficult for him, because he did not enjoy being at odds with his church, and moreover they

were in the wrong. They weren't even supposed to be involved in such matters, which belong to government and military people. Here the political responsibility of the church for the law of God in all dimensions of life has been restricted to the private life of Christians and inner-churchly matters. This accounts for the widespread feeling of many lay people that what preachers say on Sunday morning is mostly irrelevant to what they experience six days of the week. The contents of the laws of God have been delivered up to other public servants, and the church has given lay people the impression that it has no particular mandate to speak across the whole spectrum of human life in all its aspects.

There is definitely a failure to speak boldly the prophetic words of God's law and commandments that call for civil righteousness in terms the world can understand. Of course, when we do this, we will take our lumps, because 70 percent of the American people support Reagan even when he is in violation of the laws of God, not to mention international law, and the laws of our nation.

Second Function of the Law

The second function of the law has also dropped into disuse, although this is its truly theological meaning. The law of God demands a pure heart and perfect obedience, perfect fear and love of God; but sinners are not capable of fulfilling the demands of the law, neither in Jesus' time nor our own. Nothing has changed for the better in modern times. The law reveals sinfulness and intensifies it. *Lex semper accusans;* the law is always accusing us, always cutting us down, and making us feel miserable, so we reciprocate and try to cut the law down to our size. We find ourselves slipping into moral relativism, accepting things that are totally contrary to the law of God, as the debates on homosexuality and abortion make ever so clear. But the church does not speak boldly the law of God, lest it lose some dues-paying members, or even worse, imagine itself to be in the position to interpret the law of God. Heaven forbid! The church does not want to appear judgmental; leaders do not want to take a stand, but prefer to bob and weave so that no one out there will have a clear target.

Where the law is not accusing us, there is no consciousness of sin; and where there is no consciousness of sin, there is no need for repentance; and where there is no need for repentance, there is no need for faith; and where there is no need for faith, what's the use of Christ and the gospel? It is the task of the law to accuse sinners, who act against God and the commandments of God, and to deliver sinners over to the wrath and judgment of God, and to eternal death. This is the doctrine of Paul and Luther and the confessional tradition. It is a terrible thing to fall under the wrath of God, and be held accountable by his law. This is why we moderate the law, tone it down, and make it something we are capable of living up to. Then we measure ourselves by a relativized law that we can fulfill, and imagine that all is right between God and ourselves.

The law is not God's entire Word. Preaching without the backbone of the law is weak and void of relevance. But preaching that is only law is a betrayal of Christ and the gospel. The gospel contains God's promises focused and realized in Christ. It proclaims the love and forgiveness of God apart from

the works of the law. As Luther said, "The gospel is the preaching of forgiveness of sins through the name of Jesus Christ." The law is an agent of death; the gospel brings the resurrection; the law places us under the judgment of God; the gospel brings grace and peace. The gospel declares that sinners are accepted by God for Christ's sake, not according to their merits and works of the law.

The law and the gospel should not be confused, as for example when the grace of God is made conditional on something we are supposed to do to make it complete. This happens even when we make faith a condition of God's free and unconditioned decision to justify us for Christ's sake. Faith is not a work we are able to do as a precondition of God's acceptance of us. Faith is not a condition and it is not a cause; it is the action of the Spirit within us through the power of the Word to make a grateful and receptive response to the gift of the gospel. Faith alone hears the word of the gospel, and this is an achievement of the gospel itself. Neither threats of the law nor terrors of the conscience are able to move our hearts to accept the word of the gospel. The law can lead us to despair, and despair can stir up hatred of God, but this work of the Spirit merely makes us expect everything from Christ and the gospel, and not trust in ourselves. Only by passing through the narrows of the law do we reach the haven of the gospel. As Luther said, it is not permissible to preach the law without the gospel, or to preach the gospel without the law. Preaching places us under both law and gospel; they work together in the power of the Spirit to mediate a full encounter with God.

The law is to be preached both to those who do not yet believe as well as to those who already believe. Christ is the end of the law. This means that the law is abrogated insofar as it accuses and condemns us. Christ has fulfilled the law as one who was accused and accursed by the law; and he has done all this for our peace and freedom. Here we have the "happy exchange" taking place through Christ and the living voice of the gospel. Christ stands under the law for our sake, and he gives us his innocence and righteousness. Through Christ the justified are freed from the accusations and condemnations of the law.

The law is not God's entire word.

Third Use?

Here the dialectic picks up speed. Faith brings freedom to perform the essential content of the law, without being condemned and bound by the law. The sum of the law is love to God and neighbor, and this the justified sinner is liberated to do. Then they are no longer works of the law, but works of love. As someone has put it, this is not so much the third use of the law as the second use of the gospel—faith active in love, doing the works of the law spontaneously, without seeking rewards. Since, however, the Christian is still a sinner, the Christian will always need to hear the law in all its power, for the Christian is still bedeviled by a strong dose of the old nature at work within. If we say we no

longer need the law, because we are fine Christian persons who have the Spirit, then we are saying we no longer have need of Christ. The Christian life is one of life-long repentance in need of both law and gospel.

The gospel is a liberating message not only as forgiveness of sins, but also as the dethronement of the powers that lure us into idolatry. The message that Jesus is Lord liberates us not only from preoccupation with schemes of self-fulfillment, but also from bowing down to the principalities that demand absolute loyalty. Lutherans have not been famous for acknowledging the public side of the gospel, preferring instead to apply the gospel in the one-on-one situations of pastoral care and counseling. Nevertheless, the public ministry of the gospel is a structural part of the church's witness and discipleship in the world.

The gospel is a liberating message.

If Lutherans still believe they are in continuity with the confessing church movement of the gospel going back to Luther, if justification is still the article of faith by which the church stands or falls, we are in need of strong preaching of both law and gospel which personalizes and socializes both forms of God's revelation in the world and in human experience. Without such a renewal of law-and-gospel consciousness in the clergy, we will still suffer the Babylonian captivity of preaching. Without a clear distinction between law and gospel, we will continue to wallow in a confusion, preaching cheap grace where the word of the law is called for, and treating the unconditional problems of sin, guilt, and death with the relative and conditional pronouncements of the law.

Underlying the decision for the law/gospel approach is the basic question of anthropology—the nature of the human condition. Our Lutheran teaching (*Formula of Concord,* II) asserts that we can discuss the nature of human being in four different states: 1) before the Fall in a state of integrity, 2) after the Fall in a state of sin, 3) after conversion in a state of grace, and 4) after the resurrection in a state of glory. The counsel to preach the Word of God, properly distinguishing the law and gospel, revolves around the second and third states in which we all find ourselves under the conditions of existence. Homiletical theories that ignore the proper distinction between law and gospel are not to be trusted when they ignore the anthropological stipulations of the confessional writings, particularly those bearing on original sin and free will. When Karl Menninger asks, *Whatever Became of Sin?,* we have to charge preaching today with the failure to keep it under the spotlight of God's law and gospel.

The Lutheran-Reformed Dialogue in the United States

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One of the many gifts Robert Bertram has brought to ecumenical discussion is his concern for method. Method, after all, determines everything that follows. Our gratitude and best wishes to him on this occasion will take the form of methodological observations on bilateral ecumenical dialogue. These observations seem particularly necessary and timely in view of recent reactions to Lutheran-Reformed dialogues in the United States.

A.

How is a bilateral dialogue to be evaluated? Not in the same way as a multilateral dialogue, for multilaterals are far more complex. But certain guidelines apply to all dialogues.

1. Only official documents count. For example, if one has been involved with people in the Reformed tradition and formed certain opinions about them, what does that prove about Reformed teaching? Lutherans have come to realize that even the majority view discovered through scientific surveys is not an accurate reflection of Lutheran teaching. Official documents have to be evaluated, of course, according to what each tradition means by "official," but the decisive point is that dialogues are to be evaluated according to how they have dealt with official documents, not according to how they reflect personal experiences or scientific surveys.

2. Dialogues need not reinvent the wheel. When certain traditional questions have already been discussed by our dialogue partners in other dialogues, it is not necessary for us to reinvestigate such questions. Thus the Reformed in the regional Swiss dialogue "elaborated a rich Eucharistic doctrine with the Catholics," that obviates additional research. Bilateral dialogues are "not intended to produce a comprehensive treatment of all subjects but progress towards practical, bi-

lateral clarification in each case."[1] At times therefore a dialogue may simply refer to work accomplished elsewhere, and it is incorrect to demand that each dialogue deal with all questions, even all traditional questions.

3. Certain traditional words and phrases are not required. Often critics are upset because doctrinal formulations are not what the critics have been accustomed to. Yet we live in a changing world, and for this reason formulations have to be reformed. "The reshaping of doctrinal formulations is always possible and indeed, at times, may be the only way to be faithful to the Confessions."[2] But some continue to insist on certain traditional Latin phrases, such as *manducatio oralis* (real eating with one's mouth), even when modern phrasing in effect states the same thing.

4. The standard is not the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue. In many ways this dialogue has been exemplary, and Robert Bertram has been a member of the Lutheran team in the United States. Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue, however, has been more extensive because Lutherans and Catholics have a very similar investment in official theological documents, and because leaders on both sides have not allowed funds or time to limit the scope of the dialogue. Most bilaterals, as, for example, the Lutheran-Reformed dialogues in the United States, have been given a set amount of time and money. In most cases this is sufficient because preparatory work exists in abundance and the goal is limited; an exploration of all the traditional questions from New Testament times up to the present is not called for.

5. Each dialogue is unique, like an individual, because each develops out of a unique context. For this reason comparisons between dialogues must be tentative, and comparisons are often misleading. Individual members may have their own agendas and expertise. Lutherans do theology a certain way, by starting with doctrinal statements on Christology and justification. As Harding Meyer has trenchantly written: "Not only in the Anglican Communion—where it is particularly clear—but also in the constitutional change of the WARC [World Alliance of Reformed Churches], it is obvious that a certain depreciation of, or at least a slight disrespect for, doctrinal statements of the churches is expressed which we do not share."[3] Yet this has not hindered us from a particular type of dialogue with the Anglicans, because we have discovered they do theology through liturgy, especially the Book of Common Prayer, just as we have discovered that the Reformed do theology through the Book of Order. We have never insisted that the particular conceptuality of justifica-

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[1]Robert J. Marshall (chairman), *Ecumenical Relations of the Lutheran World Federation: Report of the Working Group on the Interrelations Between the Various Bilateral Dialogues* (Geneva: LWF, 1977), #91; cited in James E. Andrews and Joseph A. Burgess (eds.), *An Invitation to Action. A Study of Ministry, Sacraments and Recognition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) 118–19; hereafter cited as IA.

[2]*Ecumenism. A Lutheran Commitment.* An Official Statement of the Lutheran Church in America. Adopted by the Eleventh Biennial Convention, Louisville, Kentucky, September 3–10, 1982, Guideline 7, p. 11; also, *Ecumenical Perspective and Guidelines.* Adopted as an official statement of The American Lutheran Church at the June 1985 meeting of the Church Council, pp. 13–14.

[3]Harding Meyer, "The LWF and its Role in the Ecumenical Movement," *Lutheran World* 20 (1973) 27.

tion be used, but only that, whatever the terminology, salvation be proclaimed *sola fide.*[4]

6. Dialogues do not legislate for the churches, but produce resources that may be useful for the churches. Dialogues do not intend to legislate. If read that way, they mislead. At best they break down stereotypes, remove misunderstandings, and make recommendations. They speak to the churches, never for the churches. To conclude that Lutherans, for instance, hold "so-and-so" because a certain dialogue has stated "so-and-so" is not necessarily accurate.

B.

How is ecumenical strategy to be evaluated? Rumors proliferate that the Roman Catholics have a specific ecumenical strategy, to take a step toward unity with the Orthodox before the end of this century. Such a strategy has a certain logic, yet Catholics assure other Christians that this is not their strategy. Some Lutherans, again according to widespread rumors, hold that Lutheran ecumenical strategy should be to move toward the "catholic" side of the spectrum, toward Rome, Istanbul, and Canterbury. Again, such a strategy has a certain logic.

Both the LCA and the ALC have a more balanced strategy, spelled out by the LCA in a more official fashion in their statement: *Ecumenism: A Lutheran Commitment* (1982). Guideline 5 affirms that ecumenism "does not see progress in one area as competitive with advancement in another. Each individual gain with other Christians should be welcomed by all who are ecumenically committed." On January 7, 1986, Presiding Bishop David Preus, in an address to the Luther Northwestern Seminary Convocation in St. Paul, made essentially the same point.

Rumors nevertheless persist, alleging that Lutherans are "evangelical catholics," not Protestants. Perhaps Lutherans should be called "evangelical catholics" if that phrase is not understood in terms of its originator, Fredrich Heiler ("The Reformation was a mistake; let's go home to Rome as evangelical Catholics") but instead in terms of justification by faith alone. But the phrase is often a kind of shibboleth for the ecumenical strategy of returning to Rome. That Lutherans should not be classified among "Protestants" is surprising. Lutherans were present at Speyer in 1529 when the word was coined, both Lutherans and the Reformed developed at the same time out of the same ferment, and both are reform movements within the church catholic. However the construct "Protestant*ism*" is to be understood, Luans and the Reformed are in it together.

Each dialogue is unique, like an individual.

What surprises is that Rome expects Lutherans to dialogue with the Reformed, just as they themselves do. Moreover, if Rome, as the big sister, were thinking of Lutherans as

[4]See the perceptive essay on *sola fide* by Robert W. Bertram, " 'Faith Alone Justifies': Luther on *Iustitia Fidei.*" Theses, *Justification by Faith* (Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII; H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess, eds.; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985) 172–184.

the little sister who will lead churches to unity by leading the way, Rome should let Lutherans in on the secret and, in fact, as the big sister, make the first gesture.

In any case, the strategy should not be either Rome or Geneva. Lutherans forming the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are committed to being open toward whatever ecumenical gains are possible. Those holding the "home to Rome" strategy owe other Lutherans a fully developed rationale for their cause.

C.

How is the agreement in the Lutheran-Reformed Dialogue, Series III, on Eucharistic presence to be evaluated? Agreement exists on presence. The dispute is on the mode of presence. Is the mode of Eucharistic presence a church-dividing issue today? Lutherans have agreed that it is not.

The prime example is the agreement reached between Lutherans and Roman Catholics in the U.S.A. in 1967. The two sides affirmed the "that" of Christ's presence while leaving the "how" in dispute. Lutherans acknowledged that contemporary Catholic theologians use transubstantiation to express the fact of Christ's presence and the "change which takes place," not "to explain how Christ becomes present." The dialogue concludes this section by stating: "We are also persuaded that no single vocabulary or conceptual framework can be adequate, exclusive or final in this theological enterprise."[5] Why, having in this way found sufficient common ground with Roman Catholics on the mode of Eucharistic presence, do some Lutherans want to require more of the Reformed?

Lutherans want to know what the New Testament exegetes have to say. In 1957 at Arnoldshain, after meeting five times in the previous ten years, nineteen leading German Lutheran and Reformed theologians agreed on eight theses on the Lord's Supper.[6] The list of New Testament exegetes reads like a list of the stars: Günther Bornkamm, Joachim Jeremias, Ernst Käsemann, K. G. Kuhn, Otto Michel, and Eduard Schweizer. Hardly surprising is the fact that therefore most have held that the New Testament side of the question did not need further investigation in dialogues between Lutherans and the Reformed. Other voices exist, as is always the case, but even Karl-Hermann Kandler, a conservative Lutheran systematician, admits that an *opinio communis* exists on individual questions. As a matter of fact, New Testament exegetes have a large measure of agreement among themselves on these questions. Kandler is forced to appeal to theological exegesis in order to derive his systematic conclusions from the New Testament.[7]

The Arnoldshain Theses state that the crucified and risen Lord in his body and blood is received by us through his word of promise with bread and wine. Faith receives what is promised and builds on this promise, not its own worthiness. Misuse of the Sacrament

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[5] *The Eucharist as Sacrifice* (Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue III; Paul C. Empie and T. Austin Murphy, eds.; New York and Washington: U.S.A. National Committee of the LWF and the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, 1967) 196–97.

[6] "Thesen über das heilige Abendmahl. Arnoldshain 1957," *Una Sancta* 15 (1960) 9–11.

[7] Karl-Hermann Kandler, *Christi Leib und Blut. Studien zur gegenwärtigen lutherischen Abendmahlslehre* (Arbeiten zur Geschichte und Theologie des Luthertums, N.F., Bd. 2; Hannover: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1982) 116–17.

leads to judgment. The Eucharist is not a purely spiritual event, but "substance" and "stuff" by themselves are also inadequate concepts.[8] Favorite formulations are missing in these theses, but what else is essential?



In 1973 the Leuenberg Agreement [LA] makes a similar statement: "In the Lord's Supper the risen Jesus Christ imparts himself in his body and blood, given up for all, through his word of promise with bread and wine. He thus gives himself unreservedly to all who receive the bread and wine; faith receives the Lord's Supper for salvation, unfaith for judgment" (#18). What more is needed? Therefore in #20 of the LA the anathemas of the Reformation Confessions are declared inapplicable to the churches involved in the agreement.

The LWF evaluation of the Leuenberg Agreement points out that it "insists firmly on the christological prerequisite of Christ's self-emptying by means of the incarnation and draws the necessary conclusions from this for the doctrine of the Lord's Supper (*finitum capax infiniti* [The finite is capable of the infinite])." The bread and the wine as the means of the presence of Christ are guaranteed by the Holy Spirit and thus by God himself. The natural consequences of this are the recognition that communicants actually eat the body and blood by mouth *(manducatio oralis)* and that the unworthy also truly eat *(manducatio indignorum)*.[9]

Even the unsuccessful second series of dialogues between Lutherans and Reformed in the United States, while lifting up the problem of the mode of presence, declared a consensus exists that in the Lord's Supper "the true (proper) body and blood of Jesus Christ are present and are eaten and drunk."[10] This series, meeting (1972–74) while the LA was being concluded, declared that the LA could not be helpful because the context is different. What is not indicated is that the American context included the battles among Lutherans in the United States, particularly within the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, and for this reason the LA could not be helpful. In 1986 the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Argentina, following the lead of a number of other Lutheran churches in South America, adopted the LA; these churches do not find the very different context an obstacle.

In *A Statement on Communion Practices* (1978) both the LCA and the ALC had declared that the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper can be expressed in formula-

[8]"Thesen," 9–11.

[9]Robert J. Marshall, (chairman), #87; cited in IA, 118; cf. "The discernment of the body and blood of Christ requires faith. The real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, however, does not depend upon the belief of each individual, but on the power of Christ's Word mentioned above and upon his promise to bind himself to the sacramental event as the sign of his person given to us," *The Unity We Seek. A statement by the Roman Catholic/Presbyterian-Reformed Consultation.* (Ernest L. Unterkoefler and Andrew Harsanyi, eds.; New York/Ramsey/Toronto: Paulist, 1977) 39.

[10]IA, 57.

tions "other than those used in the Lutheran Confessions."[11] With all of this background, it is hardly surprising that the third series of Lutheran-Reformed dialogues in the United States did not think it necessary to reinvent the wheel, but simply drew together the commonly accepted conclusions found in previous discussion about real presence and the mode of presence. Therefore unless hidden criteria are at stake or unless consensus can only be on the basis of sixteenth and seventeenth century conceptuality, what more can be asked for?

D.

How is the agreement on ministry in the Lutheran-Reformed Dialogue, Series III, to be evaluated? The dialogue team was aware of the fact that the LA had dealt with classical questions separating Lutherans and the Reformed, such as Eucharistic presence, Christology, and predestination, and that other questions not considered divisive, for example, ministry, had been left for future discussion. For this reason the US dialogue team decided to place particular emphasis on the question of ministry.

Lutherans discovered that the Reformed do not claim their church structures are derived from the New Testament. Both sides affirmed the special character of the pastoral office: "Our Confessions speak of this as a divinely appointed office" (Joint Statement on Ministry 5.2).[12] The dialogue team agreed, as had the LA, that ministry is not a divisive question.

But objections are raised because some within the Lutheran tradition want to make a particular strand of that tradition the only strand. At present this debate centers on the question of the historic episcopate. As is well known, Lutherans are irrevocably committed to the view that the authenticity of the gospel is the only guarantee for the legitimacy of structures in the church, rather than the converse, that the legitimacy of the structures of the church guarantees the authenticity of the gospel.[13] Nevertheless some Lutherans today advocate having "real" bishops in historic orders, bishops who would be "guardians" of the faith. The case, however, has yet to be made for bishops who are "guardians" of the gospel but whose office is not guaranteeing the gospel. The Lutheran contribution to the understanding of the ministry has been its ability to be open about ministerial structures because the gospel is primary and keeps all else in perspective.

Lutherans like to emphasize their confessional heritage.

Some Lutherans, to be sure, have bishops in historic orders. This is no problem as long as bishops are not made a requirement. Those Lutherans in historic orders do not

[11]IA, 76–77.

[12]IA, 27.

[13]George Lindbeck, "The Lutheran Doctrine of the Ministry: Catholic and Reformed," *Theological Studies* 30 (1969) 611.

[14]"Dialogue Recommends Changes," *The Living Church,* August 26, 1984, 7.

think of Lutherans not in historic orders as having invalid ministries. At the same time the Reformed have a positive approach to historic orders. In 1984 the Anglican-Reformed International Dialogue recommended that Reformed churches need to consider having bishops just as Anglican churches should consider having elders; neither side claimed direct biblical authority for their present ministerial structures.[14] Also in 1984 the sixteenth plenary of the Consultation on Church Union, of which the Presbyterian Church (USA) is a part, approved and commended *The COCU Consensus* to the churches. According to this plan "in the Church Uniting bishops shall stand in continuity with the historic ministry of bishops as that ministry has been maintained through the ages" (48).[15]

E.

How is the Lutheran confessional stance to be evaluated? Lutherans like to emphasize their confessional heritage. At times we have contrasted our use of Confessions with those who in our view take them less seriously. To what degree this contrast exists needs to be examined. Lutherans cannot deny that it is necessary to interpret the Confessions in order to make them applicable to the modern world. Such interpretation, of course, is a way of changing the Confessions.

In the doctrinal basis of the Lutheran World Federation the identifying mark of Lutheran churches is accepting the Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism. But already in 1952 the Batak Protestant Christian Church was admitted into the LWF on the basis of its own "Batak Confession" in place of the Augsburg Confession. Later the LWF made the same basic decision about two other Indonesian churches.[16] The Batak Confession has not been included among the Lutheran Confessions accepted around the world, yet it was considered a sufficient basis for pulpit and altar fellowship with world Lutheranism. For this reason we can hardly claim we are strictly bound to sixteenth century confessional literature. In the same sense Lutherans who adopt the LA have modified their confessional stance by stating that the condemnations in the Reformation Confessions are inapplicable to those churches with which they now find consensus (LA 20, 23, and 26).

Three Batak Lutheran churches in 1984 took another historic step by joining forty-eight other Christian churches in adopting documents establishing what Lutherans call pulpit and altar fellowship. Among these churches are Pentecostals, Methodists, Mennonites, and the Reformed.[17] In East Germany the Federation of Evangelical Churches, which includes Lutherans, has recommended that Old Catholics be invited to communion services held in churches belonging to the Federation.[18] Although their numbers are small, the Old Catholics clearly are not part of the Reformation traditions, so that this invitation implicitly raises the question of departing from the Lutheran Confes-

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[15]Gerhard F. Moede (ed.), *The COCU Consensus. In Quest of a Church of Christ Uniting.* Approved and commended to the churches by the Sixteenth Plenary of the Consultation on Church Union, November 30, 1984, Baltimore, Maryland, "VII. Ministry," #48, p. 49.

[16]Meyer, 24.

[17]Lutheran World Information 21/86, 17.

[18]Ibid., 29/86, 19.

sions. The Lutheran Church in Madagascar is in the process of becoming part of a larger church body with the Reformed in Madagascar. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Kingdom of the Netherlands plans in a few years to unite with the two large Reformed churches in the Netherlands. Sam Dahlgren of the LWF has asked whether this move is "a mirror for the future of churches in a secularizing Europe."[19] The Lutheran-Methodist dialogue in Sweden has recommended full Eucharistic fellowship and full acceptance of each other's ordinations.[20] Recently the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (VELKD) and the Evangelical Methodist Church in West Germany voted to offer pulpit and altar fellowship to each other based on a common understanding of the gospel.[21]

Lutherans therefore cannot deny that in effect they are producing new Confessions by the way the old Confessions are being used in these new situations. Others who in our view do not take creeds and Confessions seriously are in actual practice not as different from our practice as we sometimes claim.

In sum: when evaluated as a dialogue and when evaluated on the key issues at stake, the Lutheran-Reformed dialogue in the United States does very well. Those who judge otherwise should demonstrate this by a thorough analysis of the data, not by rhetoric. The unity of the Church demands of us that we think and act *in optimam partem,* with the best construction put upon everything.



[19]Ibid., 48/85, 5.
[20]Ibid., 49/85, 10.
[21]Ibid., 44/86, 16.

The Pulpit's Promising Tradition

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Those of us who were taught by Robert Bertram remember that he was a preacher. He took his regular turn in chapel of course, but, more importantly, he preached in the classroom. He apparently believed that the gospel is the subject matter of every class session in a seminary, for all fragments of knowledge and all practical skills may be justified only as expressions or implications of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Nothing is neutral. Everything about the gospel is preaching because the gospel is not information but a promise. There is no such thing as a neutral promise, no such thing as a promise given without intensity, passion, and deepest need, no such thing as a promise that is not grounded in and tested by the realities of history as a particular people tries to live by the promise.

Robert Bertram's classroom preaching did not begin with a conclusion but a question, and everyone knew that the answer would form the nucleus of the next session's question. His teaching reminds me of Thomas Merton's description of Mark Van Doren in the classroom:

> Mark would come into the room, and, without any fuss, would start talking about whatever was to be talked about. Most of the time he asked questions. His questions were very good, and if you tried to answer them intelligently, you found yourself saying excellent things that you did not know you knew, and that you had not, in fact, known before. He had "educed" them from you by his question.[1]

I do not now believe that Robert Bertram invented the promise, but for at least one beginner, he might as well have, for his advocacy of the promise illumined the purpose of our theological curriculum and enlarged our understanding of proclamation.

In 1973 Concordia Seminary published a classroom reader with the significant title, *The Promising Tradition.* Included in that collection is a brief essay by Robert Bertram, "The Hermeneutical Significance of Apology IV," in which he addresses the question of the relationship of the article of justification by faith to the controverted factuality of historical and history-like portions of Scripture.[2]

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[1]Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1948), 139.

[2]*The Promising Tradition: A Reader in Law-Gospel Reconstructionist Theology* (Concordia Seminary, 1973), 2–4.

The original issue within the Missouri Synod fracas does not concern us here, but Bertram's conclusions are important. He reminds us that the relation of promise to history is an organic one: "For what else was that whole long biblical history, both fore and aft, but the history of God's *promissio*—not only His revealing of it but His making the promise and keeping it, historically . . .?"[3] In other words, why be obsessed with *history* if it consists of data whose character and reliability can somehow be verified without recourse to faith in the promise of God? Paraphrasing Melanchthon's reply to his accusers, Bertram writes, ". . . by obscuring the *sola fide* they have let Biblical history (which is nothing if not promissory) simply go to waste. In that case it might just as well not have happened. Then Christ has died in vain, and there is no 'need' of Him."[4] But more to our present purpose, why have a *promise* if it cannot generate stories and a history whose very character enables a community to preserve its identity and to shape its life and hope?

Pursuing Bertram's insight into promissory history, I want to explore one dimension of Luther's preaching, namely, his use of the sermon as a means of narrating the promise. Lutherans are inheritors of a profoundly ambivalent attitude toward story because Luther was of two minds on the relationship of promise and "history." On many occasions Luther expressed his disdain for mere history or historical faith, which he in one sermon refers to as "dead history" *(todte Historia)*.[5] In much of his preaching he dispenses with "the history" as quickly as possible in order to get at the good stuff, namely, justification by faith, law and gospel, the two kingdoms, and other theological teachings. His preference for the discourses of Jesus, as in John, and the benefits of salvation, as in Paul, above the mere history of events is well known. His definition of the gospel as a summons or a proclamation gives the impression of an irruption or an interruption in time rather than a story told *over* time. He contrasted the preaching of justification with the storytelling of the "preferred preachers":

> But they are praised because the common people admire them when they hear them tell stories and examples and play with words and allegories. In this, I too am a master. But no one is judged eloquent on the article of justification, nor do people like to hear him or praise him. Take this as a sure sign that the common people sleep and cough when we preach the article of justification but prick up their ears at stories.[6]

In many sermons or series of sermons Luther purposefully divides the history from the doctrine as he does in this House Postil for Christmas:

> This festival of the birth of our dear Lord Jesus Christ is instituted among Christians especially that we may preach this history and learn it well, that it may be kept in remembrance by the young and the common people,

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[3]*The Promising Tradition*, 4.

[4]*The Promising Tradition*, 4.

[5]*Church Postil. Sermons on the Epistles.* 3 vols., trans. Ambrose Henkel (New Market, Virginia: New Market Evangelical Lutheran Publishing Co., 1869), Vol. III, 1 Cor 10:6–13, 101 (WA 22:165).

[6]WA, TR, II, No. 2408, 453–455. See Elmer Kiessling, *The Early Sermons of Luther and their Relation to the Pre-Reformation Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1935), 36–37.

> that it may be impressed upon their hearts, and that they may rightly learn to know their Savior. For although we tell it yearly, yet we cannot sufficiently preach nor learn it. Therefore we will divide the gospel into two parts: first, we will in the most simple manner relate the history as it took place; then, secondly, hear how the dear angels preach and sing about it.[7]

He then proceeds to embellish the story of the nativity, dotting it with homely and poignant details for his listeners (e.g., reminding them that the distance from Galilee to Bethlehem is about "as far, if not further, than with us from Saxony to France"). The second part of the sermon is more "kerygmatic" in nature. Here Luther echoes the angels' preaching as he reveals the significance of the history for his hearers: "Now this is the reason why this history is preached every year, that every young heart may form this image within itself, praise God for it, and say, 'Now, thank God! I am in no danger, for I have a brother, the son of God who became such as I am. . . .' "[8]



Since the mature Luther had no formulaic pattern for sermons, his method was anointed "the heroic method" or, as John Gerhard more accurately appraised it, "heroic disorder."[9] His method of preaching is determined by the nature of the text and the absolute significance of justification by grace through faith, as well as the time of the church year, atmospheric conditions in the congregation, polemical needs, the Turk, and Luther's moods, which ranged from the vulgar to the lyrical. He launches into the sermon armed only with his *Konzept,* which in a recurring nightmare he dreamed he forgot in the pulpit, and usually begins with a brief statement of purpose and, as above, a retelling of the "history." What may follow is a doctrinal exposition of the text with pungent references to the papacy or the eating and drinking habits of the congregation. The digressions may be long, but he always returns both to text and *Konzept* before finally saying, in effect, "That's enough for today. God grant me to do better tomorrow."

On the other hand, there are in Luther's corpus some sermons and postils in which the narrative is something other than a mere preface to the real preaching and from which polemical digressions and doctrinal lectures are refreshingly absent. In these sermons he does not dispense with the history but lingers over it and elaborates it like a theme in a fugue or a figure in a tapestry. Instead of abstracting theological points he *renders* them by retelling the biblical narrative in such a way as to clothe the story in the humanity, experience, suffering, and joys of his hear-

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[7]*House-Postil,* 3 vols., trans. E. Schmid and D. J. Martens, ed. Matthias Loy (Columbus: J. A. Schulze, 1884, f.). Vol. I, Luke 2:1–14, 79–80 (WA 52:36–37).

[8]*House-Postil,* 86 (WA 52:38,40).

[9]See Yngve Brilioth, *A Brief History of Preaching,* trans. Karl E. Mattson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 111.

ers. Toward the end of one of his House Postils, a sermon on the Feeding of the Five Thousand, Luther says, "Philip counts rapidly and correctly. He says, Two hundred penny worth of bread is needed, if everyone in the crowd is to have but a little. If this sum is compared with the five thousand men, besides the women and children . . . it was insignificant indeed, and each one would have obtained but a slice of bread. Surely not much for a hungry stomach! We see that Philip made a close and correct estimate of the amount of bread needed for these hungry people in the desert. We indulge in similar calculations of what we need to support our families for a month, or for a whole year; and if we discover that the supply is not at hand, we are dejected and sad, as though we had to leave our house and home . . . Likewise Andrew exclaims: "But what are they among so many?" His arithmetic proves itself stronger than his faith. . . . The Christian should realize what a trustworthy Father and Provider his Lord is. . . . What He did then He can and will still do for His Christians; this we must never forget. His blessings we experience every day; He gives to pious poor and needy their daily bread, and assists them in every trouble in a wonderful and unexpected way."[10]

Why elaborate the narrative? Luther has two reasons. The first is that God chose to reveal himself by means of a historical life whose deeds and purposes unfolded over time and were attested in the narrative form. "Gospel," Luther said, "is and should be nothing else than a discourse or story about Christ, just as happens among men when one writes a book about a king or a prince telling what he did, said, and suffered in his day."[11] Luther's use of "king" or "prince" gives to his statement a fairytale quality not intended by one who lived in an era dominated by kings and princes. His preaching makes it clear that the nature of the Incarnation is the very opposite of a fairytale. Indeed, he goes out of his way to make God's visit to this planet as realistic, unsentimental, mundane, and German as possible. The nature of the gospel requires this total encounter between God and humanity. So he recounts the nativity from the point of view of Mary, the scared and lonely teenager, or the story of the Feeding of the Five Thousand from the vantage of poor people who can't make ends meet, or the story of the Ten Lepers by imagining the despair of those whose prayers aren't answered—not because he wants to "grab" his hearers emotionally, but because, like the Incarnation itself, the Christian message is meant to penetrate into the marrow of human experience.

Christians are always "on the way."

We need not apologize for appreciating the narrative texture and art of Luther's preaching as if these qualities should be shunted aside in favor of his theological

[10] *House-Postil*, Vol. I, John 6:1–15, 393–394, f. (WA 52:192–198).

[11] "A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels," LW, 35:117–118. Although this is an introduction to literary texts, Luther has in mind the one gospel.

themes. Indeed, Luther of all people would propose theological (incarnational) reasons for not separating the thing itself from its vesture. After all, how can God be *pro nobis* without a stable, a manger, and the heaviness of Mary's body?

A second reason for narrative in Luther's preaching has to do with the nature of human beings. Here the evidence from Luther is more indirect. The usual caricature of Luther's anthropology features the human being as a timeless creature suspended between the wrath and mercy of God. This creature's biographical data may be bracketed out of the soul's immediate relation to God. But if we listen carefully to Luther's preaching, we hear another story. While Luther certainly does not dwell on the human qualities that facilitate the reception of grace, his preaching makes it clear that human beings have it in them to participate in God's story. Sacramentally, they die with Jesus and live out the empowerment of his resurrection.[12] They learn and fail and grow in their Christian callings. Nowhere is the "developmental" quality of Christian life more evident than in Luther's pastoral preaching. A sermon series says, among other things, that the preacher and the congregation will go *on* together!

The narrative quality of the Christian pilgrimage is not merely deduced from the promise, as if Luther the preacher were saying, "You have heard the message; now apply it to your lives." This view makes the congregation responsible for the narrative application of a religious proposition. Rather, in Luther the sacred story replicates itself again and again in a series of antitypes. Because it is God's story (Luther never theorized about narrative, and the German language has no single word for "story"), it has a capacity to be both locatable in a past time and place and expandable to our time and our circumstances. Later generations of Christians are participants in the continuing story. So Luther can say about the Roman church in one of his sermons, "And they have gone to work and inflicted a most atrocious reproduction of the Passion-History upon the pious Christians of Germany, Italy, France, and England."[13]

To summarize, Luther's use of narrative is an unselfconscious response to the doctrine of the incarnation. It also derives from the nature of written revelation, that is, the Bible's narrative quality and its capacity for expansion. And it witnesses to the *viator* or pilgrim status of Christians who, he said, are always "on the way."

What's Distinctive?

On the basis of these few observations, what might we expect to be distinctive about Lutheran preaching? Many assume that Lutheran preaching will be heavily doctrinal and that the preacher will lay the same law-gospel stencil over every text. And the gospel, no matter how it is articulated in the text, will inevitably come out as justification by faith. In fact, as Robert Bertram ably insisted, Lutherans *do* read the Scriptures from the perspective of this article. But even this doctrine, *the* doctrine, does not efface the topography of the biblical narratives. Rather, the narratives *render* this doctrine in a variety of ways.

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[12]See *Church Postil,* Vol. II, Col 3:1–7, 110 (WA 21:266).

[13]*House-Postil,* Vol. II, Matt 26:57–68, 121 (WA 52:763).

The pronouncement of justification is not a legitimate shortcut past the uncertainties and ambiguities of a miracle story or a parable. There are no neutral, informational texts in the New Testament; every text serves the gospel in some way, as does every sermon. Every text is made *possible* because God freely justifies sinners, but not every text is explicitly *about* justification by faith. Rather, it is because we preachers and hearers have been justified by faith apart from works of the law, that we are empowered to follow the twists and turns of God's promise, knowing that it always witnesses to the trustworthiness of the One who issued it, and that it is meant to be road tested in the world we live in.

The pulpit's promising tradition suggests two kinds of language for preaching. The first is the immediacy of direct address, which is, unfortunately, the very language we have too hastily surrendered to the revivalists. Yet one would have to agree with the philosopher John Searle that the sentence "I promise you," or language to that effect, is the most performative utterance in the English language.[14] It is also a sentence most characteristic of the God who makes and keeps promises. Luther was brilliant when it came to punctuating a long polemic or interrupting a good story with a startlingly direct articulation of God's faithfulness. One might worry that narrative and literary approaches to preaching, in which the preacher assumes the detachment of a *narrator,* diminish the preacher's ability to drop the storyteller's mask and to say from a pastoral heart, "I promise you."

The second kind of language suggested by the promise is narrative, but not necessarily of the sort that turns the sermon into a sermon-story. The first mark of Luther's use of narrative in preaching is its reliance on the biblical text. Such preaching is not quick to make a few points *from* the text or to substitute *for* the text another story which approximates the intention of the original and somehow delivers a meaning that, in the preacher's judgment, the original can no longer achieve. Luther did not give up on the biblical narrative that easily. He trusted it, probed it, and dialogued with it until it yielded the necessary promise. His elaboration of the biblical narrative reaches its climax only when the *telos* of the story, the promise, is unfolded with the greatest intensity and clarity in terms of the capacities and needs of those present in the congregation.

For Lutherans preaching is a "promising tradition." In that phrase two homiletical elements are joined. The first is the authenticity of direct address. The second is the *traditio,* the ongoing transmission of the stories by those who are attempting to live by the promise of God.

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[14]John Searle, "What is a Speech Act?" in *The Philosophy of Language,* ed. John Searle (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 49.

What a Calvinist Has Learned from a Lutheran about Calvin's Political Theology

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Although we had both been theological teachers in St. Louis, Robert Bertram at Concordia Seminary and I at Eden Seminary, our first meeting occurred at the World Council of Churches General Assembly in Uppsala, Sweden, on Sunday evening, July 14, 1968.

We were returning to Uppsala by bus from a spectacular mid-conference worship service in Stockholm. Each of us had been fortunate enough to catch the last bus back to the University. As the bus pulled out, I discovered that, clinging to the rope next to mine, was the person who had made a striking presentation to the Assembly in Uppsala on the day before—Dr. Robert Bertram of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

That chance, providential meeting has instituted a life-long friendship and scholarly association. Upon our return to St. Louis, we participated together in the formation of the St. Louis Theological Consortium, a promising cooperative theological effort between Concordia Seminary, Eden Seminary, Kenrick Seminary, and the St. Louis University Divinity School—which was abruptly aborted in 1974 by the events at Concordia which produced Seminex. As a member of the Eden Seminary faculty, I shared in receiving Bob Bertram and his colleagues as a part of our Eden Community at the time of their exodus into the promised land!

It was in 1978, when we participated together with Sister Zoe of the Kenrick Seminary faculty in a joint seminar on "The Reformation," that Bob Bertram gave me an insight into the correlation between Martin

Luther and John Calvin's political theology that will become the focal point of this paper, written in his honor.

Before spelling out the tremendous contribution which Bob Bertram has made to my understanding of Calvin's Political Theology, I shall share, in an autobiographical fashion, the denominational context in which I live and work as a professor at Eden Theological Seminary, and the unique significance of the interplay of the Lutheran and Calvinist heritages in the formation of the church tradition of which Eden is a central expression.

Eden is the fruit of a sequence of church unions. The United Church of Christ was born in 1957, out of the union of the Congregational Christian Churches with the Evangelical and Reformed Church. Each of these had been the product of a previous union—the Congregational and Christian Churches in 1931 and the Evangelical Synod of North America and the Reformed Church in the United States in 1934.

It is in the context of the Evangelical Synod of North America that Eden Seminary claims to be equally Lutheran and Reformed, by virtue of its rootage in the Basel Mission, a European effort begun in 1817 to unite the two 16th century traditions into one "Evangelical" mission movement. Within the "E and R" tradition, we still claim both Luther and Calvin as our spiritual fathers.

Four Treasures Bequeathed by Luther and Calvin

My erstwhile colleague at Eden Seminary, Elmer J. F. Arndt, himself a product of the Evangelical Synod, used to tell our students how fortunate we are to have two Reformation fathers, rather than only one. The Presbyterians, he used to say, are stuck with John Calvin and the heritage of double-predestination and all that flows from that. The Lutherans are stuck with Martin Luther's institutional separation of "Law" and "Gospel" and the heritage of political irrelevance which flows from that. Our good fortune is that we can claim the best of each of our fathers. The best of Martin Luther and the best of John Calvin have flowed together to produce four treasures:

1. A Disciplined Evangelical Piety
2. A Theological Dynamic for Apostolic Ministry
3. A Christian Social Passion
4. An Ecumenical Spirit.

Martin Luther: *theologia crucis* and Evangelical Piety

Broadly speaking the first two treasures are the heritage all of us, including John Calvin, have received from Martin Luther. The third and fourth of our treasures have been the additional contribution of the life and work of John Calvin.

Martin Luther's challenge to clerical corruption, associated with the sale of indulgences, and to the inversion of human works and divine grace is the center piece of the 16th century German Reformation. His three *solae (sola gratia, sola fide* and *sola scriptura)* were fully shared by his Swiss contemporary, Ulrich Zwingli and reaffirmed by John Calvin in the next generation.

Martin Luther's *theologia crucis* is not just the Gospel's promise of "justification by grace through faith." The mystery of the *theologia crucis* is that God's grace in Christ

as *costly redemption* elicits *costly discipleship,* a call to obedient self-sacrificial service for each one of us who, through faith, is made righteous.

This accent has come down to the "E and R" Church tradition through the Heidelberg Catechism's emphasis upon the Christian life as rooted in "works of gratitude" and, in the 20th century, in the life and work of Dietrich Bonhöffer.

God's grace in Christ elicits costly discipleship.

The word "evangelical" defines the central thrust of Luther's contribution both to the Evangelical Synod of North America and to the "E and R" Church. It identifies the heart of the church's mission and the form of the piety which flows from it.

John Calvin: Christian Social Passion and an Ecumenical Spirit

The uniqueness of John Calvin's influence comes to the "E and R" Church through the latter two of our Reformation treasures: a Christian social passion and an ecumenical spirit.

Calvin identified his theological reformation as an attempt to "reform the Church Catholic according to the Word of God." His Geneva experiment was not only "ecclesiological" in its intent, but "socio-economic-political" in its implementation of the church's mission to the world.

In Geneva, Calvin attempted to implement Zwingli's Swiss "republican" form of governmental structure for the sake of justice and social responsibility. In New England, his heirs invented town meeting "democracy" to express Calvin's respect for individual rights and dignity.

In the 20th century, the heritage of John Calvin has informed the church with a prophetic and messianic passion. It has enabled Walter Rauschenbusch and Reinhold Niebuhr to challenge the extravagant expression of free enterprise with the vision of "economic democracy," and others to challenge virulent nationalism and international anarchy with a vision of a "world government" under the sovereignty of God, and still others to challenge governments to forsake attempting military solutions and to pursue peaceful negotiations of international conflict.

John Calvin broke sharply not only with the imperial tradition of Roman Catholic Christendom, but also with Martin Luther's separation of church and state in terms of the distinctive roles of "gospel" and "law." If, indeed, concentric circles represent the Roman Catholic tradition of church and empire, then, Luther's investment in the "political rebellion" of the German princes against the Holy Roman Empire led him to affirm a division of labor, in the ministry of God: for this world, "justice" through law, ministered by the princes; for eternity, "salvation" through the gospel, ministered by the church.

Calvin's insight and effort is more complex and, we believe, truer to the biblical heritage of the Kingdom of God. Indeed, magistrates properly have authority to govern society as ministers of God's law, but the church has the responsibility to minister both the gospel *and* the law—the gospel through the service of Word and Sacrament *and* the law through the prophetic role of holding up the vision of "justice" and "challenging" the government, at every turn, to implement it!

Calvin's Geneva experiment was ecumenical in the sense of attempting to develop a model for the *re*-construction of Christendom. His ecclesiology in *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Book IV, Chapters i through xx) bears out the inclusiveness of his vision.

In ecclesiology, Calvin expands upon the *Augsburg Confession* definition of the church:

> The church is where the Word of God is rightly preached.
>
> The church is where the Sacraments are rightly celebrated. (cf. Art. VII)

Freedom is a precious gift.

Calvin identifies the church as the covenant people of God in the Body of Christ, and adds a covenantal counterpart to each of Luther's definitions:

> The church is where the Word of God is rightly preached and faithfully heard.
>
> The church is where the Sacraments are rightly celebrated and faithfully received.

Then, in the light of the Anabaptist emphasis upon the Spirit in the "gathered Church," Calvin adds a third definition:

> The church is where the discipline of the Spirit is rightly administered and faithfully obeyed.

What a Calvinist Has Learned from a Lutheran

As I indicated at the outset, it was in our team-taught course on "The Reformation" at Kenrick Seminary, with students drawn from Kenrick, Eden, and Seminex, that Bob Bertram gave me the insight that has profoundly revolutionized my view of John Calvin's political theology.

When Bertram began to identify the relationship between law and gospel, expressed in Lutheran language, as the correlation of the left-hand and the right-hand of God, bearing the Kingdom of God through two distinctive forms of divine ministry—church and civil government—my mind quickly moved beyond the immediate discussion to a consideration of "Calvin's *Theocracy.*"

I came to see that, for John Calvin, law and gospel not only do not center respectively in church and state, but are, actually, *each manifest in both of them!* That is to say, civil government and church manifest quite different functions of the divine ministry, but God's sovereign righteousness and God's amazing grace are operative in both institutions, correlatively.

In Calvin's understanding, Theocracy simply means how God's Reign, the Kingdom of God, is being ministered to us through two human instrumentalities—the church and civil government. Overall, however, we can define two distinctions and two correlations:

I. The *distinctive* roles of
   1. the *two hands* of God: the law and the gospel
   2. the *two arms* of divine ministry: the church and civil government

II. The *correlative* functions of
   1. the *two faces* of each institution vis-à-vis the gospel and the law
   2. the *internal dialectic* in the practice of the two institutions:
      the church vis-à-vis the civil government
      the civil government vis-à-vis the church

The Distinctive Role of the Two Hands of God

The left-handed power by which God rules, *the Law,* is God's sovereign righteousness, which demands human obedience and appropriate honor for God's authority.

What Martin Luther called the "left-hand" of God is identified by Calvin as the "natural law of equity":

> It is a fact that the law of God which we call the moral law is nothing else than a testimony of natural law and of the conscience which God has engraved upon the minds of human beings. Consequently, the entire scheme of this equity of which we are now speaking has been prescribed in it. Hence, this equity alone must be the goal and rule and limit of all laws (Institutes IV, xx, 16).

On the other hand, the power by which God rules on the "right-hand," *the Gospel,* is God's amazing grace—the healing and wholing power of the Holy Spirit by which we are set free, through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, from enslavement to the powers of evil which have tempted us to disobey God and reject God's authority. Freedom is a precious gift, bestowed upon us by God's grace, but it is not to be construed as restoring our original pretension that we are free to do as we please, but that we are free to participate in a community of freed persons who acknowledge that their renewed faith in God involves responsibility (service) to one another.

The Distinctive Role of the Two Arms of Divine Ministry

The church is the community of the faithful in the power of the Holy Spirit, ministering freedom and responsible service to and through the community of those who are "justified by grace through faith."

The civil government is human society being transformed into a covenant of works: a commonwealth of freed persons, a political order, ministering law and order for justice in human society.

The Correlative Functions of the Two Institutions

The church has two faces: ministering the love of God through the Word and the Sacraments; ministering the judgment of God through the presbyterial order.

The civil government has two faces: ministering the judgment of God through the sword of the magistrate; ministering the love of neighbor through representative democracy and the responsibility for human rights.

Over and above this pattern of distinctive roles, with correlative functions in the divine ministry, there is, for Calvin, an internal dialectic in the practice of the institution of the church and the institution of civil government.

The church is ultimately called to operate prophetically vis-à-vis the civil government, continually reminding it of its responsibility "to maintain law and order for justice" and supporting the revolutionary conscience within society with the aphorism: "Obedience to human authority must not become disobedience to God!"

Yet, this distinction does not lead us to consider the whole nature of government a thing polluted, which has nothing to do with Christian people.

> Civil Government has as its appointed end, to cherish and protect the outward worship of God, to defend sound doctrine of piety and the position of the Church, to adjust our life to humane society, to form our social behavior to civil righteousness, to reconcile us with one another, and to promote general peace and tranquility (Institutes IV, xx, 2).

Throughout the course of the four centuries since the publication of his extended catechism *(The Institutes of the Christian Religion)* and his theocratic experiment in Geneva, Calvin's influence has borne ambiguous fruit in the socio-economic-political arena of world history.

John Calvin's strong commitment to the biblical vision of shalom, and its demand for the correlative inter-dependence of community and personhood in human life and history, expressed itself in a fruitful dialectic between "social responsibility and discipline" and "individual freedom and dignity."

Oddly enough, the Geneva experiment was politically weighted to the side of social responsibility and discipline, expressed in a strongly republican form of government, whereas, the Puritan New England experiment with Calvinism produced, in the town-meeting, a kind of pure democracy. Remarkably, the 18th century mating of Calvinism with Enlightenment philosophy, in the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution, produced the political syncretism we call a "democratic republic."

Obedience to human authority must not become disobedience to God!

But, from that point onward, Calvin's dialectical tension between social responsibility and individual freedom has been torn asunder into two contrasting and competing expressions in three broad areas of life:

18th and 19th century Bourgeois Capitalism claims Calvin's individual freedom and

work ethic as its spiritual dynamic, *but* the 20th century Social Gospel movement condemns the fruit of this Calvinist half-truth as a form of "organized original sin" and spiritual idolatry, offering, in its place, a vision of "economic democracy" to be protected by social legislation and governmental administration.

Again, 18th and 19th century European nationalism and international anarchy and the resulting colonial imperialism have thrived in countries that have a strong Calvinist heritage, *but* the 20th-century spirit of internationalism and the search for a World Government (the League of Nations and the United Nations) have been rooted in the Calvinist Worldview and have, symbolically, found a home in Geneva!

Perhaps the most disheartening expression of Calvinist adaptation is the role of the Dutch Reformed Churches in birthing and supporting apartheid in South Africa since 1652. *But,* the world body of the Calvinist Churches—The World Alliance of Reformed Churches—has published *A Christian Declaration on Human Rights,* in which it condemns apartheid as a theological heresy and has chosen a South African coloured pastor and theologian, Allan Boesak, as its world president.

Calvinist political theology, like all other historically significant contributions, is continually being subjected to corruption and perversion *and,* at the same time, is seeking recovery and revitalization.

In the 16th century, John Calvin referred to Martin Luther as "a distinguished apostle of Christ by whose ministry the light of the Gospel shone!"

In the 20th century, Robert Bertram, a renowned doctor in the Lutheran Church, has been an ongoing dialogue teacher to me—on one memorable occasion, sharing a precious insight into the political theology of John Calvin. It is a joy for this Lutheran/Calvinist to join in honoring him!

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*I would like to express my gratitude to Edward Schroeder for his invaluable assistance in locating many of the unpublished works of Robert W. Bertram. I do not claim to have compiled a "complete" bibliography of Bertram's work—there are many more sermons and addresses that are not included here. However, the bibliography should illustrate a history of how various concerns have surfaced and been highlighted throughout his theological journey.

Preaching Helps

Fifty Great Days

"Great days," we say—usually in reflection over good things which happened in the past.

The "Great Fifty Days" from Easter to Pentecost are great, surely, for that kind of reason. "The Lord has done great things for us"—and while the weeks and Sundays in Lent may traditionally be given more emphasis in congregational programs, no days carry better rememberings than the Easter weeks. "The Lord has done great things *to* us"—and no days help us recall that more realistically than the Easter days.

We look to God to do more great things both for us and to us. In a measure it is up to us to make this year's Fifty Days *Great.* What we have known God to have done in the past is what we would experience God doing in this year of grace. As much as we have tried to make our Lord's path straight, so much we would make our Lord's fifty days great.

From the third day of Christmas through the twelfth the radio in our car probed the air waves of the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, and New Mexico. There was a lot of good Country Western, but no melodies of the great days of our Lord's nativity. Then in a Carl Jrs. restaurant off Highway 5 in the San Joaquin Valley of California "O Holy Child of Bethlehem" and "Guide us to thy perfect light" were offered along with the hamburgers. That made even the thirteenth day of Christmas *great.*

Sing the songs of Easter all through the Eastertide and crown them with the hymns of Pentecost and Trinity. Preach the good news of Easter and crown it with the welcome to the Spirit. Make the fifty days great!

The Country Western hymn urges: "*Stand* on it!"

George W. Hoyer
Preaching Helps Editor

The Resurrection of Our Lord April 19, 1987

Psalm 118:1–2, 15–24
Acts 10:34–43
Colossians 3:1–4
Matthew 28:1–10

"On this day the Lord has acted; we will rejoice and be glad in it!" sings the psalmist. And rejoice we will, as parishioners who may never come at any other time in the year appear to worship! Not oddly, for this is *the* day which focuses on *the* central story of our faith. Christ is risen indeed, victorious over death, and because *he* is risen, we too have eternal life!

It is of some concern to me that this may be the *only* text most of the congregation has ever heard, and there is so much more that affects our lives *because* of this story. Those other influences are reflected in the lessons we hear at our other Sunday worship assemblies throughout the year. I have been known to *say* something about this to my Easter Sunday worshipers, not in a guilt-trip manner, but with genuine concern. "I am so glad to worship with you *all* this morning. I am concerned, however, that many of you will never hear any story of Christ except *this* one . . . except maybe the one about Christ's birth. There is *so much more* to the story of Christ, and this morning's gospel invites us to see and hear the reality of the "so much more," as well as the reality of the Resurrection."

And the Matthean account does just that (and because it does, can be used on so many other occasions as well). We focus on the words of the angel, God's messenger, to the bewildered women disciples who witness the empty tomb . . . and to the bewildered disciples we are today. Three things: "Do not be afraid. Come and see. Go and tell."

"Do not be afraid." What a wonderful, comforting, compassionate word from God through the angel! You will note that almost *always* the first words of angels to people are "Fear Not" (cf. Christ's birth, angels to Elizabeth, to Mary, etc.). Not surprising. After all, an encounter with God's messenger is an encounter with God, our Creator meeting us head-on, our Creator who knows *everything* about us. Who wouldn't be a little afraid? And God, who knows us so well and therefore expects that we will be frightened, *begins* encountering us with words of comfort, like the gentle compassion of a mother calming her baby when nightmares seem to overwhelm. Shhh, don't be afraid. Everything's alright. I am here, I am with you. I love you. Come and see that everything's alright.

"Come and see," says the messenger of God to the women. Come and see the wonderful gift given you. Actually you should have expected it. Remember, he *said* this would happen. Jesus, that phenomenal man whom you have loved, followed, and given your life to, that same one you watched *die* last Friday, has kept his promise. He is no longer dead, he is risen. Come and see. This victory is for you. Because he has risen, you too have that gift available. Remember, he *told* you. Come and see.

"Go quickly and share this news with the other disciples," first of all. But, as we see in other lessons, also go and tell *all*—the lonely, the poor, the oppressed, the stranger in the pew next to you. Why would you *not* want to share this wonderful news? What's that you say? You're feeling a little squeamish about "sharing"? Shh. Don't be afraid.

And so we, 20th century, bewildered disciples gather each week to come and see. This story of God's amazing love is overwhelming, too good to be true, too unusual to be believed without a little trepidation. So we gather to calm our fear, to retell the story, to hear more stories that give light to this central truth. We come each week to hear the Word of God through God's messengers. God's angels say again "Don't Be Afraid," but it sounds like "Good Morning, here's a bulletin, a place to sit."

And God's messengers say "Come and see," only it sounds like "This morning's text is _____. Remember how he told us?" Come and see and hear and eat and drink and taste. This gospel, this death and resurrection, is for you—for *your* forgiveness.

Be encountered by this Word of God in song and silence, in psalm and preaching and reading. Receive this life-giving Blood and Body, the risen, *living* Word of God.

Now, go and tell. "Tell everyone what God has done. Let *all* who seek the Lord rejoice and proudly bear Christ's name!" With food, with blankets, with Bible study, however you can, go with thanksgiving to tell all who are bewildered and afraid, that Christ's death and resurrection is for *all* the little ones of the world.

They may not believe you, you know. Not right away. After all, your message is an encounter with *God.* And that's wonderful, awesome, and frightening. So what shall we say to that fear? First a word of compassion. Shh. Don't be afraid. Come and See and Hear and Be strengthened, week after week, to go and tell. Christ *is* Risen so that all who believe shall not perish but have eternal life. Alleluia, indeed!

Judi McCall, Pastor
Grace Lutheran Church
Darlington, Wisconsin

Second Sunday of Easter April 26, 1987

Psalm 105:1–7
Acts 2:14a, 22–32
1 Peter 1:3–9
John 20:19–31

There follows the text of a sermon. It presents a way, perhaps a daring way, perhaps an effective way, of dealing (again) with dear doubting Thomas. It might be used in its entirety or as the spur to other ideas. In any case, a few important parenthetic remarks set the stage and crop up from time to time in the sermon.

(Act as if you are writing a letter. Eye contact with the congregation is to be avoided.)

Sunday, the first day of the week
Dear Thomas,

Oh, Tom, you should have been here.

It was last Sunday, a week ago today. We were all gathered together as always, and we had just heard about what Mary had seen and what had happened to her and then—oh, Tom, you should have been here—we saw the Lord. Yes, Tom, we saw the Lord.

He was in the room with us and he looked at each of us and said, "Peace be with you." And peace was with us. Oh, Tom, you should have been here. You know how difficult life has been, how hopeless and lost we have felt these last few days especially, with all the fear and the anxiety. We didn't even know if we could trust each other, if we were still friends. But he said, "Peace," and his being here was peace.

And then, Tom, he showed us his body, his wounds, and with my own hands I touched his broken, scarred body. Oh, Tom, you should have been here. When I touched him, it was as if I became a part of him, as if the two of us were joined together, as if I was enclosed within his side and those wounds were my wounds. He surrounded me. Remember how he used to talk about himself as the vine and us the branches? Remember that? Well, that is how it was. I was joined to him, to that bruised vine; his body became a part of me. I saw and I felt the wounds, and I said, "My Lord and my God." Oh, Tom, you should have been here. He was beaten and glorious at the same time. He was broken and wounded, yet he was the most wonderful sight in the whole world. His wounds were his glory, the very wounds that we caused, Tom, when we abandoned him and left him to die. In that glorious and wounded body I found my peace. He made me whole, and I want to cling to that body forever.

I felt his breath on my face, warm and alive, and it made me feel alive. Not only did I share in his body, but I felt as if his breath and spirit were my breath and spirit, too. His life was, his life is, my life. Oh, Tom, you should have been here. He filled me with his life and power. His scarred wholeness made me a new person, and I can hardly keep it in. Just before he left he said that we were to go out into the world in peace and be his agents of forgiveness, and we thought, "Of course, what else can we do?"

Tom, you remember how we all used to be: so concerned about making a good impression, so worried about not being ordinary, so timid and yet so desiring of being good and good enough. Remember how we all wanted to be the most honored of his followers? And remember how humiliating it was when he washed our feet that night? He shouldn't be doing that, we all thought. But, Tom, I tell you now, that I will spend the rest of my life washing feet, I will spend the rest of my life with those who eat crusts from the garbage, if that is what serving him means. I am a part of him and will do whatever follows from that. How could we have ever thought that God had given up on us? Oh, Tom, you should have been here. He never said, "Be good." He never said, "Do this and this and then you will have peace." He said, "Peace be with you. Stop struggling, stop earning, stop fearing, stop worrying. Peace." And I believe it, Tom. I believe it. In him I have peace, and now I look around me and everywhere I see him. I hear his joy as the children laugh in the playground. I see his bloody wounds in the frightened and furtive glances of the homeless on the street. And I feel his glory as the community gathers.

Oh, Tom, who could believe that all this happened? And so much more happened too; it would take pages and pages to write it all down, but I just had to tell you about these things, so that you would know.

Oh, Tom, you should have been here.
(Suddenly "noticing" the congregation and addressing them)

Tom, is that you? Tom? Oh, Tom, it is you. Oh, Tom, it's so good that you are here. You heard what I said about what happened before, but I didn't tell you the best news; the best news is that he said he would be here today, too. Yes, Tom, he's here today.
(Picking up a hymnal and turning to the sharing of the Peace)

Look, here on page 86, he says, "Peace be with you." Oh, Tom, peace, instead of all that fear and worry, all the doubt and insecurity, peace. Oh, Tom, it's so good that you are here.
(Picking up the bread, and being sure, later, to touch people's hands as they commune)

And here, Tom, here is his body: split and torn by the sword, ripped by the nails. Feel it in your hands, Tom. Feel the warmth of another human being as this body touches yours. Let it become a part of you. Make it yours. This wounded body will heal you. It will fill you up and surround you. Oh, Tom, it's so good that you are here.
(Back to the hymnal)

And then, here at the end, again he says, "Peace." Wherever you go he is with you and he will be your peace. He says, "Go (in peace) and serve (the Lord)." Filled with him, what else can you do?

Oh, Tom, it's so good that you are here.
(Excited, anticipating)

What Tom? What was that I thought I heard you say? My Lord and my God? Was that it? Or did I hear you almost shout "Thanks be to God"? That's right, Tom, your Lord and your God. He's here. Grab him. Touch him. Rest in him. And when he says, "Go in peace; serve the Lord," say with all your heart . . . "Thanks be to God."

Joel R. Workin, Intern
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Inglewood, California

Third Sunday of Easter May 3, 1987

Psalm 16
Acts 2:14a, 36–47
1 Peter 1:17–21
Luke 24:13–35

Meet Cleopas. Mentioned nowhere else in Scripture, Cleopas and a friend in this post-resurrection narrative (unique to Luke) provide for us a looking glass through which we can see ourselves. In their journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus and back, we have an opportunity to trace our own steps from doubt to faith to action, from sadness and despair to hope and joy and celebration. Leading the way, of course, is the crucified but now resurrected Jesus of Nazareth. It is the interaction between Jesus and those he joins in their journey which provides the setting for the drama of this Sunday of Easter.

The journey begins in Jerusalem. Cleopas is among the crowd who witness in horror the crucifixion of Jesus, whom they had hoped was the one who was to redeem Israel. As they now walk the seven miles from Jerusalem to their home in Emmaus, it is a picture of hopelessness we see. Testy with one another ("discussing together" suggests an argument), sad almost to the point of being surly, they snap a reply at the traveler who has joined them along the way. "Don't you know anything?" they seem to say, not recognizing that the one who has joined them knows it all and will shortly reveal it to them in a way they have never understood before.

How typical of our human condition. So preoccupied are we with our own narrow view of how God will intersect with our lives that when God actually does come to us, we don't even recognize the divine presence. Seeing is *not* believing. "What the eye does not anticipate it does not believe, and in the absence of faith the eye is blind" (Frederick W. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age,* p. 248). The dejection of the Emmaus disciples and their failure to recognize Jesus are only symptomatic of a deeper problem—a crisis of faith which leads to a loss of hope. We cut ourselves off from the hope-giver by believing either that our problems are too insignificant for God to be concerned about, or that they are too big for God to handle.

So what turns things around for Cleopas and his friend? What is the power that moves them from the hopeless feelings they have at the start of their journey to their enthusiastic witness to the eleven disciples at its conclusion? Clearly, it is not the mere physical presence of Jesus. Neither is it Jesus' interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures in their New Testament light. While their hearts burned within them as Jesus pointed to himself in Moses and the prophets, they still did not recognize him. Here is a powerful statement about the nature of faith. It is not until Jesus sits down at table with them and shares a meal (the Eucharistic overtones are unmistakable) that they finally recognize him in the Word made flesh among them. The testimony (i.e. Scripture) can only be understood fully and believed by being brought into a relationship with the one to whom the testimony points, Jesus, the Christ of faith. This is the encouragement Peter offers the hearer in the Second Lesson. "Through him [Jesus Christ] you have confidence in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God" (1 Peter 1:21).

That Jesus chooses to reveal his true identity to the disciples in the breaking of bread has significant implications for individual Christians and for the Christian community. Jesus wants the hope of the Christian and the life of the Christian community to depend not on the physical appearance, either then or now, of the earthly Jesus. Note how Jesus vanishes out of the sight of the two disciples the moment they identify him. Nor does Jesus wish to be

confined merely to the words which describe him. Instead, Jesus wishes to be known first and foremost as the crucified one. Thus he begins his explanation of Scripture with the statement, "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And he is recognized in an event that surely called to mind for Cleopas and friend the meal Jesus shared with the twelve shortly before his crucifixion, when he took bread, broke it and gave it to them saying, "Take and eat, this is my body, given [in death] for you." Their hope, and ours, is re-kindled when we place our hope in God, who in the death of Jesus confronted hopelessness at its depths, and on Easter came out victorious. The psalmist puts it like this: "I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved."

The implications of knowing Jesus in the breaking of bread are demonstrated dramatically in the First Lesson. "Day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day." Christ, the source of our faith and hope is most fully understood in the intimacy of a relationship—around the family table or around the Lord's Table. This suggests that the way to share Christ is to share ourselves as baptized people in whom Christ dwells. Believers in the early church explored the limits of this concept of Christian community. "All who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need" (Acts 2:44–45).

Uniting all the lessons for the day is the concept of joy in the presence of God. Cleopas and friend were overcome with sadness at first. By the end of the narrative their hearts are burning, and they are excitedly sharing their experiences with the other disciples. "Glad and generous hearts" is the description in Acts of the Christian church in fellowship with one another and with the Lord. 1 Peter describes the believer as having confidence and faith and hope because of a relationship with the resurrected Christ. A fitting conclusion might be these words from Psalm 16:

I keep the Lord always before me;
Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;
Thou dost show me the path of life;
in thy presence there is fullness of joy,
in thy right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Alan E. Loose
Shepherd of the Lake Lutheran Church
Prior Lake, Minnesota

Fourth Sunday of Easter
May 10, 1987

Psalm 23
Acts 6:1–9; 7:2a, 51–60
1 Peter 2:19–25
John 10:1–10

Take the ordinary and make it *extra*-ordinary. Homiletical illustrations abound around every preacher. Our Lord in today's Holy Gospel takes an ordinary and makes it extra.

The Hackensack hospital, not unlike other public buildings, has a revolving door at the entrance. A four year old boy was about to enter the revolving door barely a step ahead of me, *sans* mother or father. The security guard said, "Come this way, Father," as he opened a "DO NOT USE FOR EXIT" non-revolving door. For me it was salvation, no doubt, from going around and around as children are apt to do with revolving doors.

Life is too often seen as a revolving door: "Let's go around for a spin"—just going around, getting nowhere. Often even those in the faith seem simply to revolve in the spin

which means lack of commitment, going around with the wind, or going their own way as fast as their feet can take them.

"E-Z off/E-Z on" is the gospel of the interstate—a highway going who knows where—but it lacks commitment. Religion that is no more than easy on/off is no more than just another item on life's agenda. Life lived in merely a round-and-round direction reveals a failure to hear the shepherd's voice and follow his direction.

For many, the hospital door, far from being revolving, is a one way door—to death. That perception sometimes keeps residents of a certain retirement home from crossing the threshhold of the home's infirmary to visit friends. "There but for the grace of God, go I." Death's fearful hold.

Death's door stops the revolving. Those who buried the Christ thought so. Just to make sure, they set a guard, even after, as Matthew tells us, Joseph of Arimathea put "a great stone to the door of the tomb." But our holy faith reminds us that the door of death is completely changed for us through Jesus' own experience. The Lenten, Holy Week, and Emmaus journeys just completed show us the door through death to life. That is a door that truly goes somewhere.

And the Mass, time and again, sets us on the journey through the door. We are all there: children and security guards and all the baptized. Christ's death and resurrection establish God's open-door policy. The Christ who went into death heard the Father's voice and came forth—in obedience to the voice.

The revolving door, the door of death, and now the one that is left—the Eternal Door. Through that door we go in order to know the fullness of life's revolutions changed by Christ's death and resurrection. Stephen (First Lesson) saw the Lord and entered eternity. He went from the Lord's protection into the Lord's pasture (Psalm of the Day), as that same Christ leads us into the protection of the sheepfold, the life of the Church. From that fold, with the sheep, we go to the pasture where we are fed, to the Meal, a table prepared. So we hear the voice: "Come, it is prepared." Prepared as only a Good Shepherd can prepare it. And obeying, we a-*dore* the Lord.

Check out the doors of your parish. They are symbols of entrance that should be *sign*-ificant. Signs of the present and future; signs of the Christ in whom all enter the salvation of our God.

The Lord is risen!

Peter Stang Hoyer
Essex Catholic Girls High School
Irvington, New Jersey
Trinity Lutheran Church and School
Bogota, New Jersey

Fifth Sunday of Easter
May 17, 1987

Psalm 33:1–11
Acts 17:1–15
1 Peter 2:4–10
John 14:1–12

The lesson from Acts shows the extreme responses given to the preaching of the Good News. Some heard and believed. Others lashed out against the messengers, calling them "men who have turned the world upside down." By that description they meant to smear Paul and Silas' reputations—dangerous indeed are those who upset the status quo.

The people who "were persuaded and joined" the followers of Jesus might also have used that label. Positively stated, the Gospel's power takes the way things are—hopeless, hostile, loveless—and turns them head over heels, announcing that God has reached into that situation with hope, reconciliation and love.

But whether one sees Jesus as dangerous to the public good or as essential to real life and

truth, these polarities do share one thing: they take seriously the claims made by the Gospel. One builds on the foundation Jesus offers, one stumbles on him as cornerstone, but both respond in decisive ways.

How many in Thessalonica or Beroea heard and mustered up neither response, but instead consigned the message to the "hold" file? Ordinary people, preoccupied with putting food on the table, raising families, operating a business or working a job, snatching some enjoyment from a life marked by the same insecurities, fears and demands humanity shares—surely these folks didn't oppose the infant Church. Perhaps they even offered silent assent, since one might as well believe in *something.*

They had missed the particularity, the immediacy of the apostles' news. Or the promise of an upside-down world was perceived rather as a threat, since one hears of turning from "ordinary" status to "holy" according to one's assumptions about "holiness." It can be an unsettling notion, this "royal priesthood," this "God's own people" stuff. It upsets the applecart by bringing God in close, too close for comfort. When the Presence becomes as pragmatic as a man on a cross, can a person's response be any less concrete?

The enemies of Paul and Silas were right, of course. These two heralds were trying to throw the world out of joint. But by turning it *over* they revealed that the way we see and understand isn't the way God sees and understands. The underside that God has patiently been working on all this time radiates with the hope that people can hear Good News through death and resurrection, that weakness can be power, servanthood mastery and faith the difference between life and death.

With God close by, the upside-down world of forgiven sins, sainted sinners, and mercy by the bushel opens such hearers to the responsibility of passing the benefits around. Such priestly work is stirred up precisely because ordinary "keeping" is up-ended into extraordinary giving—of one's own self. For having been given the world and the Kingdom, how can one leave the former untouched by the latter?

Is such good news possible? Jesus assures us it is, as surely as his claim to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He makes the topsy-turvy reality come to pass, then hands it over to those who believe. Upside-down people, who instead of being no people, are God's people . . . people, formerly without mercy, now awash in an undammed flood.

"And you will do greater works . . ." keeping the world off-balance, unsettled, save in God's love. Surely no ordinary task, but certainly worthy of those who have been shown that the Father calls them, that they might be incited by the Good News to join in overturning not only hatred, but indifference, not only fear, but nonchalance. The world is a very different place with such news and such people . . . and with such a God.

Richard L. Ramirez
Ashburn Lutheran Church
Chicago, Illinois

Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 24, 1987

Psalm 66:1–6, 14–18
Acts 17:22–31
1 Peter 3:15–22
John 14:15–21

In many ways, the Gospel of John is foreign to a church so soundly based upon Synoptic concepts and Pauline logic. John is unique in its revelation of Jesus. To deal adequately with preaching from John, that uniqueness must be kept in mind.

There is so much in today's Gospel lesson, that it cannot all be adequately proclaimed in one sermon. There are a variety of theological themes in this text, especially trinitarian

themes. While theological presentations can be very stimulating in certain classroom situations, they do not generally make very stimulating sermons. Since it is not yet Trinity Sunday, but the second last Sunday in the Easter Season, and since the festivals of Ascension and Pentecost are near at hand, these will influence this study's approach to this text. Rather than presenting a sermon, ideas will be suggested for sermon development.

Keeping His Commandments

John 14:15–21 (22–24) is preceded by John's unique presentation of the Lord's Supper: the footwashing and the giving of a new commandment to love one another (13:34). It is followed by a pattern for Christian living, at the center of which is a commandment to love one another (15:12). This is all part of a longer section of transition, Jesus' farewell discourse, which concludes with the unique and beautiful High Priestly prayer, and its emphasis on Jesus' love for his Father, and for those whom his Father loves.

In John, the measure of love is the obedience to the love covenant. Jesus' love for the Father is measured by his obedience to their covenant relationship. Jesus' love for people is measured by his obedience to the covenant of the cross. Here, in this text, the love of the disciples is measured by their obedience to his covenant with them, his commandment to love one another. To help them keep his commandment, Jesus promised to send them a helper, the Holy Spirit.

Today's disciples are also called to keep his commandment, to love one another. The measure of our love, by the standards of today's Gospel lesson, is our loving one another. We can't do it on our own, and we don't have to. Jesus helped his disciples keep his commandments, and he continues to help us by sending a helper, the Holy Spirit, so that we can love one another.

Help in Change and Transition

Another direction for sermon development is to emphasize Jesus' presence and guidance in preparing for transitions and changes in life. It could begin with what the disciples were facing, and move on to issues of change or transition facing the congregation, community, or groups of people within the congregation or community. Jesus' presence, the Holy Spirit, the Enabler he sends to all who believe (not just to a select few—vs. 22–24), is the Paraclete (one who is called in to help where help is needed). Here is a transition from Easter to Pentecost, from upper room to early church, from Sunday worship to Christian living. The tools of the Holy Spirit include: Word, Sacrament, prayer, and people.

St. Paul attempted to help the people of Athens make the transition from an unknown god to the God made known by Jesus, through the Holy Spirit. As the 1 Peter text emphasizes, that transition is from a life dominated by sin to a life dominated by reverence for the love of Christ.

An Awareness of Jesus

Another emphasis in a sermon could be the awareness of just who Jesus is. In his efforts to fortify his faithful followers, Jesus tried to give them this awareness.

Socrates' disciples were left desolate orphans ~~when their~~ teacher and leader died. John the Baptizer's disciples were orphaned and sent to Jesus. Jesus' disciples would not be orphaned. He told them what he was going to do for them: continue to be present with them through the Holy Spirit. He then told them why they could count on this: His relationship with the Father. Jesus was not just another teacher or leader. The disciples' awareness of this would help them accept his promise, receive the paraclete, and go on. The killing of Jesus

would not put an end to what he had begun. His promise, power, presence, guidance and love would not end. The disciples needed to know that. They still do.

The Church sometimes loses sight of the fact that Jesus is far more than Lord of Sunday School and Sunday Worship. As today's disciples are confronted with difficulties and adversities, opportunities and challenges, the awareness of just who Jesus is can help them receive the Holy Spirit's love, guidance and power. It can also help them keep his commands.

The congregation can be challenged to take a closer look at what they proclaim about Jesus to their neighborhood and community, who also need to hear and see, from his disciples, that Jesus is not just some old time religious leader, but the powerful, loving, present Lord of all.

John Wiley Fox
Christ Lutheran Church
Corpus Christi, Texas

Seventh Sunday of Easter
May 31, 1987

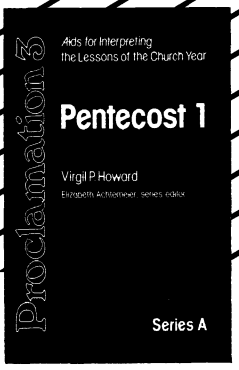
Psalm 47
Acts 1:(1–7) 8–14
1 Peter 4:12–17; 5:6–11
John 17:1–11

The power and sense of direction in the first part of John 17 are larger and more important than the emphasis it receives today, even in the wake of the Ecumenical Movement. The stress in this chapter is on unity. Unity is a part of the witness of this chapter, but it is unity with a purpose. For the followers of Jesus unity with each other is a means and not an end. In the Greek text the terms "in order to" or "in order that" occur four times in the first few verses. The Gospel is going somewhere important, and unity, as it applies to us, is a means of getting there.

The prayer in John 17 is the conclusion of that portion of the Gospel known as the farewell discourses. Three small portions of this section are used in cycle "A." If the preacher has not recently read this passage it would be well to review chapters 13 through 17. This also might be a time to study various farewell messages in the Bible. They are numerous. The glory of God and the glory God gives to Israel are recurring themes. The one verse farewell of King Saul is an exception (1 Sam 31:4). "This is embarrassing, I could just die," is the essence of the message. Most of the farewells are positive even when they are very serious. David preaches to Solomon in one version of his farewell and delves into architecture in the other. Paul is very serious and has a deep sense of foreboding in his farewell to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, but still an upbeat quality in verse 32. Among the many farewells in the Bible Moses' farewell speech, in Deuteronomy, is the model of length and positive thinking. It has even lent its name to a whole style of positive thinking called "deuteronomic." The Bible is filled with positive farewells and John 17 is no exception.

Because this is the last of the Easter Sundays the texts for the day all underline the victory proclaimed in this season. The Psalm proclaims God's universal reign and God's power over world history. God has subdued and chosen; he has gone up and reigns. God is exalted. The Psalm shouts out God's power and glory. The first lesson continues the same theme. The time of the Spirit is at hand, and the Spirit's time is to be a time of power. The followers of Jesus are empowered to proclaim the message of Jesus and the victory that Jesus has won "to the ends of the earth." The second lesson brings a note of caution. It will not be easy. There will be opposition. In the end, however, God's kingdom will triumph forever and ever. The Gospel is a "witnessing" gospel. Its major

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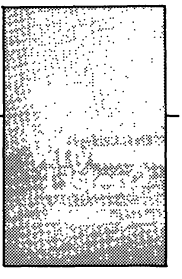
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emphasis is on the power and glory of God in Christ. The call for the followers of Jesus is to proclaim the power and glory of the resurrected one.

The followers of Jesus are to give glory because *they have received it.* Glory bubbles a little beneath the surface of the entire body of Johannine literature. Glory is something God's Christ has from pre-creation to re-creation. This glory is revealed to the followers of Jesus. They "know" Christ and so have eternal life. Knowing is power. Knowing also carries with it the business of making known.

The followers of Jesus "know" him and thus *know the name of God.* They are the ones in every age who are called to bear the name and the word of God in the world. The resurrection is the seal of a truth that previously in the Gospel had been communicated by words and signs. The followers of Jesus are part of the inner circle; they know! They know the name, and they bear the name. The followers of Jesus have had the privilege of face–to–face dialogue. They get to put their hands into nail marks and spear wounds. They know and those who come after will know because of them. The ones who know the name also become the ones who bear the name.

Like good name-bearers everywhere, they become name-droppers.

The followers of Jesus carry on the work of Jesus *in the world.* The prayer is not for the world but for the followers of Jesus who are in the world. This startles us. It may even offend us. We are used to building the kingdom in the world and to improving things in the name of Jesus. The followers of Jesus represent Jesus and point to a kingdom that he brings. It is a kingdom present and not yet present. Jesus is not the fixer of a bruised world; he is the redeemer of a lost one. He is, more accurately, the redeemer of those whom God has given him who are no longer of the world, even though they are in it.

Jesus wants his followers to remain faithful to the name and task they have been given. An image that might be useful here is an image from the musical "Camelot." As the kingdom comes to its glorious and tragic end, Arthur calls a young page to himself and tells him:

"Each evening from December to December,
before you fall asleep upon your cot,
think back on all the tales that you remember, of Camelot.
Don't let it be forgot, that once there was a spot,
for one brief shining hour, that was known as Camelot!"

The followers of Jesus know the reality of a perfect kingdom that is and will be. They, like the page, forever have the burden and privilege of telling.

The followers of Jesus are called on Easter 7 to remember and proclaim. The Eucharist celebrated today closes the Easter season with a real sense of participation and proclamation. The second stanza of Hymn 221 in *Lutheran Book of Worship* stands out:

"With your feast you feed us, With your light now lead us;
Unite us as one in this life that we share.
Then may all the living with praise and thanksgiving
Give honor to Christ and his name that we bear."

Allen E. Hermeier
St. Olaf Lutheran Church
Fort Dodge, Iowa

The Day of Pentecost
June 7, 1987

Psalm 104:24–34
Joel 2:28–29
Acts 2:1–21
John 20:19–23

One entry point into today's Gospel is the disciples' fear. Perhaps they were afraid of be-

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ing associated with the crucified Jesus or implicated in the apparent theft of his body. We're not sure. We do know that paranoia knocked the breath out of their mission.

For fear of those different from us we shut out whole nations and cultures. This may be the Sunday to raise the concerns of our Native American sisters and brothers as we raise up the Dove.

The Feast of Pentecost falls on June 7th, the day to commemorate Noah Seattle, Chief of the Allied Tribes. The reading from Chief Seattle's speech inspires hope amidst catastrophe (Pfatteicher, *Festivals and Commemorations,* 226ff.)

Fear disrupts community. But let's push the diagnosis a bit further. It is interesting that the Johannine Pentecost, as distinct from that in Luke/Acts, occurs back to back with the Easter event. Raymond Brown describes the text structurally as Scene Two of the Risen Jesus (Anchor Bible).

In Scene One Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb expecting a body. For her, death appeared victorious. Jesus calls Mary by name, conquering death by his presence. She is sent "on her way rejoicing" to tell the others but her faithful telling cannot penetrate their unbelief. Hence we come to Scene Two, our Gospel.

The disciples are paralyzed by fear. But that is symptomatic of a deeper problem, one fully articulated in the story of Thomas which immediately follows today's Gospel. Mary, the other disciples, and Thomas did not expect to meet a living Jesus amidst their catastrophe. Disbelief empowered their fear.

The preacher might gently lead the hearer from paranoia, with all of its attendant behavior, into the deeper dilemma of unbelief. Underneath the paranoia is the confession that, in fact, we are out of breath and out of faith. Worse yet, we experience this faithless asphixiation as failure before God.

Our unbelief fails the one who has the power to give or withhold breath and make Leviathan sink or swim (Ps 104). I heard recently a comedian deliver the line "Think of death as a pie-in-the-face-from-God." It didn't get much of a laugh.

Sometimes in ministry we experience the pain of running out of breath and faith. We know the paranoia of running dry and of parish life becoming "just-one-damned-thing-after-another." We feel the loneliness of being professional nobodies in a world impressed by somebodies, of trying to catch our breath by latching on to the latest "prophetic" agendas and church growth gimmicks. I think of the young priests' words in Bernanos' "The Diary of a Country Priest:"

> "A terrible night. No sooner had I shut my eyes than desolation came upon me. I can find no other word to describe this indefinable exhaustion, as though my very soul were bleeding to death."

And yet it is precisely in our "indefinable exhaustion" that Jesus sends his Holy Spirit to unlock and restore us from fear and unbelief. Our very paranoia becomes an opportunity for metanoia. "Jesus came and stood in front of them. 'Peace to you' he said" (vs. 19).

Within the catastrophe of unbelief and failure before God stands the living Jesus, breathing life eternal through the Spirit into our lives. And just so we may expect to meet him during those moments when death seems like the last word, God's ultimate "pie-in-the-face."

Peace to you! This is not a mere greeting. Peace is the salvation of Jesus come to us from the Dove, who breathes eternal life into our smothered lives.

The breath of the Spirit empowers us to unlock and unbind each other and to walk back into the catastrophes of our world. Through the Spirit he makes us a "Holy conspiracy" breathing his life into dead places because "we should at all times and in all places. . . ."

At the end of "The Diary of a Country Priest" the young priest expires, a complete failure. His friend reports the final moments.

> "He did not seem to hear me. But a few moments later he put his hand over mine, and his eyes entreated me to draw closer to him. He then uttered these words almost in my ear. And I am quite sure that I have recorded them accurately, for his voice, though halting, was strangely distinct. 'Does it matter? Grace is everywhere. . . .' I think he died just then."

Grace *is* everywhere! What do we make of that?

Jack Schieman
Trinity Lutheran Church
Pleasanton, California

The Holy Trinity
June 14, 1987

Psalm 29
Genesis 1:1–2:3
2 Corinthians 13:11–14
Matthew 28:16–20

We are a precise people. At least, we think we are! Our 20th century world prides itself in its prowess to discover, to pin down, to function around statistical significance. Just give us the facts, please! We gravitate toward the accurate, the definite and the exact; then we're secure, then we're in control. Our addiction to reductionism places us under the curse of the Law. Just consider how the search for easy, reduced answers to current social issues wreaks havoc in God's creation.

As this reflection is written, America is celebrating the 100th anniversary of Lady Liberty, the Statue of Liberty. My TV screen has been shifting from face to face of people describing what she means, why she is so important, why she is to be celebrated. No answers are the same. For all the Statue's definiteness of history and purpose, Lady Liberty's power in American history past, present and future is deep and wide, esoteric and mysterious.

On this Sunday, we "precise" people gather to celebrate and worship the divine mystery, God who has chosen to reveal Godself as Father-Creator, Son-Redeemer and Holy Spirit-Sanctifier. Gathering we give praise to God: immanent, yet transcendent; known, yet unknown; revealed, yet obscure. Look out, though, in the presence of this imprecise divine mystery we might lose *our* security, *our* control, and find our life!

Ask your parishioners four weeks before this Sunday, perhaps in a bulletin insert, to define God and what that definition of God means for them and the world. I suggest this will reveal the mystery and power of God and connect them with the texts chosen for this Sunday.

The texts say much; yet little. The texts reveal God; yet God remains concealed. The texts privilege us with a glimpse of God's fullness; yet protect God from being fully known. Our preaching on this day dare not limit, categorize, make static or reduce the majesty of God.

Beautifully the Psalmist sets the tone for our worship. In bold, clean ascriptions the Psalmist calls out to the congregation aspects of God's nature revealed to Israel: Glory, strength, holiness, power, majesty, authority. I can hear the congregation cry "AMEN!" to each ascription. How totally "other" this Lord; yet in Psalmic-gospel fashion, the text climaxes its liturgy with the proclamation of the Lord's loving immanence: strength to God's people and God's blessing of shalom.

The priestly creation account (Genesis 1) ascribes to the Lord vocally creative power. A creative power in God's speaking brings forth life out of nothing. Such life is orderly, sufficient, abundant, harmonious, and good (i.e. perfectly fulfilling God's vivifying will). Then to deepen the mystery of God (even question God's sanity) the Lord God creates persons who bear the Creator's image and procreative, stewardly authority! "And it was *very good*!"

The Lord God—awesomely other, yet warmly intimate. The Lord God—known, yet unknown.

The Holy Gospel rivets our "peek into God's nature" onto God's crowning vocalization, God's ultimate intimacy with humanity, God's deepest disclosure, Jesus—now risen and ascending—whom the disciples: "worshiped but some doubted!" i.e. knew but didn't know, understood but didn't understand. Their encounter that day with Jesus and his commissioning is a paradigm of the mystery of faith in the mystery of God for us almost-21st-century, precision-oriented disciples. We are disciples birthed anew in the baptismal flood, recreating us in God's Trinitarian name (i.e. image), uniting us with the creative, redeeming, sanctifying mystery of God's "Lo, I am with you always" nature.

Fight the systematic addiction to KISS (Keep It Simple Stupid). Muddy the clear pool waters of our human categorization, limitation and reduction of God's nature so that you might lead your hearers into the awe, dependence, and worship of the presence of the Lord God. Celebrate what God has let us know! Celebrate what God has hidden from our lives! Celebrate God's revealed gifts: grace, love, and fellowship. Celebrate how much more God has in store for God's people in the fulness of time. Until then: "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all!"

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