

LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY



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2013 Bjarne Wollan Teigen Reformation Lectures

The Reformation Heritage and Christian Vocation

The Christian Faces Contemporary Challenges

Articles and Sermon

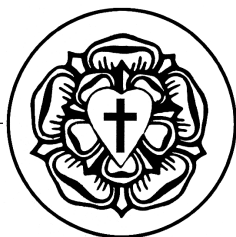
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Sermon on Genesis 29:13–30

Notes

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Foreword

LSQ Vol. 54, No. 1 (March 2014)

IN THIS ISSUE OF THE *Quarterly* we are pleased to share with our readers the 2013 annual Bjarne Wollan Teigen Reformation Lectures, delivered October 31–November 1, 2013, in Mankato, Minnesota. These lectures are sponsored jointly by Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. This was the forty-sixth in the series of annual Reformation Lectures which began in 1967. The format of the Reformation Lectures has always been that of a free conference and thus participation in these lectures is outside the framework of fellowship.

This year there were two presenters. The first lecture was given by Prof. Mark Harstad of Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, Minnesota. Prof. Harstad grew up in Watertown, Wisconsin, where his father served as chaplain at Bethesda Lutheran Home. He is a graduate of Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin (1970), and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary (1974). He served congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in Madison, Wisconsin, and Brewster (Cape Cod), Massachusetts. Professor Harstad holds the M.A. degree in Hebrew and Semitic Studies from the University of Wisconsin at Madison (1974) and completed the course work for a doctorate in the same field. He has taught courses at the college and seminary level in history, biblical Hebrew, and religious studies, specializing in Old Testament studies. He has also made six trips to Latvia where he conducted lecture programs on confessional Lutheranism,

teaching exegetical courses in the School of Theology at the University of Latvia, and courses in biblical Hebrew at the Augsburg Institute in Riga. Over the years he has served on various boards and committees of the ELS including the Doctrine Committee and the Catechism Review Committee. He currently serves on the board of the ELS Historical Society and its Centennial Committee. Prof. Harstad and his wife of 39 years, Peggy, are blessed with four children.

The second presenter was the Rev. Dr. Harold Senkbeil, executive director for spiritual care at DOXOLOGY in Brookfield, Wisconsin. Harold Senkbeil was born in Ortonville, Minnesota in 1945 to Harold and Enid Senkbeil and raised on the family farm near Bellingham. He received an A.A. from Concordia College, St. Paul, Minnesota (1965), a B.A. from Concordia Sr. College in Ft. Wayne, Indiana (1967), a B.D. from Concordia Seminary in Springfield, Illinois (1971), and a Masters of Divinity (1978) and S.T.M. (1986) from Concordia Seminary, Ft. Wayne, Indiana. He was honored with the *Servus Ecclesias Christi* award (CTS, 1988) and received the Doctor of Divinity, *Honoris Causa* from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri (2001). While in the pastoral ministry the Rev. Senkbeil served parishes in Mahanomen and Morris, Minnesota, Madison and Elm Grove, Wisconsin, and Ft. Wayne, Indiana. His academic service includes a variety of positions at each of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) seminaries in St. Louis and Ft. Wayne. He currently serves as the Executive Director for Spiritual Care for DOXOLOGY: The Lutheran Center for Spiritual Care and Counsel. Following his 31 years as a parish pastor, he served as Associate Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana (2002–2008). He has served the LCMS in a number of capacities, including the South Wisconsin District Board of Directors (1989–1997), the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations (1998–2002), and the Concordia Seminary, St. Louis Board of Regents (2011–present). Pastor Senkbeil is the author of several books, such as *Sanctification: Christ in Action* (NPH, 1989), *Dying to Live: The Power of Forgiveness* (CPH, 1994), and several others. He and his wife Jane were married in 1971, and are blessed with three children and three grandchildren.

The theme of the lectures was “Confessional Lutheranism’s Answers to the Challenges of Modern Society.” The first lecture, given by Prof. Harstad, was entitled “The Reformation Heritage and Christian Vocation.” The second lecture, presented by Dr. Senkbeil, was entitled “The Christian Faces Contemporary Challenges.”

The Reformation Lectures were a study of the three estates and their relationship to the challenges of modern society. In the Reformation, Luther provided structure for social life by using the three estates originating in the Middle Ages: those who provide nourishment (*Nährstand*), those who ensure order (*Webrstand*), and those who teach God's Word (*Lehrstand*). Luther indicated that people have responsibilities in all three estates. Understanding one's duty in each of these estates will help one meet the challenges of modern society.

2013 was the centennial of the publication of the *Lutheran Hymnary*. Printed in 1913, the hymnary contains a treasury of Scandinavian hymnody. The hymnary was well-loved by Norwegian Lutherans in America and used in many of the congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod until the publication of the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* in 1996. The essay written by the Rev. Peter Faugstad gives the history of the *Lutheran Hymnary* and summarizes its content. The Rev. Faugstad is pastor of Parkland Lutheran Church in Tacoma, Washington, and Lakewood Lutheran Church in Lakewood, Washington.

2013 marked the 170th anniversary of the Old Lutheran immigration in 1843. During the mid-nineteenth century several large groups of German Lutherans immigrated to America for religious freedom. Denied the proper practice of their Lutheran faith in the fatherland, they sought a new homeland. They desired to confess the doctrines of Scripture in their truth and purity and live authentic Christian lives proclaiming the praises of the Savior who called them out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Also included in this *Quarterly* is a sermon by the Rev. Peter Faugstad, based on Genesis 29:13–30 for the second Sunday in Epiphany; information concerning the 2013 meeting of the Theological Commission of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC); and a note on the twentieth anniversary of the CELC.

– GRS

The Reformation Heritage and Christian Vocation

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LSQ Vol. 54, No. 1 (March 2014)

WE THINK OF THE LUTHERAN Reformation as primarily a rediscovery of the gospel. And so it was, but along with that rediscovery came many other powerful insights. Among them is the biblical teaching concerning Christian vocation.

In an article entitled “Our Calling and God’s Glory,”¹ Gene Edward Veith, who has done much in recent years to popularize interest in the concept of Christian vocation, makes these observations: 1) The doctrine of vocation is second in significance only to the rediscovery of justification by grace alone appropriated by faith alone among the achievements of the Lutheran Reformation, and 2) this teaching was for some time a neglected aspect of Reformation teaching. In the introduction to his *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life*, Veith employs a literary allusion to illustrate the dramatic nature of his personal discovery of the doctrine of Christian vocation. He compares his experience in reading Gustaf Wingren’s *Luther on Vocation* to the experience of the English Romantic poet John Keats when he picked up George Chapman’s English translation of Homer’s *Iliad and Odyssey* for the first time, and then composed a sonnet to celebrate his excitement.

We won’t attempt to comment specifically on Veith’s ranking of Christian vocation right after justification among the achievements

¹ Gene Edward Veith, “Our Calling and God’s Glory,” *Modern Reformation Magazine*, “Using God” issue 16:6 (Nov./Dec. 2007): 22-28. Accessible online at <<http://www.modernreformation.org/default.php?page=articledisplay&cvar2=881>>.

of the Reformation, nor will we contest his claim that it has been a neglected teaching, although some who have been faithfully inculcating the “Table of Duties” in their catechesis may want to do that. But it will be our purpose to affirm that the doctrine of Christian vocation is a very important part of the Reformation heritage. This is so whether or not one experiences an epiphany moment underscored with an “Aha!” or “Eureka!” or the invocation of an appropriate literary allusion in connection with the study of it. It is a teaching woven into the fabric of a Reformation *Weltanschauung*, inextricably tied up with several other prominent Reformation themes.

There are several approaches one might pursue to get at the topic of Christian vocation and it was a bit of a puzzle for me what could be done in an hour’s lecture that would be of benefit to busy students, pastors, teachers, and all interested parties. The approach opted for here is to allow the great reformer himself to be our teacher and guide as much as possible. Preparation for this presentation affirmed a previously held notion that it is usually much more enjoyable to read Luther himself than to read books about Luther. This is not to say that books about Luther have no value. What those works usually consist of can be described as a process of raking into neat rows and piles the scattered leaves of Luther’s prodigious but not very systematized thought.

The Discussion of Christian Vocation in Recent Years

There can be little doubt that there has been a resurgence of interest in the doctrine of Christian vocation over the last two decades. To what is the resurgence of interest attributable? The consensus seems to be that it was the work of Swedish theologian Gustaf Wingren (1910–2000) which got the ball rolling. One contemporary scholar has connected Wingren’s work with a phenomenon called “the Swedish Luther Renaissance” and places Wingren in the third generation of that movement.² His predecessors going back into the 19th century were Einar Billing (1871–1939), Gustaf Aulen (1879–1977), Anders Nygren (1890–1978), and Regin Prenter (1907–1990), to name some of the most prominent members of that movement. Swedish Bishop Bo Giertz (1905–1998) was a contemporary as well.

In 1942 Gustaf Wingren completed his doctoral dissertation, *Luther on Vocation*. It was to some extent a refutation of an earlier work by Einar Billing on the same topic. The details of that controversy need

² Mary Elizabeth Anderson, *Gustaf Wingren and the Swedish Luther Renaissance* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006).

not detain us here. Very briefly, it had to do with where the concept of Christian vocation is to be situated in the body of Christian teaching. Billing saw it as a Second Article issue, relating to redemption. Wingren connects it with the providential care of God for creation, under the First Article.

Wingren's work was published in English in 1957.³ It went through reprinting in the 1990s and again in 2004.⁴ It is an attempt to systematize the scattered thoughts of Luther on the topic of vocation. In 2002 Gene Edward Veith published *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life*, which is a popularization of Wingren's work. Veith is an expert at taking complicated theological topics and presenting them in a style accessible to many. The body of literature which has grown up around the topic is now extensive. John T. Pless has published a helpful article which reviews the influence of Wingren's work across the decades.⁵ He also published a substantial bibliography of works old and new on the topic a few years ago.⁶ That bibliography now needs to be updated.

Not all who write about the topic of Christian vocation look with complete favor on Wingren's work. In 2002 Kenneth Hagen published a critique in *The Lutheran Quarterly* which takes Wingren to task to some extent.⁷ Again, the details will not occupy us here. A brief journey into the secondary literature surrounding the topic brings us face to face with the problem which C. S. Lewis describes in his introduction to Dorothy Sayers' translation of Athanasius' *On the Incarnation*, the problem of the proliferation of "new books" on an old topic. In taking up the new books we are attempting to join a conversation at 11:00 pm which began at 7:00 pm. Many aspects of the discussion will sail over our heads.

So, what to do? We will heed Lewis's advice and do an end run around the new books, and get back to the old books, the works of Luther. In so doing we will discover the richness of Luther's thought, derived as always from his penetrating exegetical method, total grasp of the body of Christian doctrine and how its many parts relate to each other, and his conviction that all theology worthy of the name is

³ Translated by Carl C. Rasmussen, published by Muhlenberg Press.

⁴ Reprinted by Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 2004.

⁵ "Gustaf Wingren's *Luther on Vocation* after Sixty-five years," a paper delivered at the International Luther Research Congress, Porto Allegre, July, 2007. Accessible at <<http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Journal-of-Lutheran-Ethics/Issues/August-2010/Gustaf-Wingrens-Luther-on-Vocation-after-Sixty-five-Years.aspx>>.

⁶ Accessible at <www.cranach.org/vocation/vocationbibliography.doc>.

⁷ Kenneth Hagen, "A Critique of Wingren on *Luther on Vocation*," *Lutheran Quarterly* (Autumn 2002): 249-273.

ultimately practical. It addresses the spiritual need of real human beings. The theme of Christian vocation is scattered throughout the body of Luther's works from the early 1520s to the end of his life. And what he had to say over the span of two and a half decades is completely consistent. The resurgence of interest in the topic of Christian vocation is ultimately traceable to Luther. In the English-speaking world anyone who has availed himself of the American Edition of *Luther's Works* since the volumes began to appear in the 1950s has encountered Luther on vocation.

Is it so that the doctrine of Christian vocation and the concomitant concept of the estates of mankind which the Creator has built into the structure of his creation have been neglected aspects of Christian teaching among the heirs of the Lutheran Reformation in modern times? It does seem remarkable that when Ewald M. Plass put together his three-volume anthology of Luther quotations in the 1950s, *What Luther Says*, he did not include an entry on Christian vocation or on the concept of the estates as discussed frequently by Luther. Much of the material is probably scattered under many other entries, but it seems clear now that entries on Christian vocation and estates would have been appropriate to include in an anthology of Luther quotations.

Definitions and Summary

In Luther's world of thought the term "vocation" can be applied to any of the many stations, positions, duties, offices, or callings in life which a person holds under the broader categories of the estates. The estates are a part of the fabric both of God's creation and his work of distributing the benefits of the redemptive work of Christ. The estates are established by the Word of God. They rest on an instituting Word. The foundational estates are these:

- 1) The estate of marriage and family and all related matters was instituted at creation, reaffirmed in connection with the giving of the Moral Law (the Fourth and Sixth Commandments) in written form through Moses, and reaffirmed again in the apostolic Scriptures of the New Testament.

- 2) The estate of civil government includes both the political and economic spheres of activity, how order is maintained in society, and daily bread in its broadest sense is provided. This estate develops out of the first one. The New Testament

Scriptures explicitly reaffirm that government is instituted by God (Romans 13).

3) The churchly estate consists of the believers and the means by which they are brought to and kept in the faith: the divinely instituted Means of Grace, and the offices whereby they are administered for the benefit of the faithful. This estate is a bridge between the Two Kingdoms. This side of death and resurrection the faithful are in this world, but the churchly estate ultimately has as its purpose to bring them out of this world to the eternal Kingdom of God.

Under the first estate a person passes through many vocations in the course of a lifetime, and may hold several of them simultaneously: child, brother, sister, father, mother, uncle, aunt, grandmother, grandfather, etc.

Under the second estate a person may hold the vocations of neighbor, citizen, government official, employer, and employee.

Under the churchly estate the faithful hold membership in the Holy Christian Church, into which they are called and kept by the gospel. In this world they seek out the fellowship of the Church on the basis of the pure marks of the church and support its work, including the calling of individuals whose specific vocation it becomes to preach and teach the Word and administer the Sacraments in the midst of the faithful.

All people, regardless of their relationship to God, regardless of the time and place in which they live, regardless of race and culture, hold vocations in the first two estates. This is part of the arrangement of the Creator for the providential care of his creation even after the fall into sin. The ground is cursed, daily bread is acquired through sweat and toil, pain and sorrow attend our many activities, and finally death claims all; but according to the promise of God there will not be a general destruction of the world until the final judgment. Seedtime and harvest, day and night will not cease, and God will continue to cause the sun to rise and the rain to fall for the benefit of all creatures. The estates of family and government will function until the end of time.

Vocation in the churchly estate, on the other hand, does not take place without the call of the gospel and the miracle of faith which appropriates the forgiveness of sins. In the midst of the mass of humanity this estate is made up of a little flock. In the case of believers their vocation as believers is then draped over their vocations in the other two estates. It sanctifies what they do in their various earthly positions, callings, and duties. The duties they carry out in their vocations become true good

works in the sight of God. The faithful also acquire a perspective on life which is different from that of those without faith in the gospel.

To outward appearances the lives of those who conduct themselves in an upright manner in their vocations under the first two estates apart from faith in the gospel will be indistinguishable from the lives of the faithful. Faith is hidden away in the heart, the saints are out of sight, as Luther was fond of pointing out. Gustaf Wingren⁸ claims that Luther makes a distinction in the terminology he applies to believers and unbelievers as to the first two estates. All people have *Stand*, that is, station, position, or office in family and society. But only the faithful have *Beruf*, that is, calling or vocation in a strict sense. Whether he was completely consistent in this distinction over the decades in which he was lecturing and writing about these things is not entirely clear. No particular effort will be made in what follows here to maintain the *Stand vs. Beruf* distinction in English.

Back to the Old Books: The Reformation Heritage

Following in a general way some of the chief themes outlined by Gustaf Wingren, let us now explore several aspects of the concept of Christian vocation and how it is inextricably connected with other facets of Christian teaching. Dr. Luther will serve as our guide.

The Estates Instituted by God

We begin with the estates which are instituted by the Word and command of God. One place where Luther lays this out at some length is in that interesting, concluding section of his 1528 *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*. There he presents his personal confession concerning the chief articles of the Christian faith, in the midst of which we find his confession concerning the three estates: "These three religious institutions or orders are found in God's Word and commandment; and whatever is contained in God's Word must be holy for God's Word is holy and sanctifies everything connected with it and involved in it."⁹ At the same time he makes it very clear that these estates in and of themselves do not appropriate salvation. That is attributable only to faith in Jesus Christ.

References to the estates established by the Word of God pop up again and again in his lectures and sermons. For example:

⁸ *Luther on Vocation*, 91.

⁹ LW 37: 364–365.

Let the clergyman teach in the church, let the civil officer govern the state, and let parents rule the home or the household. These human ministries were established by God. Therefore we must make use of them¹⁰

This life is profitably divided into three orders: (1) life in the home; (2) life in the state; (3) life in the church. To whatever order you belong—whether you are a husband, an officer of the state, or a teacher of the church—look about you, and see whether you have done full justice to your calling¹¹

Vocations, Callings, Stations, Etc.

Under the estates are the various vocations, callings, stations, offices, and duties. Luther uses many synonymous terms. He never tires of celebrating these things. One substantial example of how he honors vocations goes as follows:

This [verse, i.e., Psalm 111:3] is a thanksgiving for all the works of God which He ordains among men, as, for example, the various stations, offices and duties among men. Surely, anyone should laugh in his heart for joy if he finds himself in a station that God instituted or ordained. He ought to shout and dance as he thanks God for such a divine act, because here he hears and is assured that his position is full of honor and adornment before God.... This means that a servant, maid, son, daughter, man, woman, lord, subject, or whoever else may belong to a station ordained by God, as long as he fills his station, is as beautiful and glorious in the sight of God as a bride adorned for her marriage or as the image of a saint decorated for a high festival....

These divine stations and orders have been established by God that in the world there may be a stable, orderly, and peaceful life, and that justice may be preserved.... For if God had not Himself instituted these stations and did not daily preserve them as His work, no particle of right would last even a moment. Every servant would want to be a lord, every maid a mistress, every peasant a prince, and every son above a father and mother. In short, conditions would be worse among men

¹⁰ LW 2 *Lectures on Genesis* 7, 83.

¹¹ LW 3 *Lectures on Genesis* 18, 217.

than they are among the wild animals, where each devours the other; for God did not give them such institutions.¹²

The Two Kingdoms

A proper understanding of Christian vocation and its place in the scheme of things presupposes an understanding of the doctrine of the two kingdoms, the principles according to which each kingdom functions, and the kinds of righteousness that are appropriate to each. The distinction between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world is an essential aspect of Reformation teaching. It was for Luther an exegetical conclusion that he arrived at through painstaking study of the Scriptures, but then it also became a hermeneutical principle, a tool for the further elucidation of the meaning of Scripture. What we are accustomed to call the separation of church and state is one aspect of two kingdoms thinking, but there is much, much more to it than that. The distinction has to do with every aspect of how the “economies” of the two kingdoms function. This includes the nature of truth and how it is arrived at in each kingdom, what the “currency” of each kingdom is, the governing principles of each, the duties of citizenship in each, etc. Here is a sampling of how Luther would lay this out:

God has ordained two governments: the spiritual by which the Holy Spirit produces Christians and righteous people under Christ; and the temporal, which restrains the un-Christian and wicked so that—no thanks to them—they are obliged to keep still and to maintain an outward peace.¹³

[M]an is divided between two kingdoms, in one of which he is directed to his own choice and counsel, apart from any precepts and commandments of God, namely, in his dealing with the lower creatures [the things beneath him]. Here he reigns and is lord, as having been left in the hands of his own counsel....

In the other kingdom, however, man is not left in the hand of his own counsel, but is directed and led by the choice and counsel of God, so that just as in his own kingdom he is directed by his own counsel, without regard to the precepts of another,

¹² LW 13 *Commentary on Psalm 111*, 368–369.

¹³ LW 45 *Temporal Authority*, 91.

so in the Kingdom of God he is directed by the precepts of another without regard to his own choice.¹⁴

From now to the end of the world these two realms are not to be confused.... They are to remain distinct and separate from each other, if the pure gospel and the true faith are to be preserved. There is a vast difference between the kingdom of Christ and the secular government, the domain of princes and lords. And let the preacher keep his hands off the secular government, lest he create disorder and confusion! It is our duty to direct the church with the Word, the oral sword. The secular government, on the other hand, wields a different sword, a fisted sword, and a rod of wood to inflict physical punishment. The preacher's rod smites only the consciences, which feel the impact of the Word. Therefore these two rods and swords must be kept apart and separate, so that the one does not infringe on the province of the other. But they all reach for the sword—the Anabaptists, Muenzer, the pope, and all the bishops. They aspire to rule and to reign, but not in keeping with their vocation. The cursed devil has his hand in this.¹⁵

It is especially important to note the place and role of human reason in the functioning of the two kingdoms:

It is necessary to make a distinction between God and men, between spiritual and temporal things. In earthly, human affairs man's judgment suffices. For these things, he needs no light but that of reason. Hence God does not in the Scriptures teach us how to build houses, to make clothing, to marry, to wage war, to sail the seas, and so on. For these, our natural light is sufficient. But in divine things, the things concerning God, and in which we must conduct ourselves acceptable with him, and must secure happiness for ourselves, human nature is absolutely blind, staring stone-blind, unable to recognize the slightest degree what these things are. Natural reason presumptuously plunges into them like a blind horse. But all its conclusions are, as certainly as God lives, false and erroneous. In this capacity it proceeds like a man who builds on sand, or one who would use cobwebs for garments. Is 59, 6. It employs sand for meal

¹⁴ LW 33 *Bondage of the Will*, 118–119.

¹⁵ LW 22 *Sermons on John*, 225.

in making bread. It sows wind and reaps the whirlwind, as Hosea 8, 7 has it. It measures the atmosphere with a spoon, carries light into the cellar upon a tray, weighs flames in a balance, performing all manner of perverted nonsense ever known or possible to be devised. For all its efforts are designed as service to God and they must utterly fail.¹⁶

Two Kinds of Righteousness

And then there is the matter of what constitutes righteousness in each kingdom. One of the most precious sections on this issue in all of Luther's writings is found in the opening pages of the 1535 Galatians commentary¹⁷ where he lays out St. Paul's "Argument" in the archaic sense of that word, the synopsis of the entire epistle. Here he carefully differentiates between two kinds of righteousness: 1) the righteousness of faith which has value and power to justify *coram Deo*, in the presence of God, in the kingdom of God; and 2) the righteousness which is associated with carrying out one's vocation *coram hominibus*, in the presence of our fellow human beings, our neighbors, in the kingdom of this world.

...the righteousness of faith or Christian righteousness...is to be distinguished most carefully from all the others. For they are all contrary to this righteousness... because they consist in our works and can be achieved by us.... But this most excellent righteousness, the righteousness of faith, which God imputes to us through Christ without works, is... quite the opposite; it is a merely passive righteousness, while all the others... are active. For here we work nothing, render nothing to God, we only receive and permit someone else to work in us, namely God. Therefore it is appropriate to call the righteousness of faith or Christian righteousness "passive." This is a righteousness hidden in a mystery, which the world does not understand.... For there is no comfort of conscience so solid and certain as is this passive righteousness....

...[H]uman reason cannot refrain from looking at active righteousness, that is, its own righteousness; nor can it shift its gaze to passive, that is Christian righteousness, but it simply rests it in active righteousness. So deeply is this evil rooted in

¹⁶ *Epiphany Sermon on Isaiah 60*, Lenker Vol. 6, 319–320.

¹⁷ LW 26.

us, and so completely have we acquired this unhappy habit!... For although the Law is the best of all things in the world, it still cannot bring peace to a terrified conscience but makes it even sadder and drives it to despair.¹⁸

The highest art and wisdom of Christians [in the kingdom of God] is not to know the Law, to ignore works and all active righteousness, just as outside the people of God the highest wisdom is to know and study the Law, works, and active righteousness.¹⁹

This is our theology, by which we teach a precise distinction between these two kinds of righteousness, the active and the passive, so that morality and faith, works and grace, secular society and religion may not be confused. Both are necessary, but both must be kept within their limits.²⁰

But then comes the material which pertains to the other kingdom:

When I have this righteousness [i.e., the passive, Christian righteousness of faith] within me, I descend from heaven like the rain that makes the earth fertile. That is, I come forth into another kingdom, and I perform good works whenever the opportunity arises. If I am a minister of the Word, I preach, I comfort the saddened, I administer the sacraments. If I am a father, I rule my household and family, I train my children in piety and honesty. If I am a magistrate, I perform the office which I have received by divine command. If I am a servant I faithfully tend to my master's affairs. In short, whoever knows for sure that Christ is his righteousness, not only cheerfully and gladly works in his calling but also submits himself for the sake of love to magistrates, also to their wicked laws, and to everything else in this present life—even, if need be, to burden and danger. For he knows that God wants this and that this obedience pleases Him.²¹

¹⁸ LW 26 *Lectures on Galatians*, 4–5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 11–12. A brief aside: Consider for a moment the sharp contrast between Luther's understanding of the two kinds of righteousness and the recent reports in the news media of a comment of the current pope. Francis allegedly told an avowed atheist, one who explicitly rejected Christian righteousness, that if he strove to be an ethical person, he would see him in heaven.

Another characteristic of the Kingdom of God is its level ground. Before God, all are the same. All have sinned, and all are justified freely. Distinctions based on race, social and economic status, age, learning, gender, etc., do not apply:

It makes no difference to faith whether you are poor or rich, young or old, beautiful or ugly, learned or ignorant, layman or priest. For he who is called in poverty is rich before God. He who is called in riches is poor before God. He who is called in youth is old before God. He who is called in age is young before God. And again: He who is called in ignorance is learned before God. He who is called as a layman is a priest before God. All this is true because faith makes us all equal before God and no difference of person or status will count.²²

...Everyone should lead the life to which God has called him.... It makes no difference whether you are a Jew or heathen... it is not necessary to marry or remain unmarried, but you are free to do either.... Faith alone justifies you, and it alone fulfills the commandment of God....²³

The Law, reason, free will, and human merit are utterly banished from the realm of “the things above us.” Any attempt to drag these things into the Kingdom of God in such a way that one would attempt on the basis of them to claim a righteousness to which God would attribute saving value or power results in expulsion from the Kingdom of God. All such attempts constitute the antithesis and a rejection of embracing the righteousness acquired by Christ, distributed through the Means of Grace, and appropriated by faith alone.

But the Law (particularly the Second Table: “Love your neighbor as yourself”), reason, free will, and human merit have great value in the realm of “the things beneath us,” where God has placed us in this world. They constitute “the best of all things in the world.” They are to be cultivated diligently. By them we serve our neighbors in their needs and ourselves. God does not need our efforts directed toward him. What can we possibly give to him that might satisfy some “need” of God? But our neighbor does need the efforts of our reason and will under the direction of the Law. God allows us to become the agents of his providential care for his creation. Order is maintained, daily bread in the broadest

²² LW 21 *Commentary on I Corinthians* 7, 43–44.

²³ *Ibid.*, 40–41.

sense is provided, and civilized society becomes possible, in spite of the continual raging of the devil to the contrary.

The Masks of God

This brings us to another aspect of the doctrine of vocation, namely, vocations as “the masks of God” (*larvae Dei*). Luther obviously had a great fondness for this metaphor. When the topic of vocations in the kingdom of this world came up in his preaching and teaching, he would frequently inject into the discussion the illustration of “the masks of God.” Consider some examples and notice the care he takes to define the sphere of the functioning of the masks of God:

What else is all our work to God—whether in the fields, in the garden, in the city, in the house, in war, or in government—but just such a child’s performance, by which He wants to give us his gifts in the fields, at home, and everywhere else? These are the masks of God, behind which he wants to remain concealed and do all things.... He could have given children without using men and women. But He does not want to do this. Instead, He joins man and woman so that it appears to be the work of man and woman, and yet He does it under the cover of such masks. We have the saying: “God gives every good thing, but not just by waving a wand.” [*Dat deus omne bonum, sed non per cornua taurum.*] God gives all good gifts; but you must lend a hand and take the bull by the horns; that is, you must work and thus give God good cause and a mask....

Labor, and let Him give the fruits. Govern, and let Him give his blessing. Fight, and let Him give the victory. Preach, and let Him win hearts. Take a husband or a wife, and let Him produce the children. Eat and drink, and let Him nourish and strengthen you. And so on. In all our doings He is to work through us, and he alone shall have the glory from it....²⁴

The magistrate, the emperor, the king, the prince, the consul, the teacher, the preacher, the pupil, the father, the mother, the children, the master, the servant—all these are social positions or external masks. God wants us to respect and acknowledge them as His creatures, which are a necessity for this life.²⁵

²⁴ LW 14 *Exposition Psalm 147*, 114–115.

²⁵ LW 26 *Lectures on Galatians*, 95.

We must pay careful attention to this distinction, that about theological issues we must speak in a way that is vastly different from the way we speak about social issues. Where social issues are involved... God wants us to honor and respect these “positions” as His masks or instrument through which He preserves and governs the world. But when the issue is one involving religion, conscience, the fear of God, faith, and the worship of God, then we must not fear or trust any social position or look to it for consolation and rescue, either physical or spiritual.²⁶

One could very well say that the course of the world, and especially the doing of his saints, are God’s mask, under which he conceals himself and so marvelously exercises dominion and introduces order in the world.²⁷

Those who wear the masks of God should receive appropriate honor as those who stand in the place of God:

When I show honor to a magistrate or obey him, I am not obeying a shepherd’s son or a prince or a nobleman. No, then I am obeying the will of God and the need of men. And since respect for and obedience to superiors is necessary among the common people, such masks or “persons” must be established; and it is necessary to adorn them with purple, linen, a royal chariot, titles, and honors of this kind, not in order that he to whom this honor is shown may be proud, as though this were something peculiarly his own, but in order that the work and administration of God may be respected in him.²⁸

But a warning is also in place for those who wear the masks: Don’t abuse the privilege by making it into an occasion for personal aggrandizement. Those who wear the masks of God appropriately do so with humility and an attitude of service toward others:

[The] masks of judges, magistrates, teachers, doctors and lawyers are necessary; but one must... use them, not enjoy them. For you are not a man to be adored by the rest, but it is God’s will that this life be governed and preserved, in order that the works of the devil may be abolished and peace and discipline may be

²⁶ Ibid., 96.

²⁷ LW 45 *Exposition of Psalm 127*, 331.

²⁸ LW 7 *Lectures on Genesis*, 185–186.

retained. This must be the goal of all government.... This plan of God you abuse and turn into the opposite, that is, toward pride and arrogance, although it is God's will that under these masks you should serve his ordinance and man's need. In this way God wanted to come to the aid of man's need, and for this reason He has commanded that honor be bestowed on the government.... Without these masks peace and discipline could not be preserved.²⁹

And yet another warning is necessary. In a fallen world those who wear the masks of God and function in vocations where they exercise authority over others may be incompetent, unethical, or self-serving in their persons, even though their duty in their offices is to serve others in specific ways. Therefore a careful distinction must be maintained between office and person, and attitudes must be shaped and guided by the understanding of the office according to the Word of God, and not by our feelings of loathing for a person we recognize as inept or corrupt.

I have often said that we must sharply distinguish between these two, the office and the person. The man who is called Hans or Martin is a man quite different from the one who is called elector or preacher. Here we have two different persons in one man. The one is that in which we are created and born, according to which we are all alike—man or woman or child, young or old. But once we are born, God adorns and dresses you up as another person. He makes you a child and me a father, one a master and another a servant, one a prince and another a citizen. Then this one is called a divine person, one who holds a divine office and goes about clothed in its dignity—not simply Hans or Nick, but the Prince of Saxony, father or master.³⁰

In this issue [distinguishing person and office] you must always pay attention to the Word of God and guide yourself according to it, not according to the personality.³¹

It is necessary here to distinguish between the two things, the office and the person. Because one man is pious and twenty are

²⁹ Ibid., 184.

³⁰ LW 21 *Sermon on the Mount*, 23.

³¹ Ibid., 276.

wicked, you must not reject the office on account of the person, as usually happens.³²

As we have often said, the Word of God hallows and deifies everything to which it is applied. Therefore those estates that are appointed in God's Word are all holy, divine estates, even though the persons in them are not holy. Thus father, mother, son, daughter, master, mistress, servant, maid, preacher, pastor—all these are holy and divine positions in life, even though the persons in these positions may be knaves and rascals. So, because He here founds and orders the office of ruler, the rulers are rightly called "gods" and "children of God" for the sake of the divine office and the divine Word; and yet they are wicked knaves....³³

On the other hand, this reminder is also necessary: those who function competently and ethically in positions and offices apart from faith will, to outward appearances, be indistinguishable from believers who function in the same or similar offices, and may often appear to be superior to the faithful.

The remnants of sin also cling to our flesh. So far as the flesh is concerned, then, we are sinners even after we have received the Holy Spirit. Externally there is not much difference between the Christian and another socially upright human being. The works of the Christian are cheap in appearance: He does his duty according to his calling: he rules the commonwealth; he runs the household; he tills the field; he helps, supports, and serves his neighbor. The unspiritual man does not praise these works but thinks of them as common and as nothing.³⁴

In the world there is also a civic honesty that manifests itself in word and deed.... Thus Pomponius Atticus, Aristides, and Socrates were honest and guileless men. There have been many honest husbands among the heathen, who marvelously preserved the faithfulness they had pledged to their wives. Thus you sometimes even find an honest merchant. God requires this

³² *Ibid.*, 278.

³³ LW 13 *Commentary on Psalm 82*, 71.

³⁴ LW 26 *Lectures on Galatians*, 376.

civic honesty, and daily examples show that this civic honesty cannot be transgressed with impunity.³⁵

Words of Exhortation to Christians in Their Vocations

And still more words of an exhortatory nature abound in the writings of Luther regarding vocations. Consider this exhortation toward ethical behavior and an attitude of serving one's neighbor through vocation:

If you are a manual laborer, you find that the Bible has been put into your workshop, into your hand, into your heart. It teaches and preaches how you should treat your neighbor. Just look at your tools—at your needle or thimble, your beer barrel, your goods, your scales or yardstick or measure—and you will read this statement inscribed on them. Everywhere you look, it stares at you. Nothing that you handle every day is so tiny that it does not continually tell you this, if you will only listen. Indeed, there is no shortage of preaching. You have as many preachers as you have transactions, goods, tools, and other equipment in your house and home. All this is continually crying out to you: “Friend, use me in your relations with your neighbor just as you would want your neighbor to use his property in his relations with you.”³⁶

What gives the faithful confidence in going about the work of their vocations? It is their conviction that what they do in their vocations is based on an authoritative Word of God.

For it is most certainly true that when anyone in his vocation is convinced in his heart that God desires and has commanded in His Word what he is doing, he will experience such force and effectiveness of that divine command as he will not find in the oration of any orator, either of Demosthenes or of Cicero. That command states all the details. It tells what is profitable and what is good in the matter; it points out and suggests to the heart that God has in view unlimited designs far and above our understanding. And when the heart has been provided with this confidence, it proceeds boldly and is not anxious about the

³⁵ LW 12 *Lecture on Psalm 51*, 354.

³⁶ LW 21 *Sermon on the Mount*, 237.

possible or the impossible, the easy or the difficult, as St. Paul has magnificently described this confidence and security of the godly in Rom. 8:35 ff.³⁷

The Negative Influence of the Devil and Reason

But there are forces at work which would undermine confidence, destroy good attitudes, promote despair, and cause a person to give up. What to do?

Nothing but good fruit can come from the station that God has created and ordained, and from the man who works and lives in this station on the basis of the Word of God. With this you can now comfort your heart against thoughts like these: "Oh, it was this person or that who got me into this station. It causes me nothing but disgust and trouble." I have often been tempted this way in connection with my own office, and still am. If it had not been for the Word of God, I would have stopped preaching a long time ago and would have said farewell to the world, the way the monks used to do. It is the devil himself doing this and making everyone's station hard for him. Though God has assigned this office and work to us, and is heartily pleased with it as the good fruit of a good heart, the devil so confuses foolish human reason that it fails to recognize this and thus destroys its own station and fruit, it is an obstacle to itself and therefore cannot yield good fruit.

Learn to look at your station on the basis of this statement, and draw this conclusion from it: "Thank God, I know now that I am in a good and blessed station, one that pleases God. Though it may be annoying to my flesh and contain a great deal that is troubling and disgusting. I shall cheerfully put up with all that. Here I have the comfort that Christ says: 'A sound tree bears good fruit.'" He says this about every station that is grounded in the Word of God, though it may be despised and decried by the world and the special saints.... Reason is unable to judge here or to see the goodness in its station and its works, or to get any joy or pleasure out of them. Instead, it praises the exact opposite. If this were visible to us, we would live in sheer joy and bear and endure with a joyful heart whatever God lays upon us, being certain that because the tree is sound, the fruit

³⁷ LW 4 *Lectures on Genesis*, 104.

also must be good. When a pious hired man is hauling a wagon-load of manure to the field, he is actually hauling a wagonload of precious figs and grapes—but in the sight of God not in our own sight, since we do not believe, so that everyone gets tired of this station and goes staring at another one.³⁸

The Dignity of the Many Mundane Tasks Done in Faith in God-pleasing Vocations

A theme on which Luther never tires of expatiating on is the matter of the dignity and worthiness of the everyday tasks associated with Christian vocation.

Now that the Gospel has come, we preach thus: Good works are not those which we choose of ourselves, but those which God has commanded, those which our vocation calls for. A servant does good works when he fears God, believes in Christ, and obeys his master. First he is justified by faith in Christ, then he walks in faith, leads a godly life, is temperate and well-behaved, serves his neighbor, cleanses the stable, feeds the horses, etc... For since he is baptized, believes in Christ, and in assured hope is waiting for eternal life, he goes on and obeys his master and knows that what he does in his calling pleases God. Therefore everything that he does in his occupation is a good and precious work. It does not look like a great, fine work when he rides out on the field, drives to the mill, etc., but since he has God's command and directive for it, such works, mean as they seem, are nothing else than good works and a service rendered to the Lord. In like manner also a maidservant does good works when she performs her calling in faith, obeys her mistress, sweeps the house, washes and cooks in the kitchen, etc.... Likewise when a burgher or a farmer helps his neighbor, warns him of the danger threatening his body, wife, child, servant, cattle, and goods, etc., such works do not make a great show, but they are nevertheless good and precious works. When the civil government punishes the wicked and protects the virtuous, and when citizens yield obedience to the government and do so from faith and the hope

³⁸ LW 21 *Sermon on the Mount*, 265–266.

of eternal life, they are performing good works, though they do not shine and glitter in the sight of reason.³⁹

Now observe that when that clever harlot, our natural reason... takes a look at married life, she turns up her nose and says, "Alas, must I rock the baby, wash its diapers, make its bed, smell its stench, stay up nights with it, take care of it when it cries, heal its rashes and sores, and on top of that care for my wife, provide for her, labor at my trade, take care of this and take care of that, do this and do that, endure this and endure that, and whatever else of bitterness and drudgery married life involves? What, should I make such a prisoner of myself? Fie, fie upon such wretchedness and bitterness! It is better to remain free and lead a peaceful, carefree life...."

What then does Christian faith say to this? It opens its eyes, looks upon all these insignificant, distasteful, and despised duties in the Spirit, and is aware that they are all adorned with divine approval as with the costliest gold and jewels....

Now you tell me, when a father goes ahead and washes diapers or performs some other mean task for his child, and someone ridicules him as an effeminate fool—though that father is acting in the spirit just described and in Christian faith—my dear fellow, you tell me, which of the two is most keenly ridiculing the other? God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling—not because the father is washing diapers, but because he is doing it in Christian faith.⁴⁰

The domestic tasks of one faithful servant are more pleasing to God than the loathsome worship and fastings of the monks, because they are works performed in the Spirit and in faith. And the importance and worth of works is in faith and in the Spirit not in their greatness or in their great number.

Thus a maidservant who sweeps the floor and milks the cows worships God in a most pleasing manner.... If your heart is sure that the things you do in every place are pleasing to God, you will have no doubt that they are most excellent and saintly. Thus a pupil who listens to his teacher in faith should know that he is performing a golden work. On the other hand, a monk

³⁹ Sermon *Of Our Blessed Hope*, St. L. IX:952 ff., English translation found in Pieper Vol. III, 40–42.

⁴⁰ LW 45 *Estate of Marriage*, 39–40.

with all his acts of devotion is an abomination to God because he goes along without the Word and without the obedience enjoined by God.⁴¹

...God's people please God even in the least and most trifling matters. For He will be working all things through you; He will milk the cow through you and perform the most servile duties through you, and all the greatest and least duties alike will be pleasing to him.... How am I to know for certain that I belong to the people of God?... You have been baptized and are walking in a godly and holy calling. See that you do not blaspheme but love the Word and serve God in some honorable employment.... You should think as follows: "I shall follow my calling and perform a servant's, master's, child's, duties.... For I know that all these things are held in honor and are precious before the Lord our God."⁴²

...the Holy Spirit describes acts of the saintly patriarchs that are so mean and trifling that they seem worthless and wicked.... Therefore, whatever the saints do, however insignificant and sordid, it is great and glorious because they do it by faith and the Word....

...we may know that our life is pleasing and acceptable to God also in its humble duties. Reason and the world do not know this, for it is carried off to strange visions, manifestations and speculations....⁴³

God has the habit of commanding ordinary, unimportant, laughable, and at times even offensive things. Reason, however, takes delight in what is magnificent; either it is filled with disgust at those common things, or it undertakes them with resentment.⁴⁴

You students are living here with the approval of your parents, and it is their will that you should be both industrious in learning and obedient to your teachers. When you try to satisfy this desire of your parents as much as you can, you are offering a most pleasing sacrifice to God....

⁴¹ LW 8 *Lectures on Genesis* 45, 68–69.

⁴² LW 6, *Lectures on Genesis* 31, 10.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴⁴ LW 2 *Lectures on Genesis* 6, 78.

When the government by virtue of its office, calls citizens into military service in order to maintain peace and to ward off harm, obedience is shown to God.⁴⁵

Christian Vocation and the Critique of Monasticism

All of this material, Christian vocation and the many interconnected topics, provided Luther with what he needed to critique the practice of monasticism, which he knew thoroughly because he himself had come out that experience. His tirades against the monks may be regarded as excessively harsh, too frequent, tedious, and irrelevant to the modern reader. But their purpose is to uphold what constitutes the true righteousness of faith which gives the hope of resurrection to life in the eternal Kingdom of God, and to uphold the definition of true good works done in service to our neighbor in Christian vocation.

Monasticizing and making of spiritual regulations is all wrong in our time. For these people bind themselves before God to outward things from which God has made them free, thus working against the freedom of faith and God's order. On the other hand, where these people should be bound, namely, in their relations with other men and in serving every man in love, there they make themselves free, serving no one and being of no use to anyone but themselves, thus working against love. Therefore they are a perverse people, perverting all the laws of God. They want to be free where they are bound and bound where they are free, and yet they hope to be seated much higher in heaven than ordinary Christian people. But they who make such a hellish prison out of heavenly freedom and such a hostile freedom out of loving service shall sit in the deepest hell.⁴⁶

On the basis of the self-chosen works of poverty, celibacy, and obedience to the ecclesiastical hierarchy and a host of accompanying rules and regulations, monasticism attempts to drag human will, reason, and merit into the Kingdom of God and to make those things the basis for a righteousness which God should recognize, respect, and reward. They want to bind themselves where the gospel offers a completely free, saving righteousness apart from the Law, will, reason, and the merit they presume to acquire. The very same devotion to poverty, celibacy,

⁴⁵ LW 2 *Lectures on Genesis* 12, 272.

⁴⁶ LW 28 *Commentary on I Corinthians* 7, 47.

and obedience is a perverse declaration of freedom from those things by which we are bound to serve our neighbor and ourselves in the dignity of honest labor, marriage and family relations, and obedience to civil authority. Thus monasticism constitutes the very negation of the purposes of God who wills to provide us with perfect freedom before him in his kingdom, and wills to employ us as his masks, bound in loving service to our neighbor, as a part of his arrangement for the providential care of this world. And if we are inclined to say that this critique of monasticism is too remote from our experience to have any relevance or application to us in the 21st century, then listen to this admonition:

Each one of us bears in his breast a great monk.... We who confess Christ should walk in fear and grow in faith, and acknowledge that we each bear in our breast a monstrous and disgusting monk, that is, a foolish and carnal delusion of works, the ruin of faith.⁴⁷

The End of the Matter: Faith and Works in their Appropriate Spheres

We end this exploration of Christian vocation and its interconnecting themes with the assertion that this is indeed an essential part of our Reformation heritage. This is really not a complicated subject. The message is elegant in its simplicity and clarity. Ecclesiastes 12:13 provides an appropriate summation: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all." Fear God by entering his kingdom in repentance and faith in the gospel which provides freedom from sin, death, the curse of the Law, and the power of the devil. This is primary and foundational. Then live out your days in this world in service to your neighbor in those vocations in which God has placed you in family, society, and church. Dr. Luther never tired of reminding his hearers of these essential points:

These two articles St. Paul would keep alive among Christians: the knowledge of Jesus Christ our Savior, who has called us by Baptism and the Gospel as heirs of eternal life, waiting for that blessed hope and the glorious appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the knowledge that everything we do in our Christian calling and station by faith is altogether a good and

⁴⁷ LW 12 *Lecture on Psalm 45*, 274.

precious work; on which account we should be zealous unto good works.⁴⁸

You have often heard me say that the Christian life is made up of two parts, namely, first of faith and then of good works. A believer must be pious and must lead a good outward life. But the first part, faith, is the more essential. The second is never the equal of faith, although it is more highly prized by the world, which ranks good works above faith.⁴⁹

It is appropriate that both [faith and works] be preached, yet each in keeping with its nature and value. First and highest is the proclamation about faith and Christ, then comes the emphasis upon works.⁵⁰

Christ preached and taught this: that we should believe in Christ and be found in a calling that has a word of God, and do in it what He has commanded. Take the Ten Commandments in hand, and look how St. Paul teaches all the stations on the basis of these (Rom. 13:8-10). There should be fidelity and obedience from inferiors to superiors, and among the others there should be mutual love and service, and everyone should perform his office faithfully.⁵¹

True Christian perfection is to fear God from the heart, to have great faith, and to trust that for Christ's sake we have a God who has been reconciled. It means to ask for and expect from God His help in all things with confident assurance that we are to live according to our calling in life, being diligent in outward good works, serving in our calling.⁵² LSQ

⁴⁸ Sermon *Of Our Blessed Hope*, St. L. IX:952 ff., English translation found in Pieper Vol. III, 40-42.

⁴⁹ LW 22 *Sermons on John*, 275.

⁵⁰ LW 21 *Sermon on the Mount*, 65.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 269.

⁵² AC XXVII, 49.

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The Christian Faces Contemporary Challenges

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IT WAS SEVENTEEN YEARS AGO that I stood at this podium to deliver a set of Reformation lectures on Luther and the Fanatics, tracing that theme from the tumultuous years of the Reformation to the era of Pietism and then on to the influence of American Evangelicalism on Twentieth Century Lutherans. In my first lecture on October 31, 1996—at least according to my manuscript, I don't recall saying this myself—I said that due to the inroads of American Evangelicalism, confessional Lutheranism was looking death in the face. Now whatever you may think about the validity of that brash statement, I believe you'll have to agree with me that while not exactly dead, Lutheranism is starting to look a little pale around the gills. Yet with the passing of time I'm not so sure I had the right diagnosis of the problem. I'm not sure that the problems we face today can be traced to classical theological distinctions. Now nearly a generation later, it seems to me that much of what is ailing us can be traced to cultural accommodation. My thesis in this lecture is that we're going to have to first step away from our culture if we are to truly embrace it and connect it to Christ and His Word.

I begin with a prophetic voice from more than 60 years ago. Writing in 1949, Chad Walsh says this about a time in America most of us would consider “the good old days,” when all those boomers were being born, the economy was on the upswing, and the church was growing dramatically:

...“modern civilization,” which dates roughly from the Renaissance, is now on its last legs. This glum conviction is less startling than it would have been a few decades ago, when the doctrine of inevitable progress still had many adherents in both low and high places. Today the funeral bell is being rung by a whole army of philosophers and social scientists.

...Perhaps we are headed toward barbarism, and the barbarism will be permanent.... Most of the advanced thinkers point out (justly enough) that the impact of Christianity has been on the decline for the past several centuries, and from this (with much less logic) they frequently draw the conclusion that Christianity will shortly fade away completely. An opposite conclusion can be drawn. Perhaps the present sad state of Western civilization arises largely from the watering-down and outright rejection of Christianity. In that case, a return to Christianity may be the price a reluctant world will have to pay if it wants any civilization at all.¹

Now in many ways what I am today proposing as the best way for Christians to face contemporary challenges builds on Professor Walsh's thesis: our problem isn't so much the secularization of society as it is the problem of the secularization of the church. If that is true, and I hope to demonstrate that it is, then the way forward is the way of the cross: first death, then resurrection. Perhaps the collapse of all things familiar and comfortable to us isn't that disastrous. Perhaps it is the inevitable consequence of a church grown complacent and dependent on its addiction to the culture.

As my friend Robert Kolb has said, “The Eisenhower administration isn't coming back again anytime soon.” Ward and June Cleaver and “the Beav” no longer define the American family—if they ever did. What many of my generation consider “the good old days” are gone for good, and maybe that's not so bad. The simple fact is the marriage between the culture and the church was ill advised in the first place and is now no longer tenable. Not so long ago community standards were largely reflective of Christian morality, but that day is long past. No longer can you look up and down the street to determine what is right and wrong. You know as well as I that what passes for acceptable behavior among

¹ Chad Walsh, *Early Christians of the 21st Century* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1950), 9–10.

our neighbors is increasingly incompatible with the Christian life as it is outlined in the New Testament.

And so: what to do? There's more than enough handwringing and fear mongering going on among churches. Conservative biblical Christians find themselves increasingly out of step in a world that seems to have passed them by. Most everyone is agreed that we cannot go on with business as usual. Statistics don't lie, and once you begin tracking the decline, panic ensues.

Just over a year ago, the Pew Research Center published the results of a poll demonstrating that the number of religiously unaffiliated Americans had increased in the previous five years by 5%, from just over 15% to just under 20%. One-fifth of the population—and a solid third of adults under 30—claimed no religious affiliation at all.² This despite concerted and frantic evangelistic efforts and innovative and deliberate attempts to grow the church for more than three decades. It's enough to put the fear of God into you. You know what happens; perhaps you've seen it in your own congregations as I have in mine. As people look around them and see the greying heads in the pews they panic. "This is a disaster! We've got to do something!" is the cry. "Here's something; let's do it!" There are no lack of eager and zealous would-be saviors of the church. They frequently prescribe radical surgery or complete makeovers. "Change or Die" is their motto. Sadly, the outcome is all too predictable: the patient emerges from her surgery or makeover looking remarkably like the culture around her.

I think we can all agree that the challenges we face require our concerted and deliberate attention. But I think we can also agree that the solution to those challenges is not to deconstruct the church and rebuild her in the image of the world. The Word of God determines the mission, not the world. The missionary task of the church is to bring an eternal biblical gospel to bear, tailored for the challenges unique to each generation in succession.

Hasty cure based on inaccurate diagnosis is always dangerous to the patient. Proper cure hinges around accurate diagnosis. If that's true in medical care, it's especially true when it comes to spiritual care. So that's the approach I want to follow for my assigned topic: "The Christian Faces Contemporary Challenges." First we need to assess the symptoms. Second I will propose a diagnosis; it may be that there are certain

² Pew Research Religion & Public Life Project, "Nones' on the Rise," October 9, 2012, <<http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>>, accessed 23 October 2013.

things that need to die if there is to be a resurrection. Finally, I will outline a treatment plan for intentional and deliberate cure of what's ailing the church in our time.

An Honest Look: Exploring the Symptoms

Students of the culture all are agreed that there has been a tectonic shift in the underlying foundations of civilization in the west. Not all agree on what to call this shift; it's no longer fashionable to speak of "the postmodern era." But whatever you call it, something has changed dramatically. Anyone who has lived more than a few decades can feel in their bones that assumptions held in common for generations—perhaps even centuries—have been shaken radically. To cite but one example: I grew up in a world in which everyone held that there was such a thing as truth. They fought loud and long over just what that truth was, but most everyone believed truth was out there, just waiting to be discovered, and that given enough data, human reason would be able to uncover that truth. As you know, hardly anyone except for rocket scientists, brain surgeons, and a few other dinosaurs of the scientific age hold to that notion anymore. Objective truth is now viewed much like an old-fashioned daguerreotype in a world of flashy full color digital imagery; a quaint vestige of bygone times.

the loss of virtue

So what's left when you take truth out of the picture? What happens when human reason is banished from the market place of ideas? I don't think I need to tell you; after all, we all live and work daily in a world that has lost its virtue, as David Wells reminded us already some fifteen years ago now.³ When there are no commonly defined objective *virtues*, all you are left with are subjective *values*. No wonder then that our culture is in moral free-fall. For who can argue principles when all you have to go by are values? Values by definition vary from one person to another, and one person's values are equally as valid as another's.

When reason is abandoned, all you have to go on is emotion and volition. Our vocabulary reveals how far we've come in one or two generations. Listen to your friends and neighbors; listen to yourself, for that matter. Very few of us speak of opinions or thoughts; when asked for our perspective on important issues of our time, what do we say? Not "I think," but "I feel." And of course, who can argue with feelings?

³ David F. Wells, *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998).

Everyone's entitled to their personal feelings, after all. And in our subjective age, feelings are by and large all that's left. We live in a time in which almost everyone from the corporate executive to the manual laborer lives a life that has no foundation other than the values each person has selected for himself. In our time we each live as little bundles of feelings, cast adrift, as it were, to float on an endless sea of subjectivism.

the flight from reason

The price of moving our common understanding of reality from truth to perception and away from reason toward feeling is social fragmentation and moral decay. One of the most influential conservative Christian thinkers of our time is Robert P. George, the McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence at Princeton. In his recent book *Conscience and Its Enemies* he identifies three essential pillars of human society, the removal of any one of which spells cultural chaos and social disaster. These are first of all "respect for the human person—the individual human being and his dignity."⁴ When life is not respected, be that prenatal life in the womb, that of the frail elderly, or those who are unable to contribute significantly to the collective community, it is easily discarded, as we have seen tragically not just in Nazi Germany, but also in the supposedly enlightened West with the open acceptance first of abortion, then assisted suicide and euthanasia and now infanticide.

George's second pillar of decent society is the institution of the family. He writes:

The family, based on the marital commitment of husband and wife, is the original and best ministry of health, education, and welfare. Although no family is perfect, no institution matches the healthy family in its capacity to transmit to each new generation the understandings and traits of character—the values and virtues—on which the success of every other institution of society, from law and government to educational institutions and business firms, vitally depends.⁵

Notice here that Professor George is not raising any of the vital biblical arguments in favor of sexual chastity and marital faithfulness; his is a natural law argument. He is simply pointing out that as this

⁴ Robert P. George, *Conscience and Its Enemies: Confronting the Dogmas of Liberal Secularism* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2013), 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

second pillar collapses, the social consequences are immense. We are in fact beginning to see the rise of a complex network of social welfare constructed at great expense to salvage the wreckage after the denigration and demise of the family.

The third pillar and hallmark of a healthy society is, according to Dr. George, “a fair and effective system of law and government.”⁶ We don’t need to be professors of jurisprudence to see what happens when law and government are built on a foundation of personal feelings and self-interest instead of reason and objective fairness. The results are everywhere evident, not only in the halls of congress, but filtering through all the capillaries of our society, right down into the meetings of our county commissioners and township boards.

The subjectivism we deplore in governmental policy is nothing other than the social and political consequence of our collective worldview, which Professor George calls “expressive individualism.” Classically, the liberal arts were designed to constrain and master basic impulses and desires of individual human passion for the cause of the common good. This educational ideal was designed to free—to *liberate*—the individual so that he could contribute to society as a genuinely free man. When, on the other hand, human passion gains the upper hand, that person is a slave to his passions and bound to his own impulses.⁷

the disaster of individualism

Ask anyone who has given their baser inclinations free reign what it’s like, and you will see for yourselves. Whether it’s a cocaine addict looking for another hit or a porn junkie locked in his private hell of remorse, self-loathing, and sexual self-destruction, expressive individualism initially promises freedom, but ultimately it delivers bondage instead.

Admittedly it’s exciting to declare independence from the expectations of others and cultural norms, but the result isn’t very pretty. When your companions comprise me, myself, and I, you live in a very small world. Back in the 60s of the last century, the swan song of Frank Sinatra’s career accurately summed up the philosophy of the “me generation:”

⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁷ Ibid., 28-29.

I've lived a life that's full
I traveled each and ev'ry highway
And more, much more than this, I did it my way.⁸

This individualistic thinking is not a novelty, of course. It's as old as the Garden of Eden and is a continual temptation to every generation. Yet what blossomed in 60s America has tainted each succeeding age group, from the Boomers to the Gen Xers to the Millennials. Individualism, and specifically, to use George's term, *expressive* individualism is very much with us—and, in my way of thinking, has had a devastating influence on the life and mission of the contemporary church. This living for self and fixation on personal feeling and well being that characterizes the secular culture may have found its original expression in Sinatra's "I did it my way" sentiments, yet it has not only come to full flower, but gone to seed in the American church in our time.

moving from Christ to Christian

You can find obvious examples in much of what passes for preaching in pop Christianity in our time. The mission of the Christian takes over for the mission of Christ. The sacrificial death and substitutionary atonement of Jesus is eclipsed by the gospel of progress and self-improvement. Whether it's sermons on how to have good sex or how to live a life of sacrifice and service, the cumulative effect is devastatingly clear: the self has been substituted for God. The Christian improved has taken over the spotlight from Jesus Christ crucified. The work of the Christian has taken over for the work of Christ; sanctification—more precisely, a false view of sanctification—has taken over for justification. Works have been substituted for faith, and the law—again, a pale and anemic version of the law—has been substituted for the gospel. "How to" has taken over for "repent and believe." "What would Jesus do?" has taken over for "what has Jesus done?"—or more precisely, in terms of the efficacious Word and Sacrament: "what is Jesus doing?" We do not serve a dead hero, after all, but a living Lord, who comes among us daily to nourish us by His Word.

But I digress. The important thing to note here at the start as we look at challenges to contemporary Christians is that we have borrowed far too many of the assumptions of our secular culture and imported

⁸ <<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/franksinatra/myway.html>>, accessed 21 October 2013.

them into the church. We have abandoned teaching in favor of coaching. We have abandoned teaching truth and focused on self-improvement programs. We seem to be driven more by Gallup polls and approval ratings than we are by the Word of God. We have embraced the expectations and norms of our culture and begun to remodel the church in the image and likeness of the world—and in that world, expressive individualism takes precedence and rules over everything else.

One brief illustration: nearly a generation ago I was shocked one Sunday morning to have a rather well-connected matron of our congregation come up to me after church and say, “Pastor, we’ve heard all about Jesus and His cross; we already know the gospel; give us something we can use.” Well, of course I had to do some pretty quick internal analysis of that particular sermon: had I given the law short shrift, perhaps? Had I fallen into minimalizing the gospel by perhaps falling into trite mantra-like expressions? But no, that was not the case. Here was a woman, well catechized and well placed in terms of influence in our church, who genuinely believed that the transforming gospel of Christ crucified and risen had no discernible application to her daily life. She believed that helpful hints for daily living were more important than the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation daily and richly dispensed in Christ’s name and stead in His church.

what goes around comes around

Ironically the pulse of the contemporary church resonates to the beat of the world. Rather than having something transformational to bring to the world, today’s church seems fixated on remodeling itself to look more and more like the world, albeit with a spiritual veneer. From its mission approach to its preaching to its worship and teaching, the American church seems to have adopted the culture’s focus on expressive individualism, which has infiltrated every dimension of contemporary church life and now threatens—tsunami-like—to engulf and submerge it in a sea of subjective self-interest. Already nearly twenty years ago David Wells highlighted the irony of how conservative Christianity even then had begun to resemble the creed of the classic Christian liberals of the early 20th century:

It is not difficult to see how the marketers of Evangelicalism might begin to resemble the old liberalism, the gospel that H. Richard Niebuhr once described as “consisting in a god

without wrath bringing people without sin into the kingdom without judgment through a Christ without a cross.”⁹

More recently, the Australian Broadcasting Company published a piece documenting the nearly identical statistical decline of active churchgoers in Christendom worldwide not merely in liberal church bodies, but also among the conservative and evangelical churches. Citing recent demographic studies among Christians in lands as diverse as America, Australia, and the UK, Christopher Brittain documents a downward trajectory in habits of church attendance across the theological spectrum.¹⁰ The sole statistical exception to the decline is in the Global South, where the growth of Christianity is apparently led primarily by Pentecostal churches of the neo-Pentecostal persuasion, which emphasize a single charismatic leader, the witnessing of miraculous signs, and the “prosperity gospel,” which teaches that financial reward is the sign of God’s blessing.

Despite the broad theological divide between liberals and conservatives, there is a remarkable common affinity between them. While classic liberalism capitulated to the intelligentsia of its day, modifying biblical teaching to accommodate scientific and philosophical reasoning, conservative evangelicalism has adjusted its compass to the trends of pop culture, packaging its teaching and church life to appeal to a customer base informed by marketing, advertising, and entertainment. Meanwhile, the neo-Pentecostals are adjusting their message to appeal to the individual as well, promising wealth and self-promotion to its converts. Brittain advises churches across the theological divide to quit focusing on cultural trends and the fashionable dictates of expressive individualism:

For conservatives, the task is to stop interpreting the demise of liberal congregations as a victory for evangelical Christianity, and to explore what might be learned from the fact that liberal Christianity’s roots lie in the attempt to adapt and respond to cultural diversity and modern individualism.¹¹

⁹ David Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 82.

¹⁰ Christopher Brittain, “Plague on Both Their Houses: The Real Story of Growth and Decline in Liberal and Conservative Churches,” *ABC Religion and Ethics*, 8 May 2013, <<http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2013/05/08/3754700.htm>>, accessed 22 October 2013.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

On the other hand, liberals need to ask themselves what they have to hand on to succeeding generations, Brittain writes: "...liberals need to give greater attention to why the doctrines and traditions of Christianity should matter to someone not already familiar with them."¹²

The lesson of the ages remains true today for Christians on either side of the theological divide: the church is always one generation away from extinction. You could say the church is engaged in a perpetual relay race, passing on what we have received to those who come after us. Liberals are in danger of dropping the baton altogether, abandoning the faith once delivered to the saints. But conservative churches face a formidable challenge as well: accommodation and modification of the faith to reflect the cultural individualism of our time. Our culture presents a notoriously fluid target, always shifting with every passing fashion. The time-honored maxim still holds true: "If you marry the culture, you are destined to become an early widower."

the new Babylonian captivity of the church

As confessional Lutherans we are all aware of what happened in October of 1517. Not many of us easily recall what happened three years later, however. Having been threatened with excommunication by Pope Leo X earlier that year, in October of 1520 Luther published the second of his major treatises delineating the cause for his break with the church of Rome. In this major work, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," Luther outlines his scriptural objections to the sacramental theology of the Roman church, which had carried the church of Christ into captivity just as surely as the Jews had been carted off into captivity by the Babylonian Empire. By enslaving the church with its hierarchical scheme of priestly ordination, the papacy tyrannically and despotically imposed aberrations into the Mass: first, by withholding the cup from the laity, second, by the doctrine of transubstantiation, and third, by making the mass into a perpetual sacrifice for the sins of the living and the dead rather than a sacrament for the remission of sins in Christ's body once given and blood once shed at Calvary.¹³

Gathered as we are here on the Feast of All Saints, in the very shadow of the anniversary of the Reformation, it is appropriate I think that we see the challenges to the contemporary Christian as comprising a new kind of Babylonian Captivity. The strange thing about this captivity

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Martin Luther, Introduction, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 118.

is that it is not enforced or imposed on the church from without, but willingly chosen and embraced from within. We are in many ways our own worst enemies, as I hope to demonstrate later. True, the culture we live in presents challenges to the Christian unprecedented in living memory. But the real challenge lies not outside the church, but inside the church. What I describe as the New Babylonian Captivity is what we apparently have done to ourselves: namely the strange fascination and compelling obsession with the culture evident right across denominational and confessional lines.

I've already described how expressive individualism has prevailed in our world and now sits enthroned as the governing principle that defines reality right across the lines of political and geographic borders, ethnic and language divisions, and social and economic status. People everywhere take it as axiomatic that there is no overarching truth—and the corollary is that every person has the inherent right to exercise freedom of choice in any and all ethical decisions, since truth is in the eye of the beholder. Further, all of these diverse truths, some of which may be diametrically opposed and mutually exclusive, are equally valid. In the end therefore, reason devolves and compresses into feeling and each person is his or her own authority.

The ensuing chaos is of course both predictable and tragic. Yet we as Christians have come to the kingdom for precisely such a time as this. We aren't going back to the Eisenhower administration any time soon. Sadly, too many confessional Lutherans sound as if they came straight from the 1950s and the neat and tidy world of "Father Knows Best" and "Leave It to Beaver." It's time that we rise to the occasion and address the world we live in. For too long we have been content to reminisce about days gone by and shake our heads sadly at the developments around us. No wonder that we often come across sounding like nostalgia freaks.

I suggested earlier that the way out of the mess we find ourselves involves first diagnosis, then prescription. We haven't yet arrived at a diagnosis, for once we have labelled our problem a kind of "Babylonian Captivity," we haven't yet defined the disease. Let's take a more careful look at some of the symptoms of this bondage to the culture that has the contemporary church so paralyzed and depleted.

symptom #1: how the church lost its story

First, over the last four or five decades, there has been a persistent and cumulative loss of the importance of the biblical narrative.

This loss is perhaps nowhere better delineated than in a remarkable essay published in “First Things” by Robert Jenson in 1993, just as the pervasive influence of the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason was starting to crumble. In his essay, which he titled “How the World Lost Its Story,” Jenson dramatically posed the church’s mission challenge as a contemporary version of the church’s challenge in late antiquity.

As the church once lived and conducted her mission in the precisely *post*-Hellenistic and *post*-Roman-imperial world, remembering what had vanished but not knowing what if anything could come next, so the church must now live and conduct her mission in the precisely “post”-modern world.¹⁴

The consequence of living in a post modern world, Jenson contends, is that the church now faces a missionary task in a world that has lost its story, that is, the Christian West no longer has a living memory of the story of the Bible, namely, a Creator who was the author of creation and therefore the narrator of all history, who provided continuity and meaning to the purpose of humanity. The age of reason systematically tore man from his creator and called into question the authenticity and importance of the Bible. Thus, Jenson writes, “The entire project of the Enlightenment was to maintain realist faith while declaring disallegiance from the God who was that faith’s object. ...Modernity was defined by the attempt to live in a universal story without a universal storyteller.”¹⁵

Now, 20 years past the collapse of modernism, the church is still scrambling to find her footing in a world without a story. Because the church’s members were raised in a culture that collectively had lost its connection with the God who gives meaning and purpose to the world, the church herself has a hard time recovering the content and meaning of the biblical narrative, to say nothing of unpacking that meaning for the cataclysmic ethical and moral challenges that surround us. Sadly, it appears that not only has the world lost its story, but the church has lost her grip on that story as well—or at least is suffering from a chronic state of amnesia. This is the first of the symptoms of our collective disease.

¹⁴ Robert Jenson, “How the World Lost Its Story,” *First Things* 36 (October 1993): 20.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

symptom #2: from eternal verities to personal fulfillment

Secondly, there has been a disastrous shift within the church, almost a conscious decision, to turn away from the eternal truths of the Word of God and focus on human fulfillment. It is tragic, it is inexplicable, it is suicidal. It has in fact all the appearances of a death wish considered from the perspective of Scripture and the history of the church catholic. Yet it is palpable and demonstrable.

Just two weeks ago, Tullian Tchividjian, the senior pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church and grandson of Evangelist Billy Graham, wrote an op-ed piece in the *Washington Post* deploring the capitulation of evangelical churches to the prevailing winds of expressive individualism in the culture. He pointed out that the frantic activism that has been imported into the life of the church—which he labels “performancism”—has not only failed to stem the tide of defections from the pews, but has gutted the central tenet of the faith once delivered to the saints, namely God’s “One Way Love” in His Son Jesus Christ.

The hub of Christianity is not “do something for Jesus.” The hub of Christianity is “Jesus has done everything for you.” And my fear is that too many people, both inside and outside the church, have heard our “do more, try harder” sermons and pleas for intensified devotion and concluded that the focus of the Christian faith is the work that we do instead of the work God has done for us in the person of Jesus.¹⁶

This kind of “performancism,” as Tchividjian calls it, has spread throughout evangelicalism like a cancer, and continues to make inroads in ostensibly Lutheran churches. It’s as though the Reformation hasn’t happened: the justification of the ungodly has been set aside in favor of the perfection and growth of the saints. The sad truth is that the message heard in the pulpits of America today is the practical equivalent of the worst kinds of moralism promulgated in the Roman church of Luther’s day, albeit cloaked in secular wrappings and shorn of much of its spiritual veneer.

symptom #3: from chastity to decadence

Just a few minutes in front of any TV, computer or movie screen will tell you that we’ve come a long way since the days of Mae West and

¹⁶ Tullian Tchividjian, “The Missing Message in Today’s Churches,” *The Washington Post*, October 17, 2013.

Sophie Tucker—if there are any old codgers here who still recall these femme fatale figures from the distant past. Sex sells, of course, and it is used to sell everything: from overpriced clothing for hormonally-driven teenagers to overpriced sports cars for old guys trying to recapture their lusty youth. But increasingly our culture seems to be stumbling all over itself in a maddening rush to out-sensualize the sensual and deconstruct and redefine human sexuality in every conceivable decadent way. Tracing the devolution from Janet Jackson’s infamous “wardrobe malfunction” at the Super Bowl some years ago down to Myley Cyrus’ and Robin Thicke’s “twerking” display this summer at the Video Music Awards, it appears that there are evidently no limits to how low you can go in degrading the human body and its sexual function.

We can’t blame the advertising or entertainment industries; they wouldn’t be doing these things if they didn’t meet with eager and willing customers. We could go on to talk about the multi-billion-dollar pornography industry and the devastating impact it’s having also in the church and among clergy. We could talk about the millions of victims in child sex trafficking. But we don’t have the time or (likely) the stomach to address that adequately. What I am saying, however, is that we need to pay attention to what’s happening not merely as an example of moral decay, but spiritual decay and emptiness. The ongoing impact of the sexual revolution should tell us something about the world we live in. As I have said elsewhere, before we can ever clean up the world, we must weep for it.¹⁷ What can be more sad than that the deepest and most intimate aspect of our bodily existence, designed by our Creator to imitate and reflect the union of Christ and His beloved bride, the church, should become an instrument of personal indulgence and self-gratification rather than union and self-disclosure between husband and wife? What could be more heart-rending than ripping sex from its marital context in a permanent one-flesh relationship and making it a solo performance as in pornography, or loveless and anonymous, as in “friends with benefits?”

If we trace the devolution of sexual practice from the dawn of the sexual revolution until now it should not really shock Christians that huge numbers of faithful churchgoers see no problem in redefining marriage to include same-sex relationships. After all, if sex is divorced from its context in human procreation and generations of married heterosexuals have come to define their marital relationship primarily

¹⁷ Harold Senkbeil, *Dying to Live: The Power of Forgiveness* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994), 24.

in terms of an emotional bond and view their sexual union primarily in terms of orgasm and their own personal pleasure, what possible reason might we have to forbid same-sex couples the same privilege?

Maybe we should stop there. The sexual disaster unfolding everywhere in our society and increasingly also among those who bear the name of Christ is but another symptom of what's happened as the church has capitulated to the dictates of expressive individualism and built its corporate life around the gratification of the desires and the whims of the individual. We have sown to the wind and reaped the whirlwind.

Such is the inevitable result of the secularization of the world, some will say. Remember, my contention is that the challenges we're encountering as Christians in our world today are not so much the consequence of the secularization of the *world* as they are the result of the secularization of the *church*. Recently in a book entitled *How the West Really Lost God*, Mary Eberstadt, journalist and research fellow at the Hoover Institute, argues that the decline of the church in the west is paralleled by the decline of the family. Like a double helix, the two are intimately related, she contends. As the church regains its teaching regarding marriage and the family, the church will have an impact on the culture around it. Ours is not the first era when Christian sexual mores conflicted with the prevailing culture, Eberstadt reminds us:

In the largely pagan world where Christianity first took root, as Roman writers themselves reported, infanticide was common; abortion was hardly unknown; births to unmarried couples abounded; divorce was a rather obvious solution to marital unhappiness, at least for men; and in certain classes, homosexuality was a familiar fact of life. All of these were behaviors and customs that Christianity then pronounced to be sins.¹⁸

Yet despite opposing the commonly-accepted values of the day, in the apostolic era and the generations following the church grew dramatically and astonishingly—capturing the hearts, minds, and imaginations of the pagan world with the transforming story of God's intervention in this world in human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, who demolished death and brought life and immortality to light—and in so doing, opened up a whole new dimension of embodied life, transforming sexuality along with every other dimension of human existence.

¹⁸ Mary Eberstadt, *How the West Really Lost God* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2013), 142.

There's hope, in other words. All is not lost in our time of decay and decadence. Corporately, we in the church have been in this position before. If we can rise above our addiction to cultural individualism, we can address this challenge effectively. Above all, if we remain faithful to our Lord, He will remain faithful to us, for He cannot deny Himself.

symptom #4: from soul to self

Our survey of the impact of expressive individualism on the life of the church would not be complete without the fourth and final symptom: the shift from the divinely-created soul to the self-constructed ego, or as we could say in short: the "self."

Unless you're in the Navy, you likely won't hear the word "soul" used much these days. It's another of those words that have gone out of fashion. Even in the church we seem to find the word awkward and a bit embarrassing, sort of like talking about "galoshes" or "suspenders." Yet of course it's a big word in the Bible. The Psalmist writes, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy Name" (Psalm 103:1). The mother of our Lord, upon being greeted by her cousin Elizabeth as the bearer of the Messiah, calls out in thanksgiving, "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46–47).

Now of course biblical anthropology is a complex theological topic and were we to do justice to the meaning of the word "soul" in the Bible we would need several lectures just on that subject. However, to cut to the chase I'll provide my own working definition of the term. Perhaps the most important thing to remember is that biblically a "soul" is not something you *have*, but something you *are*. In other words, the soul is not a substance that resides somewhere above the hypothalamus, but rather the person in relation to God. At the creation of Adam, the LORD God took the dust of the earth and formed it into the shape of a man, then breathed into his nostrils His own divine *Ruach*, or Spirit, and Adam became a *nephesh hayah*, a "living soul." That is, he was of the stuff of the earth with a fleshly body, but being made in the image and likeness of God he partook of the life-giving Spirit of God in his totality. Thus, when the psalmist or the Virgin Mary speaks of "my soul," they mean themselves: body, soul, and spirit in relation to God.

Now as we have pointed out, since the Enlightenment the biblical view of man has shrunk considerably. To paraphrase Prof. Jenson whom I quoted earlier, the whole project of the Enlightenment was the attempt to live in a narratable world without a Narrator, that is, without

a relationship with God the Father Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth. When your world shrinks to exclude everything spiritual, all you are left with is the material. Accordingly, your view of man shrinks along with your view of the world. Man becomes a biological organism without origin, purpose, or direction, a bundle of impulses and desires, motivated by his own internal goals.

Nearly 70 years ago C.S. Lewis in his book *Abolition of Man*—probably his most important work, in my opinion — unfolded what happens to human society when humans are left to fend for themselves without a creator, in other words, what happens when humankind loses its soul. Here’s how he describes the results:

We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honor and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.¹⁹

In other words, when we deliberately strip humans of their spiritual dimension, they can no longer be fully human. This is where the individualism craze has left us as a culture. Humanity has been debased, and we have little or no capacity for the classic virtues. In the name of personal freedom we have created a world in which human beings are captives and slaves to their own desires. “Well, there you have it,” you might say. “That’s the price of secularization.” Maybe so. But how tragic it is when that same individualism rides rampant in the conscious life of the church. How catastrophic it is when the church herself becomes secularized and expressive individualism sits in the driver’s seat in the church’s life and mission. When the church has lost her connection with Christ her living head, she loses her own soul.

There are more than enough examples of churches trying to reinvent themselves in the image and likeness of the world in a frantic effort to gain attention and favor in the eyes of a populace less and less attracted to the gospel. But I’m going to cite one of the more egregious examples just as an illustration of what can happen when the church loses sight of who she is and caters to expressive individualism.

Recently a YouTube video recorded several years ago at an Anglican church in Ontario made the rounds on the internet. Titled “A Cat, a Hat, and a Eucharist,” the video presents highlights of a service designed around Dr. Seuss’ *The Cat in the Hat*. The presiding priest, decked out as—you guessed it—the cat in the hat saunters down the aisle for the procession mimicking the mischievous cat, then proceeds to slice up the

¹⁹ C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1944).

liturgy and serve it up in the doggerel rhyme of Dr. Seuss. For example, these are the Verba for the Eucharistic prayer in the Sacrament:

This bread which we share is my body, you see
Take it and eat it in memory of me
And after they ate, he picked up a drink
And said “there’s more in here than you think.
This is my blood I give for you
And those who think their life is through
because they’ve sinned; they should be living
and remember your God is always forgiving.”²⁰

The audacity of those who dreamt up this travesty is beyond comprehension. One responder at the YouTube website wrote “Isn’t blasphemy against the Holy Spirit an unforgiveable sin? This is sickening, worldly, and blasphemous. . . . Makes Joel Osteen look like John Calvin.”

We may laugh, to be sure. But we must also weep. These are perilous times for the church, and the forces that gave rise to this travesty are also at work among us. We need to watch and pray that we enter not into temptation. More than that, like good spiritual physicians, we must be alert to the symptoms of the times, that we may accurately diagnose and treat the deep spiritual disease that has infected the church’s very lifeblood in our day.

Diagnosis: Acedia

Having explored the symptoms of our contemporary malaise, I’m going to propose a working diagnosis. As we observe not merely the secularization of the culture, but increasingly also the rising tide of the secularization of the church, it seems to me that what we have here is none other than a classic case of *acedia*. No, that’s not an infestation of insects. It’s one of the classic seven deadly, or cardinal sins; often translated as “sloth.”

But the ancients saw much more in *acedia* than mere laziness. One could say they saw beneath mere sloth/laziness to its underlying cause: disappointment with and spiritual disaffection from God’s divinely ordained gifts, be they in the realm of creation or redemption. Its deadening and deadly effect can be easily inferred, for when Christians are numb to Christ’s saving work and the Father’s gracious gifts by

²⁰ “A Cat, A Hat, and A Eucharist” Service at St. George’s Anglican Church, Guelph, ON, uploaded 30 June 2010, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7rIbNCJGpI>> accessed 23 October 2013.

which He makes us and preserves us, they sink deeper and deeper into boredom, apathy, and subsequent despair. More than sixty years ago the British playwright and Christian humanist Dorothy Sayers powerfully evoked the spiritual emptiness of acedia and its often tragic end:

The sixth²¹ Deadly Sin is named by the Church Acedia or Sloth. In the world it calls itself Tolerance, but in hell it is called Despair. It is the accomplice of the other sins and their worst punishment. It is the sin which believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and only remains alive because there is nothing it would die for.²²

More recently the Christian writer Kathleen Norris has done much to open up the semantic domain of this ancient term for modern scrutiny. In the biographical journal of her struggle, *Acedia & Me: A Marriage, Monks, and a Writer's Life*, she tells the extraordinary story of her life-long strife with what she readily acknowledges as clinical depression, yet has come to recognize as something far more pernicious: the persistent temptation of acedia.

I believe that such standard dictionary definitions of acedia as “apathy,” “boredom,” or “torpor” do not begin to cover it, and while we may find it convenient to regard it as a more primitive word for what we now term depression, the truth is much more complex. Having experienced both conditions, I think it likely that much of the restless boredom, frantic escapism, commitment phobia, and enervating despair that plagues us today is the ancient demon of acedia in modern dress. The boundaries between depression and acedia are notoriously fluid; at the risk of oversimplifying, I would suggest that while depression is an illness treatable by counselling and medication, acedia is a vice that is best countered by spiritual practice and the discipline of prayer.²³

²¹ Sayers' reference here reflects an alternate numeration of classic cardinal sins, which fluctuated over the centuries.

²² Dorothy Sayers, “The Other Six Deadly Sins,” *Creed or Chaos?* (Harcourt, Brace: 1949/1974), 108.

²³ Kathleen Norris, *Acedia & Me* (New York: The Penguin Group, 2008), 1.

It seems to me that the persistent and prevailing boredom with holy things we see all around us in the contemporary church are the tell-tale signs of acedia. The first petition teaches us that what God has Himself made holy cannot be sanctified by us, but our duty is to keep God's sacred things holy among us. That is, God's Word must not only be taught faithfully in its truth and purity, but those who receive that Word of God are to live holy lives in conformity to it. But anyone who teaches or lives contrary to God's Word profanes and defiles God's holy Name.

Now, consider the symptoms we have described regarding the challenges of our age:

#1—how the church lost its story, despising and rejecting its identity as curator of God's sacred mysteries

#2—the move away from eternal verities toward personal fulfilment; exchanging the truth of the gospel for the dictates of expressive individualism

#3—the move from chastity toward decadence as the church increasingly apes the sexual promiscuity of her pagan neighbors

#4—the move from soul to self as the church endorses the faulty view that each person must construct reality out of his or her own impulses.

Do not each of these singly and all of these collectively signal an abiding disaffection from all that God has declared sacred, a boredom with all thing holy, in other words? Is not this a condition that betrays the machinations of the Evil One, who with his allies the fallen world and our own sinful nature does not want us to hallow God's name or let His Kingdom come among us? Is not this a case of turning our backs on all that God has declared to be good and holy and true? That's exactly what acedia is: not to care about those things that that most demand our utmost care. Listen again to Norris as she unpacks the tragedy of this predicament:

At its Greek root, the word acedia means the absence of care. The person afflicted by acedia refuses to care or is incapable of doing so. When life becomes too challenging and engagement with others too demanding, acedia offers a kind of spiritual morphine: you know the pain is there, yet can't rouse yourself to give a damn.²⁴

²⁴ Ibid., 3.

And there's the other side of acedia; the narcotic effect it provides to cover the pain and struggle of life. If you stay with the standard definition of acedia as sloth, it doesn't seem to describe the hurried, hectic pace of contemporary life. Our technology gives us the luxury of immediate connection and communication with people all around the globe; we live in a whirlwind of electronic stimuli, with the dings and bells of our smartphones demanding our constant attention. We are constantly busy; we can't possibly be accused of being slothful or lazy!

Yet precisely these phenomena are the indications that we suffer from the classic temptation of acedia. The frenzy and busyness of our lives are dead giveaways that the solid and lasting things of the kingdom of God have lost their luster among us. Dare I say it? The frenzy and panic with which much of the church busies herself with all things peripheral to the kingdom in a frantic attempt to somehow make God's Name holy or make His kingdom come by her own ingenuity and effort is a dead giveaway that something is radically wrong; that she has lost her connection with Christ, her living head; that she has fallen prey to the siren calls of this world; that she has given in and succumbed to the prevailing mindset of our culture instead of what Jesus Christ has created her to be by the blood and water that flowed from His living side in His death.

The frenzy and busyness of our hectic lives are examples of the narcotic effect of acedia among us, the "spiritual morphine" that Norris wrote about. All this activity is in actuality a way of coping with a boatload of pain. It masks a deep and abiding psychosis that infects our culture on all its levels. Richard Leahy, a prominent psychologist specializing in anxiety and its treatment, has written, "The average high school kid today has the same level of anxiety as the average psychiatric patient in the early 1950's."²⁵ That should tell you something; we're not designed to live the way most of us live. This is an indication that something has gone profoundly wrong in our world. But we need to step back a bit to see it clearly.

If we have eyes to see beneath the ostensible energy and beehive of activity we find all around us to its empty inner core we will see the "spiritual morphine" of acedia at work. The late Russian author and Nobel laureate Alexander Solzhenitsyn in his famous Harvard commencement address of 1978 characterized the formerly Christian

²⁵ Richard Leahy, "How Big a Problem is Anxiety," in *The Anxiety Files*, April 30, 2008. <<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/anxiety-files/200804/how-big-problem-is-anxiety>>, accessed 23 October 2013.

West as a “world without a center,” that is, its vacuous pursuit of individualism and personal pleasure betrayed that it had lost its first love. Later on toward the end of his life he described the frantic pace of life in our time as a symptom of deep psychosis. He wrote that “the psychological illness of (our age) is this hurriedness, hurrying, scurrying, this fitfulness—fitfulness and superficiality.” Surely we’d expect just this sort of frenzied superficiality in a secularized culture. But that we should find the same frenzy and superficiality in the church indicates that the church itself has become increasingly secularized; acedia is alive and well among us.

Treatment: Recovering the Corporate Life

So what’s to be done? Where do we go from here? The topic assigned to me was, “The Christian faces contemporary challenges.” I hope by now you’ve realized that topic needs to be nuanced a bit. If the real problem we face is not the secularization of society but the secularization of the church brought about by importing expressive individualism into the church—then we simply cannot face contemporary challenges individually, person by person.

The time is now to revive and recover the third article of the Creed; in other words, to live corporately and communally in a world of expressive individualism. Rather than contributing to the further fracturing of human community we Christians need to concretely demonstrate and exhibit how God sets the solitary in families—how it is that God the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies people one by one through the gospel, but then draws them into one union and communion in His holy church. Here’s the way Luther put it in the Large Catechism:

Just as the Son obtains dominion by purchasing us through his birth, death, and resurrection, etc. so the Holy Spirit effects our being made holy through the following: the community of saints or Christian church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. That is, he first leads us into his holy community, placing us in the church’s lap, where he preaches to us and brings us to Christ.²⁶

As we have seen, the frantic frenzy and busyness of our world is a symptom of the profound acedia that provides an anesthetic for the

²⁶ Kolb/Wengert, *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), “The Large Catechism,” The Third Article, 37, 435-436.

deep and pervasive pain and isolation rampant everywhere—a veritable loneliness epidemic that threatens also the fellowship of the church. We are so busy we can't connect, we think. Our technology enables us to keep in touch, but it is a poor excuse for genuine conversation in which one human heart opens to another to relieve burdens and multiply joys. Letters become emails and emails shrink into facebook posts and twitter tweets; phone calls become texts and texts shrivel to emoticons. It may be communication all right, but it's not community—or at best, a dim parody of that genuine community of the holy Christian church in which sorrows are diminished and people uphold and encourage one another in the bond of Christian love and compassion. According to St. Paul, the church is not an organization, but an organism: the very body of Christ. And the church's members are linked together in a “communion”—an intimate organic unity that far transcends any external institutional association:

But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (1 Corinthians 12:24–27)

We are not created to live solitary lives. And we are not redeemed to live solitary lives. And we are not sanctified all by ourselves either, thank God. That is what we learn in the Third Article. As the Holy Spirit sanctifies me by the gospel, so He sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. And in that communion—that fellowship, or organic union—I experience for myself not merely the forgiveness of my sins, but balm for my burdens and strength in times of temptation.

In his masterful devotional composed for Elector Frederick when he was gravely ill, “Fourteen Consolations for Those Who Labor and are Heavy Laden,” Luther writes this:

The faith of the church comes to the aid of my fearfulness; the chastity of others endures the temptation of my flesh; the fastings of others are my gain; the prayer of another pleads for me.

...Therefore, when we feel pain, when we suffer, when we die, let us turn to this, firmly believing and certain that it is not

we alone, but Christ and the church who are in pain and are suffering and dying with us. Christ does not want us to be alone on the road of death, from which all men shrink. Indeed, we set out upon the road of suffering and death accompanied by the entire church. Actually, the church bears it more bravely than we do. ...All that remains for us now is to pray that our eyes, that is, the eyes of our faith, may be opened that we may see the church around us. Then there will nothing for us to fear, as is also said in Psalm 125: "As mountains are round about it, so the Lord is round about his people, from this time forth and forever." Amen.²⁷

Prescription: Treatment Plan for Evangelization

In closing I want to offer some specific suggestions for a way to face contemporary challenges, all of which flow in one way or another from the corporate life of the church. If indeed the prevailing problem we face in our time is the pernicious growth of expressive individualism in both society and church, if the boredom with holy things and frantic frenzy we find in the church are in fact symptoms of the ancient spiritual disease of acedia in modern dress, then like good spiritual physicians we must have a treatment plan.

Make no mistake about it, every aspect of this plan is in fact a plan for evangelization. For too long now we have seen the ministry of the church and the mission of the church as two distinct pockets or compartments of the church's life: outreach and inreach, so to speak, making disciples and keeping disciples. Yet the whole of the life of the church revolves around the central article: the justification of the ungodly by grace through faith in the Son of God, who is the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Like the central hub of a wheel, every dimension of the church's corporate life is an extension of the good news that God was in Christ reconciling the whole world unto Himself, not counting their trespasses against them.

Therefore, rather than seeing "evangelism" as one activity among many, the rise of secularization and individualism in society and church means that we need to return to the early Christian model of being and doing church. In their pre-Christian environment they knew something we need to relearn in our post-Christian world: namely that every aspect

²⁷ Martin Luther, "Fourteen Consolations for Those who Labor and are Heavy-laden," *Luther's Works* 42, Devotional Writings I (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 121-166.

of the church's corporate life is in fact evangelization, an extension and expression of the presence of the living Christ personally at work in His church. The apostolic mandate to Timothy is but one pointed example:

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (2 Timothy 4:1-5)

#1: *proclamation and ministry*

Preaching has fallen on hard times in our world. Many would chalk this up as a failure of technique and style. It's true, of course, that every generation hears differently and every preacher today knows how hard it is to get a people accustomed to visual communication to sit still and listen. Preachers do need to learn all they can about effective rhetoric and communication technique. However, as important as it is that preachers know how to speak, it's even more important that they know what to say. That is, they need to *proclaim* the gospel, not merely *explain* it.

Dr. John Kleinig tells the story of one of his early pastoral conferences in Australia in which the presenter was exhorting the pastors to be more Christ-centered in their preaching. "Brothers, we must always be sure to preach about the gospel," he said. Just then the venerable Dr. Herman Sasse got up, shuffled his way to the microphone, and said, "Gentlemen, I have preached sermons for most of my life, but I have *never* preached *about* the gospel; I have *always* preached the gospel."

Listen carefully to much of the preaching going on today and I'm afraid you will hear much more preaching *about* the gospel than the actual *preaching* of the gospel. That is, there may be a lot of references to the love of God, but precious little announcement of the entire forgiveness of sins in the shed blood of Jesus Christ His Son, crucified and risen, ascended to the Father's right hand, yet present in His Word and Sacraments for our forgiveness, life and salvation.

Tullian Tschividjian, you will remember, says the hub of Christianity is not “do something for Jesus,” but “Jesus has done everything for you.” Yet since we Lutherans believe, teach, and confess an efficacious word that does exactly what it says, we dare never settle for merely explaining what Jesus has done for sinners. We proclaim that the same Jesus conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried not only rose from the dead and ascended on high, but is still present personally with His church on earth through His Word preached and Sacraments administered that sins might actually be erased, sorrows lifted, and wounds healed. Among us it is the same as in the synagogue in Nazareth where Jesus first announced the text from Isaiah regarding liberty for the captives, sight for the blind, and freedom for the oppressed and then began to preach saying “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21).

The pastoral office, the church’s ministry, is the ministry of Jesus Christ risen and alive, not dead and departed, you see. We do not preach about Jesus; we preach Jesus present among us with His gifts. That is the first and perhaps most important part of our treatment plan for the church’s acedia.

#2: catechesis for faith and life

Anyone who has ever been to Europe is usually treated to a tour of one of the magnificent cathedrals constructed during the middle ages. You might call them archaeological artifacts from the age of faith. They are architectural gems and still to this day leave throngs of tourists stunned with their jaw dropping, other-worldly beauty. The story they enshrine in stone and stained glass is the story of the God of the Bible, who created the universe, redeemed His church with the blood of His Son, and sanctifies His people by His Spirit. Yet the story that gave rise to these edifices is a story largely unknown to the tourists—many of them themselves descendants of people who built these great sanctuaries.

As Robert Jenson puts it, we live in a world that has lost its story. The collective Christian memory of the west is fading fast. Of course it’s not surprising that the biblical narrative should lose its luster in the world after two centuries of attack by modernist anti-spiritual world-views. But the church has lost its story too. Obsessed and fixated on the self and self-improvement, the postmodern church too often capitulates to the influence of expressive individualism.

If she can recover from her obsession and addiction to the culture, this is a great moment of opportunity for the church to be the church once more. For modernism has collapsed; the age of reason is over. In the world we live in now, people everywhere are absolutely captivated by spiritual matters. It's not that they are biased against the spiritual; if anything they are so enamored by spirituality of all stripes that they willingly embrace everything spiritual that promises self-fulfillment and enhancement.

This is an opportunity too great to be missed, Jenson suggests. While it's true that people today live in a world without a story, the church invites refugees from a broken world to citizenship in the kingdom of heaven; and in so doing she gives them her story as their own:

If the church does not find her hearers antecedently inhabiting a narratable world, then the church must herself be that world. The church has in fact had great experience of just this role. One of many analogies between postmodernity and dying antiquity—in which the church lived for her most creative period—is that the late antique world also insisted on being a meaningless chaos, and that the church had to save her converts by offering herself as the narratable world within which life could be lived with dramatic coherence.²⁸

You will remember I suggested at the beginning of this lecture that in order to connect with this culture, we must first step back from it. By that I meant we must be careful not to be so hobbled by the contemporary mad pursuit of expressive individualism that the church morphs into a pale copy of the culture, with a thin spiritual overlay. But after stepping back to observe and analyze, then it's time to step forward and engage. As Jenson suggests, to *be* the narratable world that cultural refugees lack.

We have the tools to do that; they cost nothing other than time and energy. They are the Scriptures, Creeds, and Confessions of the church by which she teaches the faith once delivered to the saints. In order to evangelize the world and catechize the faithful, we need once more to be a *teaching* church. The Catechism, “the layman's Bible,” as Luther called it, needs to be dusted off and used to learn the vocabulary of faith once more by heart. We can only speak of what we ourselves have heard and seen, after all. From cradle to grave baptized believers need to be

²⁸ Jenson, 24.

immersed in the divine saga of God's creation, redemption, and sanctification.

In a world that loves story, what story could be more captivating than how God came incognito among us disguised in human flesh to woo and wed His beloved bride, to claim her as His own so that they might live happily ever after together in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. There's a story that puts Cinderella and her Prince to shame. Only it's not a fairy tale. It's no fiction at all, but God's own truth. And there's nothing boring about it. What Dorothy Sayers wrote about the English church during the height of modernism holds true for the postmodern church in America as well:

We are constantly assured that the churches are empty because preachers insist too much upon doctrine—"dull dogma," as people call it. The fact is the precise opposite. It is the neglect of dogma that makes for dullness. The Christian faith is the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man—and the dogma is the drama.

It would not perhaps be altogether surprising if, in this nominally Christian country, where the creeds are daily recited, there were a number of people who knew all about Christian doctrine and disliked it. It is more startling to discover how many people there are who heartily dislike and despise Christianity without having the faintest notion what it is. If you tell them, they cannot believe you. I do not mean that they cannot believe the doctrine: that would be understandable enough, since it takes some believing. I mean that they simply cannot believe that anything so interesting, so exciting, and so dramatic can be the orthodox creed of the Church.²⁹

Do you see the possibilities? What would happen if we would begin to use the catechism and the creed as our central toolkit not just to prepare young people for communion, but to train young and old for life-long baptismal living, to give them words to speak in confessing the faith to those who ask them the reason for the hope that is in them, to provide them a pattern for daily self-examination, daily drowning of the old Adam, in preparation for the daily resurrection of the new man?

What would happen if our worship services were not places where people go for few helpful hints for living with a few jokes thrown in

²⁹ Dorothy Sayers, "The Greatest Drama Ever Staged," *Creed or Chaos?* (Harcourt, Brace: 1949) 1974 ed. (Sophia Institute Press), 1-9.

for good measure, or an occasional spiritual pick-me-up, but a weekly audience with the living God? What would happen if we began to take liturgy as more than form and ritual, but enacted reality; as holy ground where we actually come into the presence of God to receive His gifts, then to praise Him with word and song, with bodies and souls? If we are to effectively treat acedia in all of its manifestations in the church, it's time to pay more attention to the catechesis of worship, preaching, and teaching.

#3: *prayer and meditation*

Of course when God speaks to us, there's nothing more natural than that we should speak back. In that sense prayer is as natural as respiration; first we breathe in and then we exhale. God of course always takes the initiative. First He addresses us in His Word and then we speak as we are spoken to. In this sense prayer—or the lack thereof—is indicative of the nature of the relationship between God and His people. As respiration is one of the signs of biological life, so prayer is one of the signs of spiritual life. You can't have breath without lungs, but you can have lungs without breath—and they are dead lungs.

If one of acedia's tell-tale symptoms is boredom with holy things, we need to do more than treat the symptoms. The Anglican rector who inaugurated the *Cat in the Hat* Eucharist I'm sure was trying to create more interest and excitement among his people. But of course he went about it all wrong: sacrilege doesn't undo boredom with holy things, rather it desecrates and defiles what God has made holy. So rather than treating the boredom, let's treat the cause of that boredom; that is, let's treat acedia.

If we are in need of a deeper sense of the holy, we need sanctification. And according to Scripture, all things are sanctified by God's Word and prayer (1 Timothy 4:5). That is, we receive the Holy Spirit by means of God's Word then we converse with Him by means of His Spirit. So while prayer has both God's command and promise and is as normal and vital to spiritual life as our breath is to our physical life, it is also essential in the treatment of acedia. Therefore one of the most effective things we can do in confronting contemporary challenges effectively is to teach people to pray.

Prayer, while it is a natural part of the Christian life, doesn't come naturally. We wouldn't have the "Our Father," after all, were it not for the fact that one of Jesus' disciples asked him one day after he had finished praying, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples"

(Luke 11:1). And so the Lord Jesus instructed them in the best possible way: He didn't lecture them on the principles of prayer, but He began to pray, inviting them to pray with Him. The "our" in the "Our Father" does not just include our brothers and sisters in the faith, you see, but the Son of God Himself who teaches us that we may with boldness and confidence consider God the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth our true Father since by faith we are all brothers and sisters of the Father's well-beloved Son.

Here we see that the school of prayer is the church's public worship. In the texts of the liturgy the faithful both hear the word of God and learn to speak back to God as they are spoken to. That is, they learn to pray.

But what to pray? That is the question. If people are to learn the art of prayer in every circumstance, they need to learn the art of meditation also. "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer," the psalmist writes (Psalm 19:14).

To meditate does not mean to think hard, it is rather, to borrow a phrase from John Kleinig, a form of "relaxed concentration," the sort of thing that happens quite naturally when the mind wanders off to focus on something that demands our complete attention and devotion. He writes:

By entering into meditation, we give ourselves to what we see, hear, imagine, or feel. We are mentally at attention, mindful and receptive to something that comes to us. In meditation, something happens to us, something is given to us. In meditation, we stop acting as thinkers and doers and vacate the stage for somebody or something else to occupy that space. Someone else or something else becomes the center of our world. We receive what is said, done, or given to us.³⁰

And so prayer begins in a receptive posture. First we listen to God speaking, then we speak back to Him. Therefore meditation is the heart of prayer. In our busy, hectic world, we could all use a bit more peace and quiet, it's true. How much better if we were to regularly be still in the presence of God, to listen carefully to hear Him speak in His Word, if we were to hold our hearts still from their fretfulness, hurt, and fear so that we are receptive to God as He gives Himself to us in His Word.

³⁰ John Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), 92.

How refreshing it is in a world in which we are constantly on the go, doing and performing, to simply sit still for a change and to simply *be*; to be the Father's beloved child, enthralled to hear whatever it is that He has to tell us.

This requires some discipline, of course—to create space in our harried, frenzied world takes some doing. But it can be done, and the reward is great. Jesus instructed His disciples to practice their personal prayer not out in the open marketplace or even in the temple, but to enter into an enclosed space where they could be still, there to meditate upon God's Word, and then to pray.

Because our world is so filled with constant visual and audio stimuli it is important to find a quiet spot—be that the church's sanctuary, a room in our own house, a quiet walking path perhaps—or even on occasion while driving in our cars. To be quiet is the first step, then to listen—to listen not to the wild and racing feelings of our own hearts, but to the sure and certain promises of God's Word. So like children, Luther reminds us, we begin by audibly reciting the creed or the Lord's Prayer, a Psalm, or some text of Scripture. It's important that we speak out loud so that the ear can hear and the heart believe an objective word that for once cuts through the constant stream of conflicting thoughts that ebb and flow through our harried hearts and minds.

In such prayer formed and framed by the Spirit of God by His Word there is peace in the midst of turmoil, as Isaiah writes, "You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you" (Isaiah 26:3).

Conclusion: When Worlds Collide—Learning from Augustine

That these are stressful times for Christians cannot be denied. Uncertainty is everywhere around and fear is often the result, giving rise to all kinds of mischief as church leaders scramble to find the magic pill to connect with a world that seems to have come unglued. But we need not fear. Our Lord promises that the very gates of hell will not prevail against His church, and that He will be with us always, to the very end of the age.

Besides, collectively, we've been in situations like this before. Take St. Augustine for example. As the Roman Empire was collapsing in ruins, there were many who blamed the new state religion, Christianity, for its collapse. The comfortable world that had provided ease and security for a thousand years was coming unraveled. The city of Rome, which many had believed would stand forever, had been sacked by

barbarian invaders in the year 410, and her classic monuments lay in ruin. The adherents of the old pagan gods were looking for a scapegoat, and Christians provided an easy target.

You and I should have some sympathy for these ancients, for in many ways we live in a time much like theirs. The familiar and comfortable has vanished and something radically different is taking its place. I joked about the Eisenhower administration, but I think we all know the tug of nostalgia and the lure of something simpler and more predictable, less threatening and tumultuous, more comfortable and secure. But such is not our lot.

We live in an age of change here between the age of reason and whatever comes after it much like that world of late antiquity—when the classic age was collapsing everywhere in ruin and the early Middle Ages were just beginning to dawn. If you know your church history you know that that was the church's moment in the sun, one of the times of vigorous mission and growth. It wouldn't be too many centuries before those Germanic hordes that had sacked and looted the city of Rome would themselves become Christians.

Students of history remind us that these in-between eras between the collapse of one worldview and the dawn of another are frequently times of great opportunity for the church. So as we come now to the end of our consideration of how the church faces contemporary challenges I want to hold up the example of Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo in North Africa. Over a period of thirteen years he drafted an apologetic for Christianity that still stands as a classic: his monumental *City of God*.

In his book St. Augustine tells a tale of two cities: the city of man, transient and passing; and the city of God, transcendent and lasting. Here is an important lesson for us to learn as we struggle now in our time to discover how we should respond to contemporary challenges, especially since we, like the citizens of the ancient Roman empire, have gotten much too comfortable and attached to our culture. We need a more objective vantage point. We, like Augustine, need to step back from our culture to sort out what belongs to the city of man and what belongs to the city of God.

Simply put, here amid the kingdoms of this world we have no continuing city. That's why we dare not become attached to the values and passing fancies of any human culture. We await a city with foundations whose maker and builder is God. The city of God, that is, His eternal kingdom built on the person and work of His Son, rests securely

though all the world around us is shaken. Thanks be to God, His Kingdom comes all by itself without our prayer, but we pray that it may come among us also as our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives both here in time and there in eternity.

Late antiquity and late modernity have much in common. For those ancients as well as our contemporaries, things comfortable and familiar are gone, apparently never to return again. Ahead lies only uncertainty and confusion. Yet the church perpetually looks beyond the current dark shadows of uncertainty and confusion to glimpse the dawning light of eternity. She has the promise of her living Lord to sustain her: "I will never leave you nor forsake you." In Christ Jesus her Lord the church in every age has a hope and a future.

So as we search for vitality in the church's life and mission in our own tumultuous age we would do well to draw inspiration from St. Augustine in the closing words of his *City of God*. To shed light on their present darkness he points the faithful on ahead to a glorious future, to an end without ending; to that time yet to come when they would know God's eternal kingdom no longer by faith but by sight:

The seventh (day) shall be our Sabbath, which shall be brought to a close, not by an evening, but by the Lord's day, as an eighth and eternal day, consecrated by the resurrection of Christ, and prefiguring the eternal repose not only of the spirit, but also of the body. There we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise. This is what shall be in the end without end. For what other end do we propose to ourselves than to attain to the kingdom of which there is no end?³¹ [LSQ](#)

³¹ St. Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), 867.

Centennial of the Lutheran Hymnary

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THE LUTHERAN HYMNARY WAS MY grandpa's book. He was born in 1916 right after the *Hymnary* was printed (1913) and just before the Norwegian Merger (1917). His family moved into a new church building in 1918. This was called the "Synod" church in Scarville to distinguish it from the "Merger" or "Union" church just across town. The Scarville congregation continued to use the 1913 *Hymnary* until the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (1996) was published three years after my grandpa's death. He knew that 1913 book well.

Leading up to *The Lutheran Hymnary*

After purging the 1851 constitution of the Grundtvigian Error, the Norwegian Synod was (re)established in 1853. By 1866, the Synod determined the time was right for the Norwegian Lutherans in America to create a new hymnbook of their own. They elected a committee for that purpose, and the Rev. U. V. Koren (1826–1910) was appointed chairman.¹ The first draft of the new book was finished in 1868, and after further editing, the final version was published in 1874 as the *Synodens Salmebog* ("Synod's Hymnal").² Koren and the committee took

¹ Gracia Grindal, "Dano-Norwegian Hymnody in America," *Lutheran Quarterly* 6 (1992): 9. The committee members were Koren, Ole Juul, Jorgen Nørdbø, Andreas Kittelsen Sagen, and Marcus Friedrich Wiese (309n29).

² This book contained no hymns by the popular Danish hymnwriter N. F. S. Grundtvig. Koren was in favor of including "God's Word Is Our Great Heritage," but H. A. Preus refused to consider even this one hymn (Grindal, 266). A new edition of

a conservative approach in hymn selections and in updating the older Danish texts to modern Norwegian.³ This careful approach was important for future hymnbook efforts as Dr. Gracia Grindal notes:

Following the appearance of *Synodens Salmebog*, Vilhelm Koren was established as the grand old man of Norwegian American Lutheran hymnody and, until his death in 1910, the leader in every attempt to create a new hymnal among the Norwegian Lutherans, living to steer the revision of the *Salmebog* completed for the jubilee of the Norwegian Synod in 1903. He and his associates also helped to shape the production of the first English hymnal of the Norwegians in America, *The Lutheran Hymnary*. This is most clear in the hymnal's conservative understanding of the canon, its arrangement into hymns for each Sunday's text, and the inclusion of a substantial number of rhythmic chorales.⁴

Three years after the *Synodens Salmebog* was published, Prof. F. A. Schmidt began his attack against the Missouri Synod and any others who supported the confessional Lutheran doctrine of election.⁵ His attacks intensified to the extent that nearly a third of the Norwegian Synod's pastors and congregations left by 1888 to form the "Anti-Missourian Brotherhood."⁶ Two years after this, the Anti-Missourians united with the Augustana Synod and the Norwegian-Danish Conference to establish the United Norwegian Lutheran Church on June 13, 1890. G. O. Lillegard comments, "It is no exaggeration to say that the only bond of union between these three groups was their common hatred of the Norwegian Synod."⁷

Just a few years before this, the animosity among the Norwegian Lutherans in America had not been as strong. To be sure, there were major doctrinal differences among them. But when the pietistic

this book was published in 1903, and Koren was again involved with that project. There were five Grundtvig hymns in this edition (Preus died in 1894).

³ Dennis Marzolf, "Germanic Influences on the Worship Life of the ELS" (presented to the ELS Historical Society, 2005), 4.

⁴ Grindal, 272.

⁵ S. C. Ylvisaker, ed., *Grace for Grace* (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Co., 1943), 169.

⁶ Ibid., 190. Christian Anderson reports in *Grace for Grace*, "The number of souls which in 1886, before the wholesale withdrawals of pastors and congregations began, according to the records was 143,885 had dwindled down in 1890 to 93,891" (92).

⁷ Ibid., 190.

Hauge Synod in 1885 sent an invitation to the Norwegian Synod, the Augustana Synod, and the Norwegian-Danish Conference to consider working on a joint hymnbook, these church bodies accepted.⁸ They met on January 26, 1887, in Chicago to discuss where the project should begin.⁹ U. V. Koren was present and suggested the formation of a committee of two men from each synod to chart a course for the effort. Ultimately a committee of four was formed, one representative from each body. M. F. Wiese (1842–1933), a close associate of Koren, was appointed as the Norwegian Synod representative.¹⁰ Because of the effect the election controversy had on all the Norwegians, this joint project never got off the ground, and all talks broke off. In 1891, the Hauge Synod approached the newly formed United Church about adding a supplement to Landstad's hymnbook. The resulting book, still in Norwegian only, was published in 1895 and made available to these Norwegian church bodies, which included about two-thirds of the Norwegian Lutherans in America.¹¹ However, the book still did not "represent the sort of substantial and creative work accomplished by Koren and his colleagues for the Norwegian Synod's book."¹²

While they were producing new hymnbooks in their native language, the Norwegian Lutherans did not ignore their place in English-speaking America. Already in 1879, the Norwegian Synod's Lutheran Publishing House in Decorah, Iowa, printed the *Hymnbook for the Use of Evangelical Lutheran Schools and Congregations*. It was not destined for widespread use in the Norwegian Synod. The book was edited by Missouri Synod professor August Crull and contained 130 hymns. Eighty-two of these were translated from German, but only seven from Danish/Norwegian.¹³ C. F. W. Walther had high regard for the book, which predated the first Missouri Synod English hymn collection by three years.¹⁴

⁸ Grindal, 278.

⁹ "Members of the group were, from the Hauge Synod: C. O. Brohaugh, A. E. Boyum, Anfin O. Utheim, Ole Nilsen, Nils Børve; from the Norwegian Synod: V. Koren, J. B. Frich, O. Juul, Bjug A. Harstad, M. F. Wiese, H. A. Preus; from the Conference: G. Hoyme, Nils Christian N. Brun, L. Lund, Iver Tharaldsen, Nils Gregor Nilsen, Johan Arndt Bergh, H. Osmundsen, K. J. M. Granville; from the Augustana Synod: J. E. Jensen, M. Nilsen." Grindal, 312n77.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 278.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 286.

¹² *Ibid.*, 287.

¹³ Carl F. Schalk, *God's Song in a New Land: Lutheran Hymnals in America* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995), 119. See also Grindal, 288.

¹⁴ Schalk, 150–151.

More and more, the Norwegian Lutherans began to see the need for a Lutheran hymnbook in English which would include translations of the best and most-beloved Scandinavian hymns. In 1895, the Norwegian Synod and the United Church each established hymnbook committees to explore this possibility. These committees even approached each other to potentially collaborate on a new book. This was surprising, because not even a decade had passed since the election controversy tore apart the Norwegian Lutherans. When these committees differed on what chorale melodies to use, joint efforts discontinued.¹⁵ In 1898, the United Church published the *Church and Sunday School Hymnal*,¹⁶ and the Norwegian Synod produced *Christian Hymns for Church, School and Home*.¹⁷ Dr. Schalk considered the Norwegian Synod book to be a big step for English Lutheran hymnody: "This excellent little collection of 309 hymns and 12 doxologies was rich in Reformation hymnody and retained the rhythmic form of most of the chorales. Tunes and settings were largely from the work of Ludvig Lindemann, and from the Hoelter *Choralbuch*, Brauer's *Choralbuch*, and from the *Church Book* of the General Council."¹⁸ While the translations from Danish/Norwegian into English were a welcome change from the 1879 book, few of them were adopted without alterations in future books.¹⁹

Just before the turn of the century, the United Church was the largest Norwegian Lutheran body with 1059 congregations including 123,000 communicant members. The Norwegian Synod had 735 congregations with 66,000 communicant members. The Hauge Synod was the smallest of the three with 217 congregations and about 17,500 communicant members, similar to the size of the ELS today.²⁰ At least for the Norwegian Synod, huge growth was right around the corner. By the time it celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 1903, communicant membership had more than doubled to approximately 140,000.²¹ This

¹⁵ Grindal, 289.

¹⁶ Committee members: Oluf Glasøe (1859–1918), Gerhard Rasmussen (1857–1943), Emil Gunerius Lund (1852–1938), and O. G. Belsheim (1861–1925) (Grindal, 290).

¹⁷ Committee members: Nils Førde (1849–1917), Adolph Bredesen (1850–1913), Oluf H. Smeby (1851–1929), and Karl A. Kasberg (1861–1924) (Grindal, 289). This book also contained no Grundtvig hymns.

¹⁸ Schalk, 206n28.

¹⁹ Grindal, 289.

²⁰ Schalk, 217ns1–3.

²¹ Ylvisaker, 92.

was almost identical to the total before the Anti-Missourian exodus.²² The need for a Norwegian Lutheran hymnbook in English seemed to grow more pressing with each year.

Both the Norwegian Synod and United Church formed committees to see about improving their 1898 books. The Norwegian Synod's committee started work in 1905.²³ In 1908, a resolution was passed in the Norwegian Synod to see if other synods in the Synodical Conference would like to collaborate on an English Lutheran hymnbook.²⁴ The Norwegian Synod quickly contacted the United Church to work on such a project, though the United Church was not part of the Synodical Conference. If there was any contact with the member synods of the Synodical Conference, the hymnbook idea did not take off. By this time, the climate among the Norwegians had changed. In the summer of 1905, Norway voted for independence from Sweden and obtained it. This event caused a swell of nationalistic fervor among the Norwegians, including those in America. That same year, the Hauge Synod invited the other Norwegian Lutherans to enter into joint doctrinal discussions.²⁵ It was no surprise, then, that the Norwegian Lutherans were ready to work on a hymnbook together by 1908, a project that was completed by 1912. The preface in the new hymnbook identified the reasons for collaboration:

The considerations which prompted the creation of the joint committee were, chiefly, the common need of an adequate and satisfactory English hymn book; the fact of a common faith and confession as well as a common inheritance of Lutheran hymnody; the probability of getting a better hymn book through united endeavor than by separate effort; and finally, the desirability of a common hymnary, especially in the event of a union of the Church bodies concerned.²⁶

The hymnbook committee consisted of four representatives from each synod. From the Norwegian Synod: the Rev. Alfred O. Johnson (1871–1933), the Rev. Ditlef G. Ristad (1863–1938), the Rev. Oluf H. Smeby (1851–1929), and Prof. Carlo A. Sperati (1860–1945), who

²² See footnote 6.

²³ Verlyn D. Anderson, "The History and Acculturation of the English Language Hymnals of the Norwegian-American Lutheran Churches, 1879–1958" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1972), 139.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

²⁵ Ylvisaker, 95.

²⁶ *The Lutheran Hymnary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1913), 3.

was later replaced by Prof. John Dahle (1853–1931). From the United Church: the Rev. Ole G. Belsheim (1861–1925), Prof. F. Melius Christiansen (1871–1955), Dr. Carl A. Mellby (1869–1963), and the Rev. George A. T. Rygh (1860–1942). From the Hauge Synod: the Rev. Knute O. Eittreim (1870–1942), the Rev. Lars Harrisville (1864–1925), the Rev. Karl C. Holter (1851–1923), and Prof. O. O. Stageberg, who joined in 1909. The Rev. Carl Døving (1867–1937) was later asked to assist the committee in an advisory capacity.²⁷ The committee met six times.²⁸

In general, the Norwegian Synod was the most liturgical, traditionally Lutheran of the three bodies, with the Hauge Synod falling at the other end of the spectrum.²⁹ Still, the preface in a preliminary copy of the new hymnbook boasted that

[The editors] have sought to make this a distinctively Lutheran hymnal and Lutheran hymns have in every case been given the preference over those originating in other divisions of the church.... Altogether, more than one half of the contents of this book is of Lutheran origin, which is a much larger proportion than in all previous English Lutheran hymnals.³⁰

When the committee received complaints that the hymn selection included too much Reformed hymnody, more Lutheran hymns were added and others were extended to include more stanzas.³¹

While the book was finished in 1912, it was not copyrighted and published until January of 1913. By September of that year, 30,000 copies had been sold.³² It was the hymnbook committee's desire that

²⁷ Anderson, 147–149; Grindal, 314n129.

²⁸ Aug. 25–Sept. 3, 1908, in Decorah, Iowa; Feb. 23–Mar. 4, 1909, in Minneapolis, Minnesota; July 27–Aug. 10, 1909, in Albert Lea, Minnesota; Feb. 3–10, 1910, in Red Wing, Minnesota; Feb. 28–Mar. 8, 1911; and July 10–20, 1911. Anderson, 147, 148, 151, 152, 154.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 147. Dr. Grindal contends, however, that “contrary to received opinion, the individual members’ differences concerning the canon of hymnody were fundamentally minor and not predictable by synodical affiliation. The Hauge Synod was as likely to harbor hymnologists of high church leanings as the Norwegian Synod” (301).

³⁰ Anderson, 150. How would a book of sermons be received in the confessional Lutheran church if only about half of them were written by Lutheran pastors? Would it be called a “distinctively Lutheran” book? While the Lutheran Church uses and enjoys many hymns written by non-Lutherans, it should be remembered that every hymn is itself a “sermon.” Orthodox hymns written by faithful Lutherans should be given predominance in Lutheran worship.

³¹ Anderson, 152, 154; Grindal, 294.

³² Anderson, 155–156, 175–176.

this book “may prove no small factor in the efforts made to unify the various Norwegian Lutheran Church bodies of our land.”³³ This came to pass when *The Lutheran Hymnary* became the official hymnbook of the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America, a union in 1917 of the three major Norwegian Lutheran synods.

Looking at *The Lutheran Hymnary*

The Lutheran Hymnary had many strengths (see Appendix for complete contents). The first sixty-three pages of the book were dedicated to the printing of the three catholic Creeds, the Augsburg Confession, and the Small Catechism. This mimicked the tradition of other Synodical Conference books. Walther’s German hymnbook of 1847 did this, and later hymnbooks followed suit, including the Ohio Synod’s *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnal* (1880) and the Missouri Synod’s *Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book* (1912).³⁴ For the first time, the Bugenhagen Order now enjoyed wide circulation in English,³⁵ and the Norwegians also printed the Common Order of service which would become the standard liturgy among confessional Lutherans in America. Following in the Scandinavian hymnbook tradition of Kingo, Guldberg, Balle, and Landstad, along with the preference of the Norwegian Synod, the hymns of *The Lutheran Hymnary* were arranged according to the Church Year.³⁶ The committee hoped that this arrangement “will prove a valuable aid in selecting appropriate hymns for the services, and, better than a mere topical index, serve to promote a general use of the hymns found in the hymnal.”³⁷ The book also benefited from the collaboration of hymn text and music experts throughout the process. Previous books were often published in text form first, and then followed later on by a music edition. For *The Lutheran Hymnary*, texts and music were planned together and printed together.³⁸

³³ *The Lutheran Hymnary*, 4.

³⁴ Schalk, 129, 141, 151.

³⁵ For a more in depth look at this order of service, see Erling T. Teigen, “The Worship Tradition of the Lutheran Hymnary” (presented to the WELS Commission on Worship, 1985), 6–15. See also Christian Anderson, “Our Liturgy” *Clergy Bulletin* XVII, no. 2 (Oct. 1957).

³⁶ Marzolf, 2. “This was a familiar feature of Norwegian hymnals, but not the usual arrangement of English-language hymnbooks. Only Paul Henkel, in an English hymnbook compiled by him in 1816, used this arrangement, but it never seemed to have appealed to the English churches” (Anderson, 156).

³⁷ *The Lutheran Hymnary*, 4.

³⁸ Grindal, 293.

Regarding music, the committee noted that “twenty German chorals are arranged in rhythmical meter; twenty have a melodic or counterpunal [*sic*] setting. These special features the committee hopes, will serve a purpose in discovering the wish of the Church regarding the rhythmical form and the melodic arrangement of Lutheran chorals.”³⁹ The book features far more isometric versions of the chorales than rhythmic versions. In the Ludvig M. Lindeman (1812–1887) tradition of the harmonic chorale many of the older rhythmic melodies appeared in an equal rhythm (quarter note) form.⁴⁰ This rhythmic transformation reflects an emphasis on harmony as a driving force in music, which was a result of significant changes in the musical art beginning in the early 18th century. Acknowledging the debate about whether the isometric or rhythmic version of a melody is preferable, the *Hymnary* occasionally included both forms of the same hymn (such as #2, #85, and #492).⁴¹ However, isometric melodies were more heavily used.

The hymns selected for the book came from a variety of sources. One breakdown of the 618 total hymns in the *Hymnary* is that 262 (42%) came from the Danish/Norwegian heritage, 118 (19%) from the German heritage, and 238 (39%) from English and American sources. Another assessment finds 7% of the hymns from Pre-Reformation sources, 40% from Lutheran sources, and 53% from Reformed sources.⁴² Still another review organizes the hymns by centuries: 258 (42%) from the nineteenth century, 136 (22%) from the eighteenth century, 113 (18%) from the seventeenth century, 58 (9%) from the sixteenth century, and 53 (9%) from earlier.⁴³

The task of translating an entire hymnic tradition into a new language was a massive one. It was only natural that the committee should include hymnody that already had been translated into English or was originally written in English. The *Hymnary* preface particularly highlights the contributions of Carl Døving in locating existing translations:

³⁹ *The Lutheran Hymnary*, 4.

⁴⁰ For further information about the committee’s discussions on melodies, see Grindal, 294–295. For more on Lindeman, see C. Howard Smith, *Scandinavian Hymnody from the Reformation to the Present* (The American Theological Library Association, 1987), 200–202.

⁴¹ See Teigen, 20, for a balanced look at this issue. In private conversations, Professors Marzolf and DeGarmeaux expressed a similar position.

⁴² Anderson, 162.

⁴³ Grindal, 297.

It is due to add that, thanks to the very extensive hymnological library and hymnological knowledge and patient research of Rev. Carl Døving, ... many excellent translations of well-known German Lutheran hymns, translations made mostly by prominent English hymnologists, have been secured for “The Lutheran Hymnary”; these translations have not appeared in an English Lutheran hymn book before.⁴⁴

Other translations from Danish/Norwegian were supplied by members of the committee, and though some have questioned the quality of these efforts, the translations did fill an important need.⁴⁵ A number of them are still utilized today.⁴⁶ In general, the committee members believed that “their primary function was not the creation of something new, but the conservation of their European heritage.”⁴⁷ In other words, their goal was to retain their beloved tradition of hymnody and pass it on to future English-speaking generations.

A substantial number of the hymns in the book came from English and American hymn writers, and not many of these authors were of Lutheran background. This caused some to wonder whether the whole project had been rushed. More time spent could have meant more translations of Lutheran hymns or even more original texts by Lutherans. M. F. Wiese, who had worked with Koren on the 1874 *Synodens Salmebog*, stated that a good hymnbook should reject and avoid the “trivial, sentimental, schwärmeristic, stilted rhyming of all kinds of spiritual poetasters.”⁴⁸ Prof. Erling Teigen adds, “Because English was still the 2nd language of the Norwegians, and in their search for a hymnody, they recognized good poetry when they saw it. But, except for

⁴⁴ *The Lutheran Hymnary*, 4. There are 67 translations from Catherine Winkworth (1827–1878) (Anderson, 165).

⁴⁵ For a discussion of these translation challenges, see Anderson, 161–172, 215–220; see also 316–319 for a full list of hymns translated by the committee members.

⁴⁶ The work of these committee members is represented in the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*: Ristad, one translation (252); Smeby, seven translations (25, 26, 111, 475, 482, 563, 586); Dahle, one composition (387), two settings (111, 144); Belsheim, one translation (583); Christiansen, six settings (27, 266, 397, 475, 509, 590); Rygh, thirteen translations (4, 215, 230, 241, 348, 354, 399, 437, 449, 516, 590, 595, 601); Døving, sixteen translations (44, 131, 142, 150, 211, 259, 268, 365, 368, 457, 462, 493, 495, 510, 514, 585).

⁴⁷ Anderson, 175. Anderson comments on this conservative approach: “With the exception of Percy Dearmer’s ‘Father, who on man dost shower gifts of plenty,’ which was written in 1906, there is not another hymn written after 1890, twenty-three years or a generation before the hymnal was published” (175).

⁴⁸ Cited in Grindal, 295–296.

the Norwegian Synod members of the committee, they did not always observe the often subtle reformed tilt of that hymnody.”⁴⁹

While there are many examples of good hymns by non-Lutheran authors in *The Lutheran Hymnary*, there are other examples of hymns that have received too much attention through the years. “Nearer, My God, to Thee” (#466) is one of these, written by Sarah Adams, a lifelong Unitarian. This hymn suggests that we are closest to God not through the Means of Grace, but when we are lifted into the air or when we dream or think of God. Verse 2 reads:

Though like the wanderer,
The sun gone down,
Darkness be over me,
My rest a stone;
Yet in my dreams I'd be
Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee!

Other hymns similarly emphasize what we must do, instead of what Jesus has done for us. The first two stanzas of “God Calling Yet!” (#433) by the German Reformed author Gerhard Teersteegeen show where the rest of the hymn is going:

God calling yet!—shall I not hear?
Earth's pleasures shall I still hold dear?
Shall life's swift passing years all fly,
And still my soul in slumbers lie?

God calling yet!—shall I not rise?
Can I His loving voice despise,
And basely His kind care repay?
He calls me still: can I delay?

The Unitarian/Presbyterian George Heath in “My Soul, Be on Thy Guard” (#485), speaks of the soul's battle but says nothing about the victorious Christ:

⁴⁹ Teigen, 4.

My soul, be on thy guard,
Ten thousand foes arise;
And hosts of sin are pressing hard
To draw thee from the skies.

O watch, and fight, and pray!
The battle ne'er give o'er;
Renew it boldly every day,
And help divine implore.

Ne'er think the victory won,
Nor lay thine armor down;
Thine arduous work will not be done,
Till thou obtain a crown.

Fight on, my soul, till death
Shall bring thee to thy God!
He'll take thee at thy parting breath
Up to His blest abode.

Other weak hymns in the *Hymnary* come from the most beloved Scandinavian hymnwriters. Prof. Teigen writes, "The pietistic element of the hymnary committee also ensured the inclusion of some rather crass pietistic, Halleian theology—see, e.g. Hymnary 245, 'O Father may thy Word Prevail.' Their selection of Communion hymns left much to be desired and is rather reflective of the Melancthonian and pietistic approach to the sacrament."⁵⁰ This is the second verse of the hymn Teigen cites:

Come Jesus, come and contemplate
Thy vineyard's sad estate:
Baptized are millions in Thy name,
But where is faith's pure flame?
Of what avail that we
Know of Thine agony
So long as we do not o'erthrow
In faith the wicked foe.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Here is another verse by the same author, H. A. Brorson (1694–1764), from “Life’s Day Is Ended” (#591):

Hence Christ in heaven
 Did me a crown prepare,
 Which shall be given
 Not only me to wear,
 But whomsoever,
 The lowliest and the best,
 Who doth endeavor
 To serve his Savior blest,
 And so forever
 Shall be his worthy guest.⁵¹

Another weakness of the hymn selections is that there are no obvious hymns treating the doctrine of election. This was purposeful since the committee did not want to hinder any progress toward outward unity among the Norwegians.

The best Scandinavian hymns have continued to be included in modern hymnbooks, though none represents them as well as the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (more on that later).⁵² Some of the Lutheran texts that have not been retained are worth another look. From verse 2 of the Pentecost hymn, “Heavenly Spirit, All Others Transcending” (#377), by J. N. Brun (1745–1816):

Merciful Jesus, with love never failing,
 Sending Thy Spirit, the pledge ever new,
 That Thy atonement for all is availing,
 Faith ever sees that Thy promise is true.
 Crowned are Thy servants with heavenly fire,
 Speaking with hearts and with tongues all aflame;
 Heavenly Spirit, our voices inspire,
 That we may sing of His glorious name!

“Thou Holy Church, God’s City Shine” (#79) is by M. B. Landstad (1802–1880):

⁵¹ For more on Brorson’s life, see Smith, 116–122.

⁵² *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (St. Louis: MorningStar Music Publishers, 1996).

Thou holy Church, God's city, shine,
High on His mountain founded!
Sing praise to Christ, thy king divine,
Who thee with walls surrounded;
Thy children He doth bless and sends
His peace to thee, thy strife He ends:
Now praise thy God, O Zion!

He sendeth out His holy word
To every land and nation,
It swiftly runs, 'tis from the Lord
His message of salvation;
The hearts that were like ice and snow,
It melts so that in streams they flow
With tears of true repentance.

Who now but will himself deny,
And yield to God submission,
His word receive, on Christ rely,
Obtains a full remission;
He is converted and made wise,
And goes from hence to Paradise:
Grant us this grace, O Savior!

Finally, verse 4 of a Danish hymn from around 1600, "In God, My Savior, I Put My Trust Alone" (#350):

My consolation
Thou art in every need,
For my salvation
Thou on the cross didst bleed;
In heaven dwelling,
I shall, when past all pain,
Thy praise be telling,
O Lamb for sinners slain!
When, anthems swelling,
I sing the angels' strain.

These are some of the more unique features of *The Lutheran Hymnary*:

- Page numbers restart in the hymn section but do not match the hymn numbers.
- Two hymns are specifically about missions to the Jews (#126, #127).
- Two hymns are included by Francis Scott Key (#15, #520).
- An initial is given for the first name of male authors, but the full name of female ones.⁵³
- Text issues: words were often condensed to fit on a line (#557), or they were bumped to the line below with brackets (#345).
- Doxologies of different meters were added at the end of the book (p. 655).
- Some hymns have different melodies than we expect to hear: A cheerful “O Come, O Come, Immanuel” (#172); the melody for “O Come, All Ye Faithful” paired with other hymns (#340 “How Firm a Foundation,” #570 “We Gather, We Gather”).
- Some hymn texts had not yet achieved their popular form: “Holy Night! Peaceful Night!” (#178).⁵⁴

Legacy of *The Lutheran Hymnary*

The Lutheran Hymnary certainly was not a perfect book, but it was a good book for its time. Though it contained too many hymns by Reformed authors, there were many who wanted still more of these texts, particularly the popular “Gospel songs” coming from the American revivals. Just two years after the *Hymnary* was published, *Concordia: A Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs* was printed without any direct synodical support. It was revised in 1932, and enjoyed special prominence among Scandinavian pietists.⁵⁵ The reorganized “little” Norwegian Synod was not totally happy to be using the “Merger book,”

⁵³ Alphabetically by last name (may not be exhaustive): Sarah Adams (#466), Dorothy F. Bloomfield (#538), Jane Borthwick (#556), Birgitte C. Boye (#183, #329, #383), Phoebe Cary (#289), Elizabeth C. Clephane (#321), Elizabeth Codner (#268), Annie R. Cousin (#597), Elisabeth Cruciger (#167), Sarah Doudney (#59), Catherine H. Esling (#517), Adelaide A. Procter (#267), Linda Sandell (#423), Anna Steele (#135, #473), Mrs. H. B. Stowe (#549), Adelaide Thrupp (#536), Emma L. Toke (#368), Anna Warner (#294), Anna L. Waring (#256, #343)

⁵⁴ “Holy night! peaceful night! / Through the darkness beams a light, / Yonder, where they sweet vigils keep / O’er the Babe who, in silent sleep, / Rests in heavenly peace, / Rests in heavenly peace!”

⁵⁵ Grindal, 300–301.

but there was nothing else available in English that represented their unique hymnic tradition.

In 1928, the Norwegians received an invitation to send representatives to join the Synodical Conference Hymnbook Committee. Pastors Norman A. Madson and Christian Anderson were selected, and they served on the committee until *The Lutheran Hymnal* was published in 1941.⁵⁶ This was a fine book, but it omitted the Bugenhagen order of service and a number of good Scandinavian hymns. Like the *Hymnary*, it also contained many weak texts of British and American origin. Some ELS congregations adopted it, but others continued to use the 1913 *Hymnary*. Prof. Teigen writes,

The reception of the Hymnal was not all that enthusiastic in the Norwegian Synod. President Henry Ingebritson reported to the 1941 convention, “We miss many of our favorite hymns in the new book.” He suggested that “members of the hymnbook committee confer with the publishers, asking for an edition for our synod with an appendix containing some of our hymns” (SR 1941, p. 13). The convention resolved to endorse the proposal of the committee to try to get 40 additional hymns and the synod’s liturgy printed as a supplement to the new hymnbook. The committee was to report to the next convention—but the next report contains no references to it. Presumably, the wars (the one in Europe and the one in the Synodical Conference) took attention away from this less important matter. There continued to be a lack of wholehearted acceptance of the Hymnal in the synod for quite some time. Some pastors urged their congregations to introduce it, while others spoke against it because it did not contain the 40 preferred hymns nor the liturgy used in the synod.⁵⁷

Scandinavian Lutheran hymnody suffered another blow with the publication of the *Service Book and Hymnal* of 1958. Even though six of the eight church bodies that worked on the hymnbook had Scandinavian roots, the committee, with chairman Luther Reed at the rudder, decided that most of these hymns should not be retained in the new book. The *Service Book and Hymnal* “exclude[d] almost entirely that

⁵⁶ Teigen, 4–5. Prof. DeGarmeaux indicates that Pr. Adolph Harstad also served on the committee. Mark DeGarmeaux, “O Come, Let Us Worship” (presented to the 78th Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Mankato, MN, June 1995), 25.

⁵⁷ Teigen, 6.

normative core of Reformation hymnody from the 16th century together with many of the excellent contributions from the Scandinavian heritage which had their roots in German hymnody.”⁵⁸ In a paper submitted for the Bachelor of Arts Degree at Bethany Lutheran College, Andrew Soule documents the steady decline of the use of uniquely Scandinavian liturgy and hymnody. Until the publishing of the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, only a small part of that tradition could be found among American Lutherans.⁵⁹

The *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* was printed in 1996, eighty-three years after *The Lutheran Hymnary*. It was the effort of a small committee in a small church body, but it remains the best Lutheran hymnbook ever published in the English language. The 1996 *Hymnary* succeeded in taking the best from the Scandinavian *Hymnary* tradition (including the Bugenhagen Order), along with the German 1941 *Hymnal* tradition. Both the 1913 and 1941 hymnbooks represented hymn traditions that were moving from one language (Norwegian and German respectively) to another (English). Both of these books included too much from non-Lutheran authors, in part understandable given the monumental task of translation, but too much nonetheless. Here are the percentages of translated and non-translated hymns in some of the hymnbooks of the 20th century. Keep in mind that some of the translated hymns are from non-Lutheran background, just as some of the non-translated hymns are from Lutheran background:

- 295 (48%) written in English; 323 translated in *The Lutheran Hymnary* (1913)
- 312 (47%) written in English; 348 translated in *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941)
- 312 (50%) written in English; 311 translated in *Christian Worship* (1993)
- 194 (32%) written in English; 408 translated in the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (1996)
- 293 (47%) written in English; 337 translated in the *Lutheran Service Book* (2006)

It may be that we should see fewer translated hymns in American Lutheran hymnbooks as time passes. But the question remains: From

⁵⁸ Schalk, 171–172. See also Grindal, 301.

⁵⁹ Andrew Soule, “A History of Norwegian Liturgy and Hymnody in America: Its Origins and Diminishing presence in American worship 1840–2012” (submitted for the Bachelor of Arts Degree, Bethany Lutheran College, 20 April 2012).

where should the predominant number of the hymns representing the one, holy Christian, apostolic faith come? It seems that twenty centuries of Greek, Latin, German, Norwegian, etc., hymnody (especially from Lutheran authors), should represent more than 50% of our total hymnody.

Dr. Carl Schalk outlines what he views as the core of Lutheran hymnody. He argues that this core comes from the Babst Hymnbook of 1545, published with Luther's blessing just before his death. Schalk tracks this core of hymnody through the many American Lutheran hymnbooks published since the eighteenth century. This core of hymns faltered during the period of pietism, was totally wiped out during the age of rationalism, and has not entirely worked its way back into modern books. The confessional Lutheran tradition brought to America by men like Walther and Grabau, was a definite "shot in the arm" in this regard. But the English-language books still have not matched the core hymns included in the German books. Schalk charts how many out of forty-four of these core hymns are present in American Lutheran hymnbooks:

- 29 in *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnal* (1880)
- 32 in *Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book* (1912)
- 21 in *The Lutheran Hymnary* (1913)
- 7 in *Common Service Book* (1917)
- 30 in *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941)
- 9 in *Service Book and Hymnal* (1958)
- 26 in *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978)
- 31 in *Lutheran Worship* (1982)
- 31 in *Christian Worship* (1993)⁶⁰
- 38 in *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (1996)
- 29 in *Lutheran Service Book* (2006)
- 19 in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (2006)

Again, the 1996 *Hymnary* stands out. It stands out again in the amounts of hymn stanzas printed compared to most other Lutheran books. *The Lutheran Hymnary* often eliminated stanzas that the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* later restored. For example, five stanzas of "O How Shall I Receive Thee" in the old *Hymnary* (#157) were extended to ten stanzas in the new *Hymnary* (#94). Both *Hymnaries* include all ten stanzas of "Like the Golden Sun Ascending." But other

⁶⁰ Schalk, Appendix A, E. His book published in 1995 does not include the final three books on the list.

Lutheran hymnbooks don't: six stanzas in *The Lutheran Hymnal* (#207), five in *Christian Worship* (#147), and three in *Lutheran Service Book* (#548).

While there are many differences among the Lutheran hymnbooks produced in America, there are also many similarities. This is a comparison of the three main English hymnbooks used in the history of the Norwegian Synod/ELS, *The Lutheran Hymnary* (TLHy), *The Lutheran Hymnal* (TLH) and the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (ELH):

- 251 hymns shared by ELH, TLH, and TLHy
- 422 hymns shared by ELH and TLH which is 69% of ELH and 63% of TLH
- 333 hymns shared by ELH and TLHy which is 55% of ELH and 54% of TLHy
- 322 hymns shared by TLH and TLHy which is 48% of TLH and 52% of TLHy
- 108 hymns are unique to ELH (18% of book)
- 177 hymns are unique to TLH (26% of book)
- 218 hymns are unique to TLHy (35% of book)

Until the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, there was reason to fear that much of the rich hymnody of Scandinavian Lutheran origin would be lost. Indeed, much of it has been. But there may be a growing awareness of the need to continue to translate into English the Lutheran gems hidden in other languages. It is exciting to see *Walther's Hymnal* published for the first time in English, the work of translator Matthew Carver.⁶¹ Prof. DeGarmeaux has given the Lutheran Church a great gift in his translation of the hymn stanzas in Laache's *Book of Family Prayer*, along with his ongoing efforts to get more texts by Kingo and others into English. It may be that some of the Norwegian hymn translations we already have could benefit from a re-working. This could be accomplished by someone fluent in Danish/Norwegian and English, or by a team approach (someone to provide the rough translation, the other to provide the poetry). New translations would be preferable to the tweaking done to update language in the more recent hymnbooks. We will see what approach the WELS takes in its new hymnbook to be published in 2024.

⁶¹ Concordia Publishing House, 2012.

Conclusion

Scarville Lutheran Church was happy with *The Lutheran Hymnary*. But after 1956, no more of these books were printed,⁶² which meant no more could be purchased as replacements or as gifts. When the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* was nearly completed, the congregation talked about changing over. This was a difficult notion for those who had known only the one book. The scales might have tipped a bit in the new book's favor when my grandma offered to dedicate the memorial funds received after her husband's death to purchase them. My grandpa never saw a copy of the ELH, and there are probably changes that would have bothered him. But he would have seen in the new *Hymnary* a book that carried on the Scandinavian tradition, while also offering the best collection of Lutheran hymns ever seen in an English book. He would have been glad for that. LSQ

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⁶² Teigen, 1.

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170th Anniversary of the 1843 Old Lutheran Immigration

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ARATHER INTRIGUING GRAVE MARKER stands high in a Lutheran cemetery in Lebanon, Wisconsin. The marker bears this inscription:

Here rests in God
One of the founders of Lebanon.

Johann Schley
Born July 12, 1796
Died October 28, 1850

He emigrated together with his family with the Pomeranian Old Lutheran migration of 1843 from Stettin, Germany, on five sailing vessels to America where the immigrants founded Lebanon.¹

This year (2013) marks the 170th anniversary of the Old Lutheran immigration of 1843. During the mid-nineteenth century several large groups of German Lutherans immigrated to America for religious freedom. Denied the proper practice of their Lutheran faith in the fatherland, they sought a new homeland. They desired to confess the doctrines of Scripture in their truth and purity and live authentic

¹ *Hier Ruht in Gott Einer der Gründer Libanons / Johann Schley / Geb. 12. Juli 1796 / Gest. 28. Oct. 1850 / Ausgewandert sammt Familie mit dem pommerschen "Alt-Lutheranerzüge" von 1843 von Stettin, Deutschland, auf fünf Segelschiffen, nach Amerika, wo die Einwanderer Libanon gründeten.*

Christian lives proclaiming the praises of the Savior who called them out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Five major immigration groups came from the German states between 1838 and 1854: Stephan and the Saxons, who settled in Missouri (1838–39); Grabau and the Prussians and Pomeranians, who settled in the Buffalo, New York area and Wisconsin (1839); the 1843 immigration of Prussians and Pomeranians, who settled in the Buffalo, New York area and Wisconsin; the Bavarians, who were sent to Michigan by Löhe (1842–53); and Kilian and the Wends, who settled in Texas (1854). In addition to this, Old Lutherans, led by Kavel and Fritzsche, went to Australia. Other Old Lutherans travelled to South Africa and South America. The German Lutherans who came to America at this time numbered almost five thousand. In the next two decades, thousands more came to the Midwest.

These German Lutherans were referred to as “Old Lutherans” because they wanted to retain the doctrinal heritage of the Reformation and the seventeenth-century dogmaticians. They reintroduced confessional Lutheranism in America by their adherence to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the entire Book of Concord. The immigrations brought a renewal of confessional Lutheranism in the synods located in the eastern states and were the foundation of the Synodical Conference, which maintained Lutheran Orthodoxy well into the twentieth century.

The Origin of the Immigrations

For many years the Prussian electors and kings had been striving to effect a union between the Reformed minority and the Lutheran majority in their lands. Already on Christmas Day in 1613, the Hohenzollern dynasty, under Johann Sigismund (1572–1619), openly embraced the Reformed faith with a Reformed communion service in the Berlin Cathedral, while his wife Anna² and the majority of his people stood firm in the Lutheran faith. Each Prussian leader thereafter worked to modify the differences between the Reformed and Lutherans in their lands, as is seen in the conflicts at the time of Paul Gerhardt.³ On the 300th anniversary of the Reformation in 1817, Friedrich Wilhelm III, ruler of Prussia, issued a proclamation announcing that the Lutheran

² See Gaylin R. Schmeling, “Anna of Prussia,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (March 2008): 177–180.

³ See Gaylin R. Schmeling, “Paul Gerhardt: Pastor and Theologian,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (March 2008): 18–26.

and Reformed churches in his lands be united into one church. The royal proclamation appeared on September 27 under the title “*Entstehung der preussischen Landeskirche*” (Formation of the Prussian State Church). The proclamation called for ministers and churches of both confessions to overcome their narrow views by joining in receiving the Lord’s Supper and by uniting in a common church organization. For upper-class Prussians imbued with the rationalism of the period, the proclamation was a logical and acceptable solution to the religious divisiveness of the past era. One of the reasons that the king made this proclamation was that he, a Calvinist, had not been able to receive the Holy Supper with his Lutheran Queen, Louise of Mecklenberg.⁴ This union was scandalous, based on compromise. Only in backwoods villages were the mysteries of God treasured, the Word taught in its truth and purity, and the Sacraments rightly administered.

In 1822, the King personally prepared a church agenda for his union church, commonly referred to as the Prussian Union. This agenda pleased neither the Lutherans nor the Reformed. The Reformed felt that the liturgy was too Lutheran, even Catholic, while the Lutherans saw Reformed elements within the book.⁵ The most objectionable elements in the agenda were the *fractio* and the distribution words.

The pastors were ordered to use during the distribution of the Sacrament of the Altar this formula, “Christ says: This is my body; Christ says: This is My blood.” When Lutheran and Reformed people attended Communion at the same altar, the king reasoned, the Lutherans could still believe that in, with, and under the bread and wine in Holy Communion they do receive the true body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, invisible, but nevertheless real; while the Reformed could hold according to the unscriptural teachings of Zwingli and Calvin, that in the Lord’s Supper one receives merely bread and wine, and that union with Christ can only be had spiritually.⁶

⁴ John Philipp Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod* (St. Cloud, Minnesota: Sentinel Publishing Company, 1970), 30.

⁵ As negative as this agenda was for confessionalism, “from the standpoint of form—based as it was on historic 16th-century models—it was not only a step in the right direction, but it also gave impulse to the movement of liturgical study and worship renewal” (Fred L. Precht, ed., *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993], 84).

⁶ David’s Star Evangelical Lutheran Church, *125th Anniversary* (Jackson, Wisconsin, 1968), 4–5.

These distribution words allowed two doctrines of the Lord's Supper to stand side by side. The result was sinful unionism contrary to the clear word of Scripture which tells us to avoid those who teach contrary to God's Word (Romans 16:17).

The other issue in this conflict was the *fractio panis*, the breaking of the communion bread. As the words were recited which spoke of Jesus breaking the bread in the Last Supper, the pastor was to break the bread. The Reformed considered this to be an essential element in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. It had come to be understood as a rejection of the real presence in the Sacrament and therefore, highly objectionable to the Lutherans.⁷

In reaction to the rationalism of the time and the King's forced union, confessional awakening (*Erweckungsbewegung*) and the Lutheran renewal⁸ broke forth reminding the world of the treasures of the past found in Luther and the old Confessions. In the year 1817, on the 300th anniversary commemoration of Luther's Ninety-five Theses, Claus Harms (1778–1855) of Kiel published his own Ninety-five Theses in which he attacked rationalism and the Prussian Union as well as pleaded for a return to the truths of the Reformation.

In the 75th of these theses he declared, prophetically, with reference to the proposed mere external union of the two Churches: "By a marriage the poor maid is to be made rich. Do not perform the ceremony over the bones of Luther. They will become alive, and then woe unto you!"⁹

⁷ Bodo Nischan, *The Second Reformation in Brandenburg* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 138-139.

⁸ In the year 1817, on the 300th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, Claus Harms published his new Ninety-five Theses, which is usually considered to be the beginning of the Lutheran renewal. It was a renewal in Luther studies and a renewed interest in the Lutheran Confessions and the theology of the seventeenth-century dogmatians. There were Scheibel at Breslau in Silesia; Grabau in Prussia and Pomerania; and Rudelbach, a Dane, in Saxony who influenced the founders of the Missouri Synod. Soon Wilhelm Löhe spread his far-flung Lutheran net of missions from Neuendettelsau. Also at the universities (Erlangen, Leipzig, etc.) outstanding work was done in exegesis by Harless, von Hofmann, Franz Delitzsch (converted Jew and student friend of C.F.W. Walther); and in dogmatics by Thomasius and Philippi. The Lutheran renewal blossomed in Norway with the Johnsonian Awakening under Gisle Johnson (1822-1894) and Paul Caspari (1814-1892) who were professors at the University of Christiania.

⁹ Brauer, *Under the Southern Cross* (Adelaide, Australia: Lutheran Publishing House, 1985), 4. *Als eine arme Magd möchte man die lutherische Kirche jetzt durch eine Kopulation reich machen. Vollziehet den Akt ja nicht über Luthers Gebein! Es wird lebendig davon und dann—Weh euch!*

The Lutheran Church was the poor maid to be made rich through the union with the Reformed. But in reaction to the Prussian Union true, vibrant Lutheranism arose again. Thus the Ninety-five Theses of Harms were the beginning of the confessional Lutheran movement.

In 1824, on the 700th anniversary of Christianity in Pomerania,¹⁰ a special plea was sent out by the government, urging all people in the land to accept the union. The push toward the union began in Stettin, the provincial capitol, and quickly moved throughout the province. In 1824, 576 pastors and 1141 congregations had joined the union, while 120 pastors and 195 congregations rejected it. However, by 1826, only 41 pastors and 64 congregations were still opposed to the union.¹¹ Soon the news reached Pomerania that Lutherans who refused to enter the union were being persecuted. This caused many to re-examine the basic doctrines of the Lutheran faith and their somewhat thoughtless and careless entry into the union. As a result there were many groups and pastors who wanted to remain separate from the union and establish a free church that was truly Lutheran.

The Influence of Grabau and von Rohr on the 1843 Immigration

While there were many who opposed the Prussian Union, the two individuals who especially inspired this immigration were Johannes Grabau (1804–79) and Captain Heinrich von Rohr (1797–1874). Grabau had been ordained into the Union Church of Prussia. In 1836, he began to openly criticize the union. He refused to continue using the formula for administering the Lord's Supper which compromised the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament.¹² After he was suspended from the state church, he organized a confessional congregation in Erfurt. As a result of this, he was thrown into prison in March of 1837.

With the help of von Rohr and another individual by the name of Friedrich Mueller, Grabau was able to escape from prison. Von Rohr was a captain in the Prussian army and, because of his association with

¹⁰ For a history of Christianity and Lutheranism in Pomerania, see Samuel M. Schmeling, "Old Lutherans in Pomerania-Prussia and their Influence on Confessional Lutheranism in America" (M.Div. thesis, Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, 2004).

¹¹ *By the Grace of God, A History of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church*, vol. 2 (Freistadt, Wisconsin, 1964), 10.

¹² See footnote 6.

the Old Lutherans, was deprived of a military commission.¹³ Constantly on guard, in order to evade the authorities, the three headed for Berlin where Grabau served small groups of Old Lutherans in the city. Then they continued north, providing pastoral services to the villages in Northern Brandenburg and Pomerania. As they proceeded they passed through Angermünde, Brüssow, Neuenhagen, Stettin, Hakenwalde, and Kammin.¹⁴ Wherever they travelled, Grabau busied himself by preaching and administering the Sacraments. He served the Old Lutherans in Brandenburg and Pomerania in much the same way that circuit riders did in the American West. Both Grabau and von Rohr were again in prison for a time, but meanwhile planning for an immigration to America was underway. They were part of the 1839 immigration.

The 1843 Old Lutheran Immigration

The two leaders of the 1843 immigration were Kindermann and Ehrenström. They were influenced by Grabau but did not leave Prussia in 1839. Gustav Adolph Kindermann (1805-1856) was born in Ziegenhagen near Reetz in Pomerania. He was the fourth son of a Lutheran pastor who, after the birth of Gustav Kindermann, moved to Kunnersdorf near Frankfurt an der Oder. Gustav Kindermann attended the gymnasium in Frankfurt an der Oder, and then the Universities of Halle and Berlin, taking his examinations for the ministry in Stettin. "When Kindermann took his second examination, he disputed concerning the doctrine of the Holy Eucharist with Bishop Ritschl, one of the examiners. Kindermann apparently upheld the Lutheran view which made him unpopular with his examining committee."¹⁵ He left the Prussian Union in 1837 and began to serve the Old Lutherans in the Kammin area including Tribsow. He came into contact with Grabau and von Rohr when they traveled to Pomerania after escaping from prison. Kindermann had theological views that were similar to those of Grabau. He is said to have preached, "*Wer nicht zur lutherische Kirche sich bekenne sondern zu einer andere, gehe deshalb verloren* [Anyone not acknowledging the Lutheran church but another church will be lost]."¹⁶

¹³ He was ordained in 1846 and his son, Philipp, was later the president of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS).

¹⁴ Reuben Clarence Lang, "History of the Buffalo Synod: Up to 1866" (Masters thesis, Wartburg Theological Seminary, 1949), 8.

¹⁵ Elmer H. Marth, "Gustav Adolph Kindermann," *Concordia Historical Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (October, 1965): 136.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 142.

Until 1843 he served a number of Old Lutheran groups in the Stettin area.¹⁷

Karl Wilhelm Ehrenström was born in 1803 in Stendal, Altmark, Prussia. He studied theology and philosophy at Halle. In 1833, he withdrew from the union church and in 1835 he was ordained a Lutheran pastor and installed in Meseritz, Posen.¹⁸ He served many parishes over a widespread area in Northeastern Germany. He was imprisoned numerous times, the last of which occurred at Danzig where he remained until he was released as a result of the Toleration Act of 1841. Ehrenström was a fervent and captivating preacher. Wherever he preached, he drew great crowds, feeding the flock with the gospel of Jesus Christ. A common theme in his preaching was *Uniert ist ruiniert*, that is, "Union is ruin."¹⁹

Kindermann, together with Ehrenström, organized the 1843 immigration. 1843 was a record year for Old Lutheran emigration from Prussia as sixteen hundred northern Germans came to America. When King Friedrich Wilhelm III died in 1840, those who opposed the Prussian Union were allowed to organize a free or independent church body. It was informally known as the Breslau Synod, but more formally as the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church. The Breslau Synod however, agreed to use the public schools which were really union schools.

To this the Pastors Ehrenström and Kindermann together with their congregations near Stettin, Pomerania could not subscribe. Since their protests to the "General Synod of the Lutheran Church in Prussia" went unheeded, they felt constrained, out of love and respect for God and His infallible Word, to leave their homeland and emigrate to North America,

¹⁷ By 1843 it was legal to establish an Old Lutheran congregation in Prussia. The main reason why he emigrated was that the Old Lutherans were not allowed to establish their own parochial schools which he and his congregation felt were a must. He established the David's Star congregation and school in Kirchhayn, Wisconsin. He suffered a stroke while the present David's Star church building was being constructed. Death came to him on Easter Sunday, March 27, 1856, and he was laid to rest in the Kirchhayn cemetery next to the church (Wilhelm Iwan, *Old Lutheran Emigration of the Mid-19th Century from Eastern Germany (mainly Pomerania and lower Silesia) to Australia, Canada, and the United States*, vol. 2, trans. August R. Suelflow [Mequon, Wisconsin: Freistadt Historical Society, 2002], 103).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 103, 104.

¹⁹ Eugene W. Camann, *Uprooted From Prussia, Transplanted in America* (Buffalo, New York: Gilcraft Printing Company, 2000), 26.

thousands of miles away. Thus, we find that it was the cause of truly Lutheran and Christian education and life for young and old alike which moved the founding fathers of David's Star Evangelical Lutheran Congregation to leave their homeland and to establish under the Holy Spirit's guidance our congregation at Kirchhayn.²⁰

The congregations of Ehrenström and Kindermann were now determined to emigrate. On Pentecost, in 1843, they were given official permission to leave the country. Parting was extremely sad for these farm people who loved their fatherland. In many cases families were divided and dear friends were left behind. Some of them gathered at Stettin and others at Hamburg. Fifteen ships transported them to America. They all arrived in New York by the end of 1843. The following are names of the ships that brought them to New York: Edward, Kammonsam Roy, Hualco,²¹ Rainbow, Reform, Howard, Proteus, Arab, Sylvester, Ajax, Bachus, Sophrina, Dorothea, Sir Issac Newton, and Stephani.²² Some of the immigrants remained in Buffalo, but most of them went on to Wisconsin, settling either in Kirchhayn, near Jackson, or Lebanon, near Watertown.

The Lebanon settlement included the Silesians who previously had a disagreement with Grabau over finances in Hamburg and thus had little desire to affiliate with Grabau. Their main congregation became a part of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) until the time of the Election Controversy. The people in the Lebanon settlement would eventually become the founding fathers of many of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) churches in the Ixonia area. In addition some of these Lutherans from Ixonia relocated to Norfolk, Nebraska, where they established the mother-church of the Nebraska District of the WELS.²³

A group of nearly 200 settlers, under the leadership of Kindermann, arrived in the area around Kirchhayn in the fall of 1843. Kindermann suggested the name Kirchhayn or church in the wildwood "because of the dense forest of white and red oak, beech and maple trees in the

²⁰ David's Star, *125th Anniversary*, 5, 7.

²¹ A replica of the Hualco is on display in the foyer of the Concordia Historical Institute in St. Louis, Missouri. It was donated by the Suelflow family whose forefathers were passengers on this vessel. The author's forefathers were also on this boat.

²² *Confessional Lutheran Migrations to America: 150th Anniversary* (Eastern District, LCMS, 1988), 34.

²³ M. Lehniger, *Continuing in His Word* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 1951), 111-115.

midst of which, by God's grace, the new settlement would grow."²⁴ They immediately began to clear the land of trees in order to farm. At the same time they did not neglect divine worship. They met in the home of one of the settlers until their first sanctuary was built in 1847 on the eighty acres of land the congregation owned. Here they conducted their worship services in accord with the Old Lutheran rites and during the week Mr. Stiemke, their called Christian Day School teacher, taught their children the truths of the Lutheran faith.²⁵ The present sanctuary was built in 1856.

The name of this congregation is significant. It is probably the only congregation named David's Star in the country. When the log church was dedicated on Palm Sunday 1848, the hymn "Hosanna Sing to David's Star" was sung. This hymn was found in the old Pomeranian Hymnal (No. 1073) and in the German Hymnal of the WELS (No. 705). Kindermann and the congregation chose the name David's Star on the basis of the second verse of the hymn.

Mein Herz empfängt dich herzlich gern
 Du Gottessohn, du Davidsstern!
 Du wahrer Weibessamen;
 Du Siloh, Heiland, Hirt and Heil!
 Mein Bruder, Gnadenthron und Heil!
 Komm in des Herren Namen.

My heart with gladness opens far
 For God's own Son, the David's Star,
 God's long-expected Promise.
 Thou Shiloh, Shepherd, Source of Grace,
 True God made Flesh to take my place,
 Who with Salvation cometh.²⁶

During the early years of the congregation's existence, a number of controversies over doctrine and practice surfaced. As a result, the congregation left the Buffalo Synod in 1862. After thirty years of existing without any synodical affiliation, the congregation became a

²⁴ David's Star Evangelical Lutheran Church, *150th Anniversary* (Jackson, Wisconsin, 1993), 9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ David's Star, *125th Anniversary*, 12.

member of the WELS in 1892. Today, the congregation has a membership of over eleven-hundred people and a thriving Lutheran elementary school.

A number of the people who were part of the 1843 immigration joined friends and relatives in the Freistadt settlement near Mequon, Wisconsin. This settlement had been established in 1839. Many of the 1839 immigrants remained in Buffalo, New York under the care of Grabau, but around forty families from Pomerania, together with von Rohr, travelled to Wisconsin and founded the Freistadt settlement.

The name that was given to this religious settlement was Freistadt (Freystatt), which means free city. This name was to be a constant reminder to the settlers and their children that God had led them out of spiritual persecution and slavery in Prussia to a land of freedom. Here they could worship the Lord with a true confession of pure doctrine and a Christ-like-life.²⁷ This congregation, Trinity of Freistadt, is the oldest German Lutheran congregation in Wisconsin.

The Freistadt congregation, together with most of the other Pomeranian immigrants, became part of Buffalo Synod in 1845 under the leadership of Grabau. Later because of disagreements over the doctrine of church and ministry they joined the LCMS.²⁸

The Influence of the Pomeranian Old Lutheran Immigrations on American Lutheranism

In the Lutheran Reformation, Pomerania became a staunchly Lutheran land and steadfastly held the Lutheran faith. When Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia demanded a union between the Lutherans and Reformed in his lands in 1817, many in Pomerania arose to defend true Lutheranism. Some worked to organize a free Lutheran Church in Germany which was accomplished in 1845. Others emigrated to America, Australia, South America, and South Africa where they became the core of confessional Lutheranism in these areas.

The influence of these Pomeranian Lutherans was first felt primarily in the Buffalo Synod. In 1845, this church body was organized in Milwaukee as a predominantly Prussian and Pomeranian church body. Because of internal conflict resulting from an improper view of church and ministry and other hierarchical teachings, this church body never flourished. It faced a number of splits which were detrimental to it, but

²⁷ L.F.E. Krause, *The Chronicle*, trans. Roy A. Suelflow (Freistadt, Wisconsin: Trinity Lutheran Church), 24.

²⁸ See Schmeling, "Old Lutherans."

in the long run, became a benefit to the LCMS, the WELS, and our synod. The Buffalo Synod continued as a small organization until 1930 when it united with the Ohio Synod and the Iowa Synod forming the American Lutheran Church (ALC).

The second church body to experience the influence of these Pomeranian Lutherans was the LCMS. A large number of Buffalo Synod pastors and congregations joined the LCMS because of Grabau's teachings concerning church and ministry. The Wisconsin districts of Missouri which contained many Pomeranians are some of the largest in the synod. In the person of Franz Pieper, the Missourian dogmatician, we see the beneficial effect that the Old Lutheran Pomeranian immigrations had on the LCMS.

The WELS also has enjoyed the benefits of the Pomeranian immigration. Many of the WELS congregations are made up of Pomeranian Lutherans. In 1877, when a splinter group of the Buffalo Synod, led by Philipp von Rohr, dissolved, his congregation in Winona and a number of others joined the WELS. Philipp would later become the president of WELS. In the person of August Pieper, who taught at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, we see the beneficial effect that the Old Lutheran immigrations had on the WELS.

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) was not left untouched by the Pomeranian immigration. Even though the ELS was founded as a predominantly Norwegian church body, over the years many German and Pomeranian Lutherans have become a part of the organization. This is mainly the result of confessional Lutherans leaving the LCMS because of doctrinal deviation to find a safe-haven in the ELS. In the persons of August and Franz Pieper, we see the beneficial effect that the Old Lutheran immigrations had on the ELS. In our synod, we appreciate both the doctrinal emphasis of Franz Pieper and the exegetical emphasis of August Pieper.

These Old Lutherans from Pomerania desired to retain the doctrinal heritage of the Reformation and the seventeenth-century dogmaticians. They reintroduced confessional Lutheranism in America by their adherence to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the entire Book of Concord. They have made their mark in Synodical Conference Lutheranism and continue to do so today in the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC). ^{LSQ}

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Sermon on Genesis 29:13–30

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“Oh Lord Jesus, You are seated on high but You look upon that which is lowly [Ps. 113:5–6]. What the world casts off, You exalt. What the world thinks undesirable, You esteem. What the world counts trivial, You bring into great honor.... Take me into Your family as You took in forsaken Leah. Regard me with Your eyes of mercy as You regarded Leah. Listen to me with open ears as You listened to Leah. Do me good as You did Leah good, and I will praise Your grace as Leah praised it, and thank You with joy as Leah thanked You. Help, O Lord Jesus, that the glory of Your name may be magnified among us wretched souls who are so undesirable to the world. Amen.” (Valerius Herberger, *The Great Works of God*, Vol. III, pp. 197–198)

Text: *As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he ran to meet him and embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban all these things, and Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh!" And he stayed with him a month. Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the*

love he had for her. Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed." So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went in to her. (Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant.) And in the morning, behold, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?" Laban said, "It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years." Jacob did so, and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. (Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant.) So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years. (Genesis 29:13-30; ESV)

EVERYBODY LOVES A GOOD ENDING. Most movies end with a resolution of conflict or tension. The bad guys normally lose. The rocky romance leads to mutual understanding and dedication. But this is not always such a true reflection of what we experience in our relationships. The bad guys don't always lose. Disagreements are not always repaired. The kindness we try to show is not always returned. Others do not put the best construction on what we say and do. We feel the need to constantly defend ourselves and our motivations. Of all the things that can be said about our life, I don't think many of us would describe it as a fairy tale.

Fairy tales are make-believe. They defy logic and typical human experience. They have happy endings. Our lives in this world are not fairy tales, but that doesn't mean they are without hope and happiness. Because once upon a time, or rather, "when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law" (Galatians 4:4). Jesus was delivered in the stable at Bethlehem to live for you. He was delivered up to be crucified and die for you. By the grace of God, heaven is waiting for you when your short time here has ended.

Jesus Delivers the "Happily Ever After."

I. Once upon a time, a man named Jacob, down on his luck, came to a well. He had traveled to the land of his grandfather Abraham, looking for his relatives. It just so happened that a beautiful woman came that day to the well to water her sheep. Her name was Rachel. When Jacob learned that she was one of his relatives, he cried for joy and kissed her. She ran to tell her father Laban. He hurried to meet Jacob and

embraced him like a son. They brought him to their house, where they feasted together.

How happy Jacob was to be there! He gladly worked for his uncle and dined at his table. After a month passed, Laban asked him what his wages should be. Jacob desired nothing more than the beautiful woman he first met at the well. He said to Laban, “I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.” His uncle agreed. Seven years is a long time, but those years “seemed to [Jacob] but a few days because of the love he had for her.” Jacob and Rachel—soon to be husband and wife!

Doesn't it sound like a fairy tale? Could there be a stronger love than Jacob's, who was willing to wait seven years for a bride? But this is one story that did not end “happily ever after.” Laban deceitfully gave his older daughter Leah to be Jacob's wife, and he did not realize it until after the marriage was consummated. It is assumed that Leah was veiled, so that Jacob did not know her identity until the morning. Then Laban, that dear, welcoming uncle of Jacob's, extracted another seven years of hard labor from him for the right to marry Rachel too. At least Jacob was united with his true love at last!

But not all was rosy in the Jacob ben-Isaac household. Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, much more. But it was Leah who bore him children. Rachel took her infertility issues out on Jacob, “Give me children, or I shall die!” she said. Rachel envied Leah for her children. Leah envied Rachel for her favored status. Both women offered their servants to Jacob to increase their child-bearing counts. Laban continued to take advantage of Jacob, stealing from him his fair wages. Jacob decided to make a run for it with his wives, children, and possessions. Laban chased after Jacob, potentially to do him harm.

II. What a far cry this was from the fairy tale beginning. We wish we could say we have no idea how that family could experience such troubles. But there is something familiar about the whole thing that applies to all of us, whether married or not. We know what it's like when good friends become enemies. We have seen how a charmed beginning can turn into a terrible disaster. We recognize how our rose-colored glasses have at times clouded our vision, both in the ways we look at others and the ways we measure ourselves.

Sometimes we fail to see the bad qualities in others which leads us to suffer by their hands. But more often we are guilty of holding our neighbors to higher standards than we apply to ourselves. We excuse our mistakes, but we will never forget another's sins against us. Or we look

out for ourselves, not caring who is hurt or offended along the way. And sometimes we are so consumed by having to be right, that we forget to be patient and kind, especially with brothers and sisters in Christ. Because we must win and be vindicated and always be on top, we fail to love as God commands.

Our self-centeredness and lack of love pollute our relationships. In marriage, husbands torment their wives whenever they compare their appearance to other women, just as Jacob favored the attractive Rachel. Wives torment their husbands whenever their expectations and desires exceed what their husbands can supply, just as Rachel criticized Jacob. We jealously look upon the success of others and work to knock people down a notch, like those contentious sisters, Rachel and Leah. And we manipulate people to elevate our standing and improve our lot in life, like Laban manipulated Jacob.

Marriage, family life, and our interactions with those around us are often no fairy tale at all. They can resemble nightmares and cause us great pain and strife. But that doesn't make a happy ending impossible, nor does it mean that we can never be happy now. The crucial point is that we look for happiness in the right place. Is happiness in your marriage contingent on retaining that wedding day glow, or does it hinge on Christ who forgives and strengthens you? Should your friendships be focused on what others can give to you, or on the love you can show to others? Can you bring peace to your life through your own efforts and generosity, or can that peace only come from Jesus? These are simple questions that seem to have obvious answers, but we will always be tempted to value the fine wine instead of the One who made it out of water (John 2:1–11), to get distracted by the gifts instead of seeing the Giver.

III. Jesus comes to us with no sinful motivations. He looks with love upon us, even though our inward appearance is ugly and unappealing. He sees through the outward beauty of every "Rachel"—all the self-righteous who will not admit their sin. And He loves each "Leah"—those whose sin is exposed, who recognize that they have not lived perfectly and loved rightly. God does not see as the world sees or judge as the world judges.

The LORD had mercy on Leah and gave her children though she was despised, and He produces great fruit through us though we are despised by the world. Isn't it interesting that God would determine that the Messiah would come through Leah, the one who was not betrothed, the one who was sold by her father, the one who was despised

by Jacob? Jesus was not born from the beautiful Rachel, but from Leah. He descended from Judah, the son of Jacob and Leah.

You may currently be one who is despised, despised by your neighbors, despised by family members, perhaps even despised by your own spouse. You may be asked to bear a cross in your marriage, family, or community that seems too heavy to carry. But the load lightens when you are filled with and embraced by the love of Christ. No one was despised like He was. No one carried a cross as heavy as His. No one's love was thrown back at him like His was. He loved sinners who hated Him in return. But that did not affect His love. That did not divert Him from His plan. That did not stop Him from the torment He willingly endured for each and every sin.

Jesus stayed on the cross for you. He forgives you for being the agent that brought pain and sadness to another person. He forgives you for putting your own desires before the needs of others. He forgives you for giving up too quickly on the people He called you to love and to serve.

Jacob's family is a picture of the unhappiness and trouble that we experience in our families and relationships, but Jacob is also a picture of God's grace. Jacob deceived his father to obtain his blessing, he married two sisters, and he slept with their servants as well. But God remained faithful to him. He gave him faith in His promises, and Jacob believed them as his father Isaac had, as his grandfather Abraham had. He believed that God would send a Savior for sinners, sinners like him.

Our homes are not perfectly happy, and none of us is free from blame. But Jesus does not despise us. He has committed Himself to us, even dying in our place. If you are wrongfully accused and poorly treated by those who should love you, do not despair. Jesus loves you with a perfect love, a love that led Him to die so that you would live. He came down from heaven to become one with the human family, and to take all baptized believers—all who have been united in His one body—to the dwelling places of heaven. Uninterrupted joy and unbridled happiness may be fleeting or altogether absent in this life. But that eternal marriage feast is ready and waiting for you who trust in Jesus for your salvation. There, with your Bridegroom and King, you will live "happily ever after."

The great hymnwriter Philipp Nicolai wrote about this blissful union and everlasting joy:

Zion hears the watchword sounding,
With bridal joy her heart is bounding,
She wakes, and breaks the spell of sleep.
For her Lord comes forth in splendor,
All rich in grace, truth's strong Defender!
Her Star grows bright mid darkness deep.
Now come, O precious Crown,
Lord Jesus, God's own Son.
Hail, Hosanna!
We enter all,
The marriage hall,
To eat the Supper at Your call.
(ELH #544, v. 2)

LSQ

Notes

LSQ Vol. 54, No. 1 (March 2014)

2013 Meeting of the Theological Commission of the CELC

The Theological Commission of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) met on May 28–30, 2013, in Mequon, Wisconsin. The members of the Theological Commission of the CELC are Prof. John Brenner, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS); the Rev. Andreas Drechsler, Evangelical Lutheran Free Church (ELFK), Germany; the Rev. Davison Mutentami, Lutheran Church of Central Africa—Zambia (LCCA-Z); the Rev. Takeshi Nadaira, Lutheran Evangelical Christian Church (LECC), Japan; Prof. Gaylin Schmeling, Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS); and the Rev. Daniel Koelpin (WELS), CELC president, *ex officio*.

The Theological Commission is writing a document summarizing the five essays on the doctrine of the church delivered at the 2011 CELC convention in New Ulm, Minnesota. In addition, the commission completed its review of a statement entitled “Make Known God’s Manifold Wisdom,” focusing on outreach, for publication and presentation to the 2014 CELC convention. This topic will be Article VI of *The Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession for the Twenty-First Century*. Article I is a study of the doctrine of Holy Scripture, Article II of the doctrine of justification, Article III of the work of the Holy Spirit, Article IV of the person and work of Christ, and Article V of the doctrine of eschatology. These statements may be found in PDF form on the CELC website under the heading “Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession” <www.celc.info>.

The triennial convention of the CELC will be held in Lima, Peru, May 30–June 2, 2014. The officers of the CELC are: president, the Rev. Daniel Koelpin; vice-president, Prof. Michael K. Smith; secretary, Prof. Thomas Nass; planning committee, the Rev. Michael Duncan and the Rev. Steven Petersen.

The CELC is the third largest worldwide Lutheran fellowship, following the larger Lutheran World Federation and the International Lutheran Council. It was organized in 1993 at Oberwesel, Germany, and represents 24 church bodies with approximately 450,000 members. The conference accepts the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments (the verbally inspired and inerrant Word of God) as the sole authority for doctrine, faith, and life. The conference also accepts the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as contained in the Book of Concord of 1580, not *in so far as* but *because* they are a correct exposition of the pure doctrine of the Word of God. The CELC continues

to strengthen each of its member churches through mutual encouragement and consultation. We praise and thank our Triune God for having permitted us to establish this confessional organization on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ and His Word.

– Gaylin R. Schmeling

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20th Anniversary of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference

The constituting convention of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) took place April 27–29, 1993, at Oberwesel, Germany, a beautiful site overlooking the Rhine River. This was my second trip down the Rhine River. On the first trip, my thoughts centered on Heine's *Die Lorelei*, the castle ruins, the vineyards, and the beauty of the Rhine Valley. During the 1993 trip, my thoughts turned to things far more important. We were traveling to Oberwesel to establish an



(left to right) the Rev. Takeshi Nadaira, Prof. Gaylin Schmeling, the Rev. Daniel Koelpin, Prof. John Brenner, the Rev. Andreas Drechsler, the Rev. Davison Mutentami

international organization which would unite confessional and orthodox Lutherans from around the world.

We in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) were only a small church body by human standards, a remnant of Norwegian mergers in 1917. We experienced the devastation of the demise of the Synodical Conference and its aftermath in the 1950s and 1960s. We were gathering remnants of confessional congregations in various places in the Midwest and elsewhere in the States, but what could we do to reach out to confessional groups in other lands? There were many lonely Lutherans spread across the globe. Yet there were men of vision in our midst, such as Rev. Edgar Hoenecke, who called for a worldwide Lutheran fellowship already in the late 1960s.

Many people advocated such an international organization over the years and did much to bring it to fruition. However, three names stand out as individuals who worked to promote such an organization and make it a reality: Pres. Gerhard Wilde of the Evangelisch-Lutherische Freikirche (ELFK), Pres. George Orvick of the ELS, and Prof. Wilbert Gawrisch of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). Pres. Wilde emphasized again and again the need for such a fellowship for lonely Lutherans throughout the world. He had experienced that loneliness in his own country during Soviet times and later when his church body struggled to maintain its confessional stand. Pres. Orvick expended considerable effort throughout his presidency

to make contact with confessional Lutherans in the United States and around the globe who were in need of a new confessional home. Prof. Gawrisch worked tirelessly for this organization. He put in more time and effort than anyone else to organize, promote, and establish such an international synodical conference.

We experienced some amazingly heady days in the spring of 1993. We in the ELS were mainly a rural Midwestern synod and now, on the twenty-seventh of April in Germany, the cradle of Lutheranism, we were establishing an organization including church bodies from Europe, North America, Asia, Africa, and Australia. The CELC has continued to portray its international outlook with conventions in Puerto Rico, Sweden, Japan, and Ukraine. This coming spring the triennial convention of the CELC will take place in Lima, Peru (May 30–June 2, 2014), hosted by a daughter church of the ELS, the Peruvian Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church. The theme of this convention will be “We Are God’s Workmanship – Created in Christ Jesus for Good Works: A Study of the Doctrine of Sanctification.”

The CELC was established as the spiritual heir of the Synodical Conference and it is definitely fulfilling its purpose. The purpose of the CELC has been to preserve the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions in our midst and to proclaim the message of salvation in Christ throughout the world. The CELC has done this through mutual encouragement

and strengthening of the member churches. Hearing brothers from across the seas confess the same doctrine and proclaim the same Gospel that we do in southern Minnesota is a wonderful encouragement and blessing. Having had the privilege of being able to attend every convention of the CELC since its establishment, I have seen first-hand the mutual consolation of brethren and strengthening that is the result of this gathering of orthodox and confessional Lutherans. Because of this international organization, I can count among my personal friends men and women from nearly every continent.

The CELC stands ready to give answer to the confident hope of salvation in Christ that is within us. It is a refuge for those seeking confessional homes and a beacon shining the light of the Gospel in a sin-darkened world. Here the central truth of the Reformation, justification by faith alone, continues to be proclaimed. We are declared righteous by nothing

we do or accomplish, but alone on the basis of Christ's redemptive work which is counted as ours through faith in the Savior. He accomplished salvation for all on the cross and announced it to all by His resurrection declaring the whole world righteous in Christ. This treasure is brought to us personally through the means of grace and is received by faith alone in the Savior which is worked through those very means of grace.

We are filled with gratitude and thankfulness to the Lord for all the blessings He has bestowed on us through the CELC. Here He has preserved His Word in its truth and purity and His sacraments rightly administered, providing a refuge for lonely Lutherans in an ever more secularized world. On this, the twentieth anniversary of the CELC, we pray that as He has been our refuge and strength in the past, He would continue to be with us in the future through Word and Sacrament.

— Gaylin R. Schmeling



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