

LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY



VOLUME 56 • NUMBER 1
MARCH 2016

**2015 Bjarne Wollan Teigen Reformation
Lectures: Lutheranism and the Arts**

Martin Luther and the Visual Arts

The Reformation and History: Luther and Clio

Captive to the Text: Luther's View
of Literature and Meaning

Articles and Sermon
Presidential Quotes From the Past

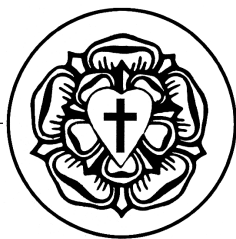
Reviewing the Practice of Closed Communion

The Liturgical Sequences: New
Translations and Settings

Sermon on Luke 5:1–10: Seminary Opening 2015

Book Review

LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY



VOLUME 56 • NUMBER 1
MARCH 2016

The journal of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary

LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF..... Gaylin R. Schmeling
BOOK REVIEW EDITOR..... Michael K. Smith
LAYOUT EDITOR..... Daniel J. Hartwig
PRINTER..... Books of the Way of the Lord

The *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* (ISSN: 0360-9685) is edited by the faculty of
Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary
6 Browns Court
Mankato, Minnesota 56001

The *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* is a continuation of the *Clergy Bulletin* (1941–1960). The purpose of the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, as was the purpose of the *Clergy Bulletin*, is to provide a testimony of the theological position of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and also to promote the academic growth of her clergy roster by providing scholarly articles, rooted in the inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures and the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

The *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* is published in March and December with a combined June and September issue. Subscription rates are \$25.00 U.S. per year for domestic subscriptions and \$35.00 U.S. per year for international subscriptions.

All subscriptions and editorial correspondence should be sent to the following address:

Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary
Attn: *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*
6 Browns Ct
Mankato MN 56001

Back issues of the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* from the past two years are available at a cost of \$10.00 per issue. Back issues of the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* and *Clergy Bulletin* prior to the past two years are available at <www.blts.edu/lsq>.

The *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* is abstracted in *Religious and Theological Abstracts*, PO Box 215, Myerstown, PA 17067 (E-mail: <rtabst@leba.net>; Website: <www.rtabst.org/abstracts>).

Copyright ©2016 by Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. Requests for permission to reproduce more than brief excerpts are to be directed to the Editor-in-Chief.



Contents

LSQ Vol. 56, No. 1 (March 2016)

2015 BJARNE WOLLAN TEIGEN REFORMATION LECTURES: LUTHERANISM AND THE ARTS

- Martin Luther and the Visual Arts 9
William S. Bukowski
- The Reformation and History: Luther and Clío 29
Robert Rosin
- Captive to the Text: Luther's View of Literature and Meaning 61
Brian Dose

ARTICLES AND SERMON

- Presidential Quotes From the Past 89
- Reviewing the Practice of Closed Communion..... 91
John A. Moldstad
- The Liturgical Sequences: New Translations and Settings..... 97
Daniel J. Hartwig
- Sermon on Luke 5:1–10: Seminary Opening 2015 115
Thomas F. Kuster

BOOK REVIEW

- Bible Study Review: The Gospel to Share 119
Michael K. Smith

Foreword

LSQ Vol. 56, No. 1 (March 2016)

IN THIS ISSUE OF THE *QUARTERLY* WE ARE PLEASED to share with our readers the annual Bjarne Wollan Teigen Reformation Lectures, delivered October 29–30, 2015, in Mankato, Minnesota. These lectures are sponsored jointly by Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. This was the forty-eighth 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 three presenters. The first lecture was given by Prof. William Bukowski of Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, Minnesota. Prof. Bukowski teaches painting, drawing, and art history and serves as exhibition coordinator of Bethany's Fine Arts gallery. He is also a founding member of the Christ in Media Institute. He received his M.A. and M.F.A. at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and also studied fresco at the Academy Caerite in Ceri, Italy. Prof. Bukowski painted the Life of Christ altarpiece in Trinity Chapel at Bethany in 1996, and also the Creation Fresco in Meyer Hall of Science and Mathematics in 2002. He has also painted numerous works of art for Lutheran sanctuaries. His paintings are in many public and private collections throughout the Midwest including Minneapolis Children's Hospital, the Madison Art Center, Fairview Hospitals, and Pathstone Living in Mankato. He has participated in more than 180 art

exhibitions across the country. Prof. Bukowski has traveled extensively throughout Europe, the Holy Land, and Egypt. He has led instructional group travel to Italy and New York City for Bethany students over 35 times. Bill and his wife Sherri have been married for 39 years. They have three children, all Bethany graduates, and two grandchildren.

The second presenter was Dr. Robert Rosin. Dr. Rosin is a professor of historical theology and the Eugene E. and Nell S. Fincke Graduate Professor of Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri. A faculty member since 1981, he served as editor of Concordia Seminary Publications (1995–2005) and chair of the department of historical theology (1995–2004). He received his Doctor of Philosophy and Master of Arts from Stanford University (1986, 1977); M. Div. from Concordia Seminary (1976); and Bachelor of Arts from Concordia University Chicago, River Forest, Illinois (1972). Prof. Rosin's research interest areas include the connection of Renaissance humanism and the Reformation, the intersection of Christianity and culture, and theological educational curriculum in mission contexts. He is the author of *Reformers, The Preacher, and Skepticism: Luther, Brenz, Melancthon, and Ecclesiastes*; the editor and translator of Luther's comments on each of the biblical books for the *Concordia Reference Bible*; and the editor and author of *A Cup of Cold Water: A Look at Biblical Charity*. He has also contributed essays and translations for numerous scholarly books. In addition, he has written articles and book reviews in many distinguished and popular journals. From 1997 to 2013, Prof. Rosin served as the director of the seminary's Center for Reformation Research. He has been an officer and board member of the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference, the Society for Reformation Research, and the American Friends of the Herzog August Bibliothek. Beginning in 1983, he has been a guest instructor or lecturer in Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Korea, Japan, China, Brazil, Ethiopia, Croatia, Germany, Sweden, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, England, Russia, and Kyrgyzstan. Prof. Rosin's wife, Laine, is a senior copy editor at Concordia Publishing House.

The third lecture was given by Prof. Brian Dose of Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota. Prof. Dose has served as an English professor for 25 years. He began teaching at Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin, in 1990 after serving as a pastor in Corpus Christi, Texas, and Detroit, Michigan. In 1995 he moved with the pastor-training college to Martin Luther College in New Ulm. In addition to his pastoral training at Northwestern and Wisconsin Lutheran

Seminary, Dose has pursued graduate studies at the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee (M.A. in English) and a number of other institutions, including Wroxton College in Oxfordshire, England. He presently teaches general education English courses in writing and literature, and classes in older British literature courses—Chaucer through Wordsworth—as well as Modern World Literature. Prof. Dose grew up in Wabasha, Minnesota. He and his wife, Donna, have been blessed with seven children, two who are still in high school. As both a professor and Christian father, he believes he has two of the greatest calls possible. He serves by combining a love for words with a devotion to the Word, and he has had the joy of reading to his children nearly every night literature both inspiring and inspired.

The theme of the lectures was “Lutheranism and the Arts.” The first lecture, given by Prof. Bukowski, was entitled “Lutheranism and the Visual Arts.” The second lecture, presented by Dr. Rosin, was “Lutheranism and History.” The third lecture, given by Prof. Dose, was “Lutheranism and Literature.”

The Reformation Lectures were a study of Lutheranism’s relationship to the arts. The lectures explained the influence of Lutheranism on the visual arts, history, and literature. Lutheranism was open to the visual arts, beautifying our worship in contradistinction to the white-washed churches of the Reformed, it has given direction to the study of history as seen in the example of the *Magdeburg Centuries*, and it has affected our literature. Lutheranism has touched every aspect of our Christian vocation.

In this issue of the *Quarterly* we are beginning a series of “Presidential Quotes From the Past.” The series will include a number of relevant, Christ-centered quotes from the former presidents of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod as we look forward to the one hundredth anniversary of the synod in 1918.

The president of our synod, the Rev. John A. Moldstad, distributed to our pastors a fine summary of the practice of closed communion in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. The biblical doctrine of closed communion is the historic teaching of the orthodox Lutheran Church. This summary is included in this issue of the *Quarterly*.

The Rev. Gregory Sahlstrom was a missionary among Mormons in the Salt Lake City, Utah area. He has done considerable research on Mormonism. He has written a manual for evangelizing Mormon missionaries and is writing a book on Mormonism. In his article, “The

Absent God of Mormonism,” he points out the false teaching of the Mormons concerning the Deity. “Not only does the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints define God as someone who was once absent before becoming God and as a God who is not with us in this world or the next; the absent God of Mormonism isn’t God in any real sense at all and so is absent in the sense of simply not existing.”

In his article, “The Liturgical Sequences: New Translations and Settings,” the Rev. Daniel Hartwig addresses the use of liturgical sequences and offers a few new hymnic translations and settings for their congregational use. This material will be beneficial for use in our congregations. The Rev. Hartwig is pastor of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Okauchee, Wisconsin.

Also included in this *Quarterly* is a sermon on Luke 5:1–10 prepared for the opening service of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary in 2015 by Dr. Thomas Kuster and a book review by Dr. Michael Smith.

– GRS

Martin Luther and the Visual Arts

William S. Bukowski
Professor, Bethany Lutheran College
Mankato, Minnesota

LSQ Vol. 56, No. 1 (March 2016)

“IF IT IS NOT A SIN BUT GOOD TO HAVE THE IMAGE of Christ in my heart, why should it be a sin to have it in my eyes?”—Martin Luther¹

Introduction

In order to understand Lutheranism and the Visual Arts, one has to start with Martin Luther and his relationship to liturgical art. Luther as reformer and theologian did not write a great deal about the visual arts. Of his many volumes of writings, none were dedicated to visual art. The subject of art comes up with iconoclasm and teaching with visual images. Leslie P. Spelman wrote:

As a direct result of the Lutheran Reformation there developed but few pictorial art forms. Luther was not antagonistic to pictorial art. He shocked his sterner contemporaries by having a picture of the Madonna in his room. He denounced the iconoclastic actions of some of his followers. Yet, the early Lutheran Church by creed or liturgy did not sponsor any new pictorial art forms within the church.²

¹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Volume 40, Church and Ministry*, ed. Conrad Bergendoff (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958).

² Leslie P. Spelman, “Luther and the Arts,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 10, no. 2 (December 1951): 166–175.

Why were the visual arts left behind? Luther rarely recorded his response to works of art. In his many volumes of writings, he does contradict himself on the matter of the importance of images and his own preferences. Liturgical art at this time played an integral part in the church service. Using images as well as music, the word, incense and movement, the congregation was given a spiritual context for their worship. They could identify the who and why and it completed the use of their senses. With Luther's preference for the word, images have been devalued and in many Protestant churches are completely gone. He lived at the time of the Renaissance, when churches were filled with sculpture, paintings, frescoes, and mosaics. Luther was content to allow his good friend Lucas Cranach to manage his image needs. Some historians have even proposed a decline in German art in general because of the restrictions on images after the Reformation. When the generation of Northern Renaissance artists died there was no one to take their places. Had Luther written more about the visual arts or liturgical art as he did about music, there may have been a real "Lutheran" Renaissance. Insert the word "painting" for music in this Luther quote:

Next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world. It controls our hearts, minds and spirits. A person who does not regard music as a marvelous creation of God does not deserve to be called a human being; he should be permitted to hear nothing but the braying of asses and the grunting of hogs!³

There were several key painters at the time of Luther who did contribute to a kind of "Lutheranism in the Arts." Two of the most important were Albrecht Durer and Lucas Cranach the Elder. Both of these artists were affected by Luther's writings and changed some of their paintings as a result. There are also several key paintings that reflect the new Lutheran voice. But art has never been seen as an essential ingredient for Lutherans and did not continue to develop. One can't point to a long-term Lutheran tradition in the visual arts or a specific Lutheran style of art beyond that generation.

Nearly twenty years after the initial destruction of images in Wittenberg, the first Lutheran altarpiece was installed in Schneeberg, Germany and images were allowed once again. Within two generations the Age of Reason in Europe essentially ended the relevance of

³ Martin Luther, "Preface to Georg Rhau's *Symphoniae iucundae*," *Luther's Works* 53 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 323.

Christian art to the European culture at large. Can Lutherans revisit the use of the visual arts in today's liturgical settings? Is it possible to change the culture of Confessional Lutheranism to be enriched by a new appreciation of visual traditions and to use visuals to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Forming Luther's Vision for the Visual Arts

One has to instruct ordinary people simply and childishly, as much as one can. Otherwise, one of two things happen: They will neither learn nor understand, or else they will want to be clever, and use their reason to enter into high thoughts, so they move away from belief.⁴

What experiences may have helped to form Luther's ideas on liturgical art? As a monk, he recalled seeing a crucifix in his cloister: "I was frightened by it, and lowered my eyes and would rather have seen the Devil."⁵ This quote shows someone who is hyper-sensitive to the image of Christ on the cross.

Luther accompanied one of his colleagues on a walk from Nuremberg, Germany to Rome, Italy in 1510 and back in 1511. The reason for the journey was to settle a dispute in the Augustinian order. Luther walked through Milan, Bologna, and Florence to reach Rome. At this time in Milan, Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) had recently finished one of the most famous images in Europe at that time, *The Last Supper* (1489). Giorgio Vasari wrote about how Leonardo's painting was highly regarded early on: "This work, remaining thus all but finished, has ever been held by the Milanese in the greatest veneration, and also by strangers as well."⁶ Luther was unable to celebrate Mass in Milan because they used the Ambrosian liturgy. He was surprised to learn that they did not consider themselves subject to the pope.

In Florence, Michelangelo had recently installed a sculpture that was considered a masterpiece of the new Christian hero – the *David*. Vasari writes, "And, of a truth, whoever has seen this work need not

⁴ Martin Luther, *Third Easter Sermon*, vol. 37, 64, lines 32–35; referenced in Bonnie Noble, *Lucas Cranach the Elder: Art and Devotion of the German Reformation* (New York: University Press of America, 2009).

⁵ Martin Luther, *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe XXXVII* (Weimar, 1883), 310; referenced in Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 179.

⁶ Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Most Eminent Italian Architects, Painters and Sculptors*, 1550, tr. Gaston De Vere (London: 1912), 89–92, 95–101, 104–105.

trouble to see any other work executed in sculpture, either in our own or in other times, by no matter what craftsman.”⁷ In Rome, they were four years into the rebuilding of St. Peter’s. Michelangelo was working on a ceiling painting in the Sistine Chapel. Raphael was working on the decoration for the apartments of Pope Julius II. If one were not comfortable with art that overwhelms the individual, one would not have been comfortable with these great works. This artwork that Luther may have seen has been considered the most important in the history of the Renaissance and among the finest ever produced in European art. Luther did write about his impressions of Italian art:

The Italian painters are so able and so full of genius that they can, in a masterly way, follow and exactly imitate nature in all their paintings; not only do they get the proper color and form in all the members, but they even make them appear as if they lived and moved. Flanders follows Italy and imitates her in some measure, for the men of the Low Countries, especially Flemish, are cunning and artful.⁸

This reveals a man who was looking with a discerning eye at the artwork around him and appreciating the Italian skill at painting. The opening statement about instructing ordinary people simply and childishly may have been a reaction to the High Renaissance masters who did want to be clever, and who did use their reason to enter into high thoughts. Luther appreciated their skill but wasn’t interested in this kind of artwork for the sacred space. Luther also wrote a brief excerpt on his visit in Florence:

In Italy the hospitals are handsomely built, and admirably provided with excellent food and drink, careful attendants, and learned physicians. The beds and bedding are clean, and the walls are covered with paintings. ... Equally excellent are the foundling asylums of Florence, where the children are fed and taught, suitably clothed in a uniform, and altogether admirably cared for.⁹

⁷ Ibid, 104–105.

⁸ Preserved Smith, *Life and Letters of Martin Luther* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), 349.

⁹ Martin Luther’s *Tabletalk* Volume 65; referenced in Will Durant, *The Renaissance: A History of Civilization in Italy from 1304–1576 A.D.* (Simon and Schuster, 1953), 533.

The children's hospital Luther was referring to was designed by Filippo Brunelleschi and decorated with stucco sculptures and paintings. When Luther first saw of the city of Rome in the distance, he fell to the ground and shouted out, "Hail, holy Rome! Holy indeed, drenched with the blood of the holy martyrs." 1475 and 1500 were established as jubilee years for a pilgrimage to Rome, so one could still find various printed guide books to Christian Rome, so-called *Indulgentiae ecclesiarum urbis Romae*, which dealt with Rome's seven pilgrimage churches and where to see certain relics. It is probable that Luther had such a guidebook to help him tour Rome. Luther stayed at the monastery of Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome. He would not have received any special treatment from the clergy as a foreigner. He celebrated mass in Rome daily; at the altar of St. Sebastian, he once even said several in a single hour.

When I made my pilgrimage to Rome, I was such a fanatical saint that I dashed through all of the churches and crypts, believing all the stinking forgeries of those places. I ran though about a dozen Masses and in Rome and was almost prostrated by the thought that my mother and father were still alive, because I should gladly have redeemed them from purgatory with my Masses and other excellent works and prayers. ... But it was too crowded, and I could not get in, so I ate a smoked herring instead.¹⁰

The churches he planned on seeing included the patriarchal basilicas: Basilica of St. Peters, Basilica of St. John Lateran, Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, and Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore. They also include two minor basilicas and a shrine: Basilica of St. Lawrence Outside the Walls, Basilica of the Holy Cross of Jerusalem, and St. Sebastian Outside the Walls. The churches were typically designed and built in an early Christian basilica style of architecture, filled with mosaics, paintings and sculpture. Since Luther's time they have all been redecorated and remodeled. Near St. John Lateran are the sacred steps from the palace of Pontius Pilate and Luther did climb on his knees in the same way that is still typical of pilgrims to Rome today. He wanted to free his grandfather from purgatory.

Rome is a harlot. I would not take a thousand gulden not to have seen it, for I never would have believed the true state of

¹⁰ Walther von Loewenich, *Martin Luther, The Man and His Work* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982), 69.

affairs from what other people told me, had I not seen it myself. The Italians mocked us for being pious monks, for they hold Christians fools. They say six or seven masses in the time it takes me to say one, for they take money for it and I do not. The only crime in Italy is poverty. They still punish homicide and theft a little, for they have to, but no other sin is too gross for them.¹¹

Luther's trip to Italy showed him the skill and grandeur of the Italian High Renaissance, and helped him to develop his opinion on the use of liturgical art. He also witnessed the corruption within the church of Rome. His recollections of Italy came many years later after the Lutheran Reformation was fully established in Germany.

The Destruction of Images

After the posting of the 95 Theses there was a violent reaction in Germany to the abuses of the Catholic Church. None of Luther's suggested reforms were about art or the use of art in the church. But his colleague Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, who embraced Luther's ideas, was inspired to lead the people to the violent destruction of images in the churches. Karlstadt produced the first writings on the need to destroy images. Karlstadt summarized his positions:

To have images in churches and houses of God is wrong and contrary to the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exod. 20:3); To have carved or painted idols upon altars is more harmful and devilish still; It is good, necessary, laudable, and godly to do away with them and to give the reasons found in Scripture for their removal.¹²

Municipal authorities of the town of Wittenberg issued an "Order of the town of Wittenberg" dated January 24, 1522, demanding the removal of pictures from the churches, only days after Karlstadt writings had appeared. The result led to a destructive riot that unleashed an irrational violence.

They heaped such insults on the images of the saints, and the crucifix itself, that it is quite surprising there was no miracle. . . . Not a statue was left either in the churches, or the vestibules, or

¹¹ Smith, 19.

¹² Andreas b. von Karlstad, "On the Removal of Images and that There Should be No Beggars Among Christians," in *The Essential Carlstadt*, ed. E.J Furche (Ontario: Herald, 1995), 102.

the porches, or the monasteries. The frescoes were obliterated by means of a coating of lime; whatever would burn was thrown into the fire, and the rest pounded into fragments. Nothing was spared for either love or money.¹³

Luther was urged to speak out against the iconoclasm. The violent destruction had taken him by surprise. He had to immediately take a position in favor of images to restore order. He wrote his answer to the Iconoclasts in a letter to the princes of Saxony:

Christ and his apostles destroyed no churches and broke no images. They won hearts with the Word of God, then churches and images fell of themselves. ... I approached the task of destroying images by first tearing them out of the heart through God's Word and making them worthless and despised. This indeed took place before Dr. Karlstadt ever dreamed of destroying images. For when they are no longer in the heart, they can do no harm when seen with the eyes.

For where the heart is instructed that one pleases God alone through faith, and that in the matter of images nothing that is pleasing to him takes place, but is a fruitless service and effort, the people themselves willingly drop it, despise images, and have none made. But where one neglects such instruction and forces the issue, it follows that those blaspheme who do not understand and who act only because of the coercion of the law and not with a free conscience. Their idea that they can please God with works becomes a real idol and a false assurance in the heart. Such legalism results in putting away outward images while filling the heart with idols.¹⁴

Luther wanted the viewer to understand the difference between worshipping the liturgical art and appreciating the image as an aid to worship and a welcome reminder. By "tearing them out of their hearts," he meant to clarify the use of liturgical art. Once the congregation understood the art as an image to support the Word, it could no longer harm the viewer by corrupting their faith. He did not want people confused by an imaginary power of images to forgive sins or grant

¹³ Erasmus in his Epistle MXLVIII to Bilibald, in Robert Drummond, *Erasmus: His Life and Character*, Volume 2 (London: Smith, Elder & Company, 1873), 315.

¹⁴ Martin Luther, *Letter to the Princes of Saxony*, Luther's Works Volume 40, ed. Conrad Bergendoff (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 58.

indulgences. Luther admitted that very few people would mistake the crucifix on display for God but rather recognize it as a sign. He also wrote that images for memorial and witness should be tolerated. Later he speaks about images with a forceful tone: “I also condemn images, but I would have them assailed by the Word and not by blows and fire.”¹⁵ He speaks more favorably about art in this seemingly contradictory quote:

I have myself seen and heard the iconoclasts read out of my German Bible. I know that they have it and read out of it, as one can easily determine from the words they use. Now there are a great many pictures in those books, both of God, the angels, men and animals, especially in the Revelation of John and in Moses and Joshua. So now we would kindly beg them to permit us to do what they themselves do. Pictures contained in these books we would paint on walls for the sake of remembrance and better understanding, since they do no more harm on walls than in books. It is to be sure better to paint pictures on wall of how God created the world, how Noah built the ark, and whatever other good stories there may be, than to paint shameless worldly things. Yes, would to God that I could persuade the rich and mighty that they would permit the whole Bible to be painted on houses, on the inside and outside, so that all can see it. That would be a Christian work.¹⁶

Luther pointed out the merits of painting scenes from the Bible compared to worldly things as well as the hypocrisy of the Iconoclasts. They all owned coins that depicted saints but they weren't about to destroy those. Not only was it civil disobedience, but it was also done with sinful piety as a good work. The hypocrisy was also shown by some Iconoclasts who took the art to their homes, where they thought it would be no longer sinful. Art outside of the church wasn't considered a dangerous idol in the same way:

Calling church pictures “art” often saved them from destruction. In a printed circular of 1522, Franz von Sickingen, predatory baron and outlawed destroyer of cities in France, the Palatinate,

¹⁵ Martin Luther, *The Life of Luther, Written by Himself*, collected and arranged by M. Michelet, tr. William Hazlitt (London: George Bell and Sons, 1904), 115.

¹⁶ Martin Luther, *Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments*, Luther's Works volume 40, ed. Conrad Bergendoff (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 99.

and Hesse, confessed the evangelical cause. Writing from the Ebernburg, Sickingen denounced monastic orders, clerical celibacy and the cult of saints. On images, his views were more traditional. He condemned burning them, arguing that they only become idols through false use. But he admitted that people see in them “art and beauty and luxury” and that this distracts faith. Therefore he writes, they might be more useful in beautiful chambers as ornament than in the church, so that all the expense and wasted effort is not lost. ...

Church is for everyone but its seductive pictures belong in “beautiful chambers” of nobles like himself. This has been a dominant story of the origin of the category “art.” Transferred from church to collection, images become neutral objects of aesthetic experience.¹⁷

Outside of the Academy and the Protestant Church, the iconoclasm during the Reformation is considered one of the great tragedies to the visual arts and culture in European history. Generations of liturgical art and cultural memory were obliterated. Contemporary historians want to compare it to current Islamic extremists, who are also destroying artwork, ancient temples, and cultural history.

In the *Reformation of the Image*, Koerner points out that to many of the new Lutherans the church edifices and artwork belonged to the law, sin, and death. From the 1520s, Protestants likened Catholic works of righteousness with Old Testament legalism, and equated their break from the Church with Christ’s repudiation of Jewish law.¹⁸ This idea had the greatest impact of all on Lutherans and the visual arts. The artwork and church buildings before Luther, to the eyes of the new Lutherans, represented works corrupted by intent of the Catholic Church. That interpretation initially justified the destruction of images and church buildings. But even worse it allowed the Lutheran culture to be disinterested in the tradition of liturgical art or architecture. The evidence for this statement is the lack of a Lutheran liturgical art history. This approach can also lead to the devaluation of the entire history of Christian art before the Reformation. In the Lutheran viewpoint, it is still the evidence of the corrupt theology of the Catholic Church.

In the early years of the Reformation, Luther also preached against donating pictures on the basis that if it was done as a good work, then it

¹⁷ Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 200–203.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

was idolatrous. He suggested that artists were involved in the commerce of the Mass and it was a corrupt economy. He was against excessive costs and donations for art when it could have been spent on the poor. This idea of money spent on art could be better spent on missions is still prevalent among our congregations. If liturgical images weren't necessary for salvation, why take a chance on a potentially corrupt element of this world? It would appear that Lucas Cranach softened Luther's ideas on these matters, as the ban on images was eventually lifted and altarpieces and sculpture returned to churches.

Albrecht Durer

Albrecht Durer (1471–1528) was an established master when Luther's writings were distributed. He was completely sympathetic to Luther's views and collected all of Luther's written works. A student at the time left Durer's studio because Albrecht was too obsessed and distracted with the writing of Martin Luther. Durer continued doing his own artwork for Catholic patrons as well as men like Frederick the Wise. In the early stages of the Reformation, Durer urged the production of a portrait of Luther so that people could see that Luther was a man of God and not a heretic. The task fell to Cranach, and it helped spread what we might now call the Luther "brand." Durer did produce one masterpiece in what has been considered in the Protestant spirit, called *The Four Apostles*. The *Four Apostles* was painted in 1523–26 and represents John, Peter, Mark, and Paul. Their inspired writings influenced Luther's reforms. John and Paul face each other with Peter and Mark standing behind them. Each man is holding a Bible. Under the image Durer wrote, "All worldly rulers in these dangerous times should give good heed that they receive not human misguidance for the Word of God." In the center of a traditional altarpiece would have been a depiction of the Madonna and Child, or Jesus on the cross. The center was left empty or "invisible." Luther wrote about the invisible Christ:

On earth you will neither see him nor reach him with your senses or thought. Rather, as St. Paul says, you will see him covered in dark word or image—that is, in word and sacrament. Those are like his mask or clothing under which he conceals himself. But certainly he is present there, since he himself works miracles, preaches, administers sacrament, consoles, strengthens and aids.¹⁹

¹⁹ Ibid.

A modern interpretation of Durer's art is in Janson's *History of Art*. Regarding Durer's *Four Apostles*, Janson states, "... in another universal sense, the figures represent the Four Temperaments and by implication, the other cosmic quarters—the seasons, the elements, the times of day, and the ages of life."²⁰ This interpretation has the bold and epic quality that Luther didn't want in religious art. Durer presented these panels to the city of Nuremberg. But as the iconoclasm continued, even Durer's artwork was not immune to displacement, as the city council of Nuremberg confiscated his altarpiece for the Paumgarten family in the Lorenzkirche and sold it to collectors. Durer was the first to create what is considered a Lutheran work of art.

Lucas Cranach the Elder

Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472–1553) had an intimate relationship with Martin Luther. He was the official painter of Frederick the Wise, and his studio was one of the most productive in Europe at the time, even though it was in the relatively small town of Wittenberg. The times brought Luther and Cranach together and Cranach was a perfect match for Luther. Cranach was energetic, ambitious, and understood the mass media of the time. Luther was needed to help stop the destruction of images, which must have been devastating to Cranach. It would seem likely that Cranach remained a member of the city council and mayor to influence and change the ban on images. Cranach needed Luther and Luther needed the Cranach studio and printing press to illustrate and produce his writings and to supply the need for images of Luther.

The early years of the Reformation did force the Cranach studio into diversifying their image output. After the destruction of church interiors and everything in it, the Cranach studio started producing more diverse subjects including nude images, Venus, Lucretia, Eve, and scenes from mythology typical of the Italian studios. Cranach is better known in the history of art for his nudes than his images of the reformers. Luther said Cranach was "a rough painter who could have spared the female sex for the sake of God's creation and our Mothers. He could have painted other images suitable to the pope, i.e., devilish ones, but you judge for yourself."²¹ Luther is saying he could have skipped the nudes for the

²⁰ H.W. Janson and Anthony F. Janson, *The History of Art, The Western Tradition*, 8th Edition (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2010), 540–541.

²¹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Volume 50, Letters III, tr. Gottfried G. Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975); referenced in Steven Ozment, *The Serpent & The Lamb, Cranach, Luther and the Making of the Reformation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 277.

sake of offense and as far as Luther was concerned, Cranach could have painted devilish images for the pope instead. That is a bold criticism for the many nudes that are now in museums throughout the world. It doesn't appear that Luther had a significant influence on the Cranach studio artworks.

The Cranach studio would have been like a media production company today. It has been estimated that between 10 and 15 artists worked in Cranach's style after patterns by the master. Cranach controlled the official production of the image of the new reformer. What made it official was the fact that Cranach was the court painter of Frederick the Wise. Artists also copied each other to supply the demand for images of the reformer. Cranach had the closest thing to exclusive rights on the celebrity of northern Europe and folk hero of Germany.

Lucas Cranach was also a close personal friend of Luther. He was a witness at Luther's wedding and they were baptismal sponsors of each other's children. Cranach owned the printing press, the pharmacy, and Wittenberg properties, becoming one of the richest men in Wittenberg. He, like Durer, was a master of illustration and mass production with woodblock images and engravings that filled Luther's pamphlets and books. Cranach produced the painted and engraved likenesses of Martin Luther as monk, professor, and husband that have formed everyone's notion of Luther to the present day. And finally, he produced altarpieces in what many consider a Lutheran style when the ban on images was repealed and paintings returned to the churches.

Illustrated Luther

Luther had no objection to the use of his own image to promote his reforms or to help introduce him to the masses. The first image by Cranach was an engraving of Luther the monk. Frederick the Wise did not authorize the image because it was too intense. Lucas completed another with Luther in a niche that was approved. Hans Bildung Grien and Daniel Hopfer also added variations as the demand for images grew. After printing Luther's translation of the Bible, Cranach and Luther were finding that rival printers were copying their printings without authorization. Cranach helped Luther design a trademark symbol so buyers would know it was an authentic Luther Bible from the Cranach press. First he used the lamb and then the white rose, which remained the Lutheran symbol. Lucas Cranach illustrated Luther's *Passion of the Christ and Antichrist*. While not up to Durer's mastery, the Cranach studio effectively communicated the ideas Luther put forth.

Christ Driving out the Money Lenders and the *Pope Receiving Money for Indulgences* needed no subtle interpretation or hidden symbolism. Booklets like *Luther's Small Catechism* and related pamphlets were fully illustrated. Luther's translation of the Bible was also illustrated with woodblock prints and colored prints in one edition. This clearly proves that Luther supported the use of images in his work to spread the Gospel. In 1520, Cranach decided to show Luther with the doctor's hood. The idea was to emphasize his knowledge as well as his everyman persona. Paintings of Luther poured out of the Cranach studio. The



studio portraits were based on Cranach's drawings or oil studies and copied by his studio assistants. Since Cranach was the official painter for Frederick the Wise, many of these would have been ordered along with other official works of art. In 1521–22, Cranach even painted Luther in his disguise as Junker Jorg. After Luther married, Cranach produced a double portrait to show the former monk and former nun together. The message of these paintings was not lost on the viewers. The allegiance to Luther and his reforms were evident when one hung a portrait of the rebellious monk. For someone who claimed he was not partial to images, he became one of the most famous images throughout Europe with political and theological content. Surely Luther was aware of the power of the image.

Law and Gospel

The goal of a new Lutheran art was expressed in one work: *Law and Gospel*. Cranach created and produced *Law and Gospel* in consultation with Luther around 1529. In the Gotha version, the scene is split by a tree, which is dying on the left and living on the right. The Old Testament stories of the Brazen



Serpent and the Fall of Humanity are depicted in the middle ground on the law side. The Devil and Death are forcing the man into hell. Moses

is shown holding the Ten Commandments. On the Gospel side, John the Baptist directs the man and the viewer to Christ on the cross and the open tomb. It describes how, with the law, man is condemned to hell by death and the devil. Christ is in the heavens pointing to Adam and Eve. They have the forbidden fruit and so we are guilty by the sin of one man. In the middle ground Moses' staff with the snake is visible, with snakes and dead people lying on the ground. A group of men stand on the right side holding the commandments. We are condemned to hell by the law. If the viewer doesn't understand it, there is a description in the boxes in the painting. On the right side of the panel, the man is presented with Christ crucified and Christ's resurrection. There is text included to spell it out to the viewer. Cranach produced several versions of *Law and Gospel* in oil and also as an engraving. Historical criticism of Lutheran art is that now art would function only as an illustration to the Lutheran Catechism or as a sermon illustration. There would be no interpretations or nuanced meaning, and limited representation of the sacred.

The Schneeberg Altarpiece

Whoever is inclined to put pictures on the altar ought to have the Lord's Supper of Christ painted, with these two verses written around it in golden letters: "The gracious and merciful Lord has instituted a remembrance of his wonderful works."

Then they would stand before our eyes for our heart to contemplate them, and even our eyes, in reading, would have to thank and praise God. Since the altar is designated for the administration of the Sacrament, one could not find a better painting for it. Other pictures of God or Christ can be painted somewhere else.²²

The art historian might say here is proof that Luther saw Leonardo's *Last Supper* on his trip to Italy and the theologian would say Luther was more interested in the administration of the sacrament. There were thirty altarpieces erected by Lutherans in eastern Germany between 1560 and 1600. All display a Last Supper as their main image. The *Schneeberg Altarpiece* has a Last Supper at the base of the altarpiece that is on display at all times. This signaled the return of images to the

²² Martin Luther, *Commentary on Psalm 111*; referenced in Bonnie Noble, *Lucas Cranach the Elder: Art and Devotion of the German Reformation* (New York: University Press of America, 2009), 78.

churches and it was placed in the city church of Schneeberg in 1539. Tension over church art in Lutheran churches had lessened to the point where a new Lutheran work of art was put on public display. The closed altarpiece shows an expanded version of *Law and Gospel* as a permanent beacon in the church for everyday worship. The elements it uses are the same as the panel painting: Jesus looks on as Adam and Eve sin and we fall in judgment of the law. Moses is holding the tablets and Death and the Devil are directing the clothed man to hell. The man is directed to the cross and the scene included the Moses serpent and the angels telling the shepherds of the Messiah, Jesus' victory over Death and the Devil, and the heavens opening up in the upper corner. On the rear view is the Last Judgment in the center with Noah and the flood. So the back of the altarpiece shows the law and the front shows the Gospel. While taking communion, the congregation would see the rear view of the altarpiece.

In the feast day position, there are three manifestations of Christ: the Agony in the Garden, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection. The donors are also present. Bonnie Noble asserts the motivation for donating the altarpiece was different from before. Now these patrons wanted to declare their faith and the promise of their salvation as guaranteed by the new theology. There is also a physical separation from the scenes of Christ's life.²³ This interpretation is impossible to prove. Visually it is very similar to the pre-Reformation Catholic altarpieces and Karlstad seventeen years earlier in 1522 would still have still burned it, though at the risk of the wrath of John the Serious and John Frederick, the donors.

Wittenberg Altarpiece

Lucas Cranach's *Wittenberg Altarpiece* was an example of Luther's choice for appropriate art for an altar—at least the central panel. It was produced and put in place the year after Luther died in 1546. There is the possibility that Luther would not have approved of an altarpiece with his image in the front of the church. The altarpiece is the focal point in the church in St. Mary's in Wittenberg. The central panel is a unique depiction of the Last Supper. It is the traditional image of Christ announcing, "One of you will betray me." This causes an uproar among the disciples including John collapsing onto Jesus' chest. Judas holds the moneybag and bites the finger of Jesus. It is believed that the one disciple turning to the server is Martin Luther in his Junker Jorg

²³ Noble.



disguise. The model for the server is Lucas Cranach the younger. The tradition of artists putting friends and family in altarpieces was long established in European painting. The scene is presented in a circular aerial view with a fortress in the background. The lower panel shows Luther preaching Christ crucified in a coarse, bloody courtyard. The audience members include the painter Lucas Cranach and members of Luther's family. This image is certainly a departure from Renaissance altarpieces, as it included members of the congregation listening to Dr. Luther. This shows the participation in a church service with the sacraments clearly presented and includes the tribute to Martin Luther. The right panel represents confession with the principal figure of Johannes Bugenhagen. He was the pastor at St. Mary's and is hearing open confession. He is granting absolution to one man and withholding it from the impenitent rich man. Bugenhagen also conducted Luther's wedding and eulogized Luther at his gravesite. The left panel shows baptism with Philipp Melancthon sprinkling the water. Lucas Cranach holds the towel and the co-godfather of the newborn is Elector John Frederick. Katherine Luther, Barbara Cranach, and Walburga Bugenhagen are also present. The woman with her back to us is believed to be Barbara Cranach and was a little jibe to her tendency to buy expensive clothes. The complaints about images from Luther in 1522 would still apply to this Altarpiece of 1546. One could say it is a distracting memorial to Martin Luther more that it is an aid to worship or keeps the audience

focused on the Bible. Ironically, as a tribute to Martin Luther, it causes us to worship with him in mind. If we use the same standard used for the destruction of so many images, it too would have been destroyed. It does suggest a new participation in the sacraments by the congregation.

Weimar Altarpiece

Painted in 1555 by Lucas Cranach the Younger, the Weimar altarpiece presents a combination of the visual ideas of the Reformation along with the artist and the reformer. Christ's death on the cross and victory over death and Satan is shown in the foreground. In the background are the images of the Law and Gospel from the earlier designs. To finish the piece there is a tribute to Martin Luther pointing to the Bible and Lucas Cranach having Christ's blood spill on his head. This is clearly a memorial to Luther and Cranach painted by Cranach's son. To have two of the leading personalities of the Reformation take center stage next to John the Baptist is in itself an audacious proclamation. These men were instrumental to the events of the day, but it doubtful Luther would have supported this image of himself. Who would not be distracted in worship to see the Wittenberg friends standing center stage? Steven Ozment, in the *The Serpent and the Lamb*, suggested that Cranach was an add-on in the painting only after a deathbed confession of faith. This interpretation seems more like gossip, since some of Cranach's contemporaries accused him of being more concerned about his business interests, property, and selling artwork than the issues of Lutheranism and salvation. Cranach's son added his father by copying an earlier self-portrait by Lucas Senior. The blood hits Lucas Cranach because of his confession and now he is with Luther for the sake of history. The prominent donors complete the idea of a memorial painting rather than liturgical art as an aid to worship.

The Decline in German Art

There are many complex reasons why critics and historians think that German art was in a decline during and after the Reformation. Carl Christensen points this out in his article on the decline in German Art:

Early Protestantism was excessively utilitarian and didactic in its approach to art. It has been said that, because of a basic ignorance of and insensitivity to the limits of successful artistic expression, Luther and his fellow reformers made subject-matter

demands upon Protestant artists which could be met only at the expense of aesthetic integrity. A preoccupation with doctrinal content led to tragic consequences in the area of artistic form.²⁴

There are recorded cases in Basel and Strassburg where painters and sculptors were petitioning the city governments for municipal employment, where the new Protestant attitudes about images had cleansed the churches of their arts. In the preface of a pattern book from Strassburg in 1538 published by artist, hymn-writer, and author Heinrich Vogtherr:

By a special dispensation of His Holy Word, now in these our days brought about a noticeable decline and arrest of all the subtle and liberal arts, whereby numbers of people had been obliged to withdraw from these arts and to turn to other kind of handicraft. It might, therefore, be expected ... that in a few years there would scarcely be found any persons in German lands working as painters and carvers. Prohibitions against producing art works with explicitly Roman Catholic content which were put into effect in many Southern German and Swiss towns. The penalties for such a transgression could be fairly severe: temporary imprisonment, confiscation or destruction of the offending work, or the threat of loss of citizenship.²⁵

Even if an artist wanted to return to images from the Catholic past, he could be arrested. The restrictions of artists and the lack of demand led to a decline in German art especially in regions where the influences of Calvin and Zwingli were particularly strong.

Conclusion

Luther was aware of the power of visual arts. He may have been overly cautious when it came to liturgical art because of the possibility of multiple interpretations or offense inside of the church. This was partially due to the iconoclasm that Karlstad provoked. Luther didn't expect it or want it and went along with banning the images just to regain some kind of order. In an effort to spread his message of reform and a readable Bible, Luther worked with Lucas Cranach as a master of new media. The printed pamphlets went viral in a modern sense

²⁴ Carl C. Christensen, *The Reformation and the Decline of German Art*, Central European History, vol. 6, no. 3, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 207–232.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 211.

as copies were printed and reprinted by regional printing presses. The images of Luther were needed to show him as the man among the people with the courage of his convictions. The branding of Luther helped to show him as a serious man of God and helped the success of the Reformation. The painting that was co-designed by Cranach and Luther, *Law and Gospel*, became the icon of the Reformation. Art was now valued more for what it meant than for how it looked. By grace alone, by faith alone, and by Scripture alone man is saved. This supported the sermons, the hymns, and what Luther believed were the visual needs of the Lutherans. Religious reform was achieved at the expense of some cultural loss. Luther admitted that “experience of life proves, that no man’s purposes ever go forward as planned, but events overtake all men contrary to their expectations.”²⁶

Modern Times

Looking to our own fellowship and sister synod and its traditions, there are some indications of the connection with the early reformers. In the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, small altarpieces were done by itinerant painters and many small paintings of Christ have survived in our rural churches. The early years of the synod were more about survival of the synod than creating works of liturgical art.

In 1988, Tiefel explained a brief history of the *Use of Liturgical Arts in the Wisconsin Synod*:

Much of the proper Christian use of and emphasis on the arts was lost to the Lutheran Church during the eras of Pietism and Rationalism. Our synod’s own Pietistic roots are perhaps part of the reason why artistic expression has not so often been widely endorsed and encouraged in the WELS. ...

The fact that members of Lutheran liturgical societies often were members of groups which were undermining the doctrines of Scripture and fellowship did art no favors in our circles. (One cannot help feeling that the devil purposefully attaches unsavory characters to art in an effort to disassociate the church from God’s wonderful gifts. Think how often art seems to be linked to the homosexual community in our society!) While most vigorous negative feelings have softened through the years, it may not be an overreaction to surmise that there remain

²⁶ Martin Luther, *Martin Luther, Selections from His Writings*, from *Bondage of the Will* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011), 184.

in our circles a well-intentioned suspicion of proponents of the liturgical arts and a general antipathy to at least some of the arts themselves.²⁷

The anti-liturgical and archaic attitude of the WELS toward art at the time of this article suggests that the culture of the conservative confession Lutherans acted like the new Lutherans. If you didn't need it for salvation, why add a potentially corrupt work of art? Tiefel goes on to say:

In an era when the learning process of people is increasingly dependent on what is seen and heard, the seminary believes it is vital that its students have a thorough knowledge of, a deep appreciation for and a determined commitment to any and all of those arts which are suited to carry the Word of God to human hearts.²⁸

With this quote, it suggests that a new interest in the arts that are suitable to assist in spreading the Gospel are being considered.

Both synods have made strides in commissioning new works of art that support an ancient connection between the image and the message. But more work can be done. In our practical and pragmatic world, the commissioning of art to decorate the church seems to most an extravagance that, like the early Lutherans, isn't necessary for salvation. When the church desires and requests a return to liturgical arts there are many young Lutheran artists eager to share their gifts and express their faith in new works of liturgical art. As our visual culture is engulfed in the digital world, it is time for Lutherans to use these powerful new mediums as well as the old, as Luther did with his illustrated Bible, and pamphlets to spread the good news of the salvation by grace through Jesus Christ our Savior. [LSQ](#)

²⁷ James P. Tiefel, "Use of the Liturgical Arts in Corporate Worship," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 85, no. 2 (Spring 1988): 99.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

The Reformation and History: Luther and Clio

*Robert Rosin
Professor, Concordia Seminary
St. Louis, Missouri*

LSQ Vol. 56, No. 1 (March 2016)

HISTORY—LOVE IT, HATE IT, BUT YOU CANNOT live without it. It's part of life. And historians—well, the same for them, too. I'd like to think you'd look kindly on historians. But perhaps you've had a bad experience with history. Maybe you were frightened by a historian when you were a child, and the memory lingers. Perhaps you are still suffering the aftereffects of a bad experience from high school days—you know, the driving education instructor who doubled as the American history teacher (and would rather have been the wrestling coach), but someone had to do it (and apologies to driving ed instructors everywhere). So it might be no accident that the program committee put the history guy in the middle, because if he were at the start or the end, you might come late and leave early. For whatever reason, if you're having second thoughts or just biding time as the day moves on, then I hope to nudge you a bit toward changing your mind. Should "history" be bunched in with the arts—the visual we just heard about, the musical coming with the Bethany choir and choral vespers, and the literary tomorrow? History and the arts is the larger program focus. Let's see if it fits, if there's some artistry there, and some value for theology. You be the judge, and I think—I hope—you'll see the value when we're done, especially on a personal level that runs deep.

The fact is, as someone once said, "historians are the most useful people and the best teachers, so that one can never honor, praise, and thank them enough. That may very well be a work of great lords, as the

emperor, king, etc., who in their time deliberately had histories written and securely preserved in libraries. Nor did they spare any cost necessary for supporting and educating such people as were qualified for writing histories.”¹

Well, what do you think of that? If you have any doubts or second thoughts, know that those lines comes on good authority, from none other than Martin Luther. (I especially like the part about sparing no expense in the pursuit of the subject of history. Unfortunately, our provost is an exegete.) Luther had high praise for history, and he bemoaned the fact that he did not have more of it during his school years. “How I regret now that I did not read more poets and historians, and that no one taught me them. I was obliged to read at great cost, toil, and detriment to myself, that devil’s dung, the philosophers and the sophists, from which I had to purge myself.”² (You always knew he was a smart fellow, didn’t you?!) Why this love for the past? Because the past wasn’t just past but also present in an important way, as I hope you’ll see. History had served Luther well in the course of his reform efforts. Now maybe Clio, the Muse of History for the ancient Greeks, wasn’t whispering in Luther’s ear—Luther wasn’t a historian per se—but the product of any number of authors and dedicated historians who toiled at Clio’s prodding contributed not just to Luther and his thought, but to the Reformation in general. Part of the payoff was material that could be used in making a case for reform, but there was more. More significant in the long run for Luther’s day (and for us) was the larger, deeper take on life that history afforded not just for mundane matters but to anchor a theological overview—a metanarrative, to use a trendy word—for life itself. In that vein, Luther does better than mere *Profanhistoriker* (“ordinary historians”), giving history a special twist when it comes to the Christian faith and to life in church and world. We’ll take a look at that and more in what lies ahead. We have no realistic expectation of exhausting the topic but simply hope to get the wheels turning, generating some thoughts to take away and ponder.

The Reformation has been seen any number of ways. The tried and in some ways still true approach sets forth a grand drama played out on the European world stage, very much a top-down movement, the action of kings and great men in context where ideas have consequences. Those

¹ Martin Luther, “Preface to Galeatus Capella’s History (1538),” trans. Lewis W. Spitz, *Luther’s Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), vol. 34, 276 (hereafter LW; hence LW 34: 276).

² Martin Luther, *Werke* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1899), vol. 15 (hereafter cited as WA; hence WA 15: 46). LW 45: 370. From Luther’s *Address to the Municipalities*.

ideas—building national identity, for example—did not necessarily connect to the Reformation in first order, but they did play a role in the greater mix. Another angle is from the bottom up, the movement of the masses—prosopography—largely a social movement. The value here is at least in knowing the audience hearing those great ideas, but to some extent they are active as well. Or we could go hard-core Marxist and see reform in economic terms. Never mind what great men say and never mind what else may seem to be on the agenda, in the end the Reformation is simply another, although pivotal, stop along history's great unfolding path that culminates in the rise of lower classes and their "salvation" yielding a socio-economic Eden.³ A few had cast the Reformation as a psychological product, seeing the key in psychobiography of the great figures such as Luther, as personal psychological problems at the root burst out to bring much greater change. So Eric Erickson in his book *Young Man Luther* puts Luther on the couch and coaxes out deep-seated twists and turns that would make Freud proud. And why Erikson stands by his analysis when the profile does not necessarily match up with the facts, well, then assuming turnabout is fair play, you'll have ask him, "And what did you mean by that?"⁴

But above all the Reformation is a theological movement. Here there are any number of avenues that would take us to that big idea, but we're going to follow one that winds through the neighborhood of another movement, the Renaissance—not so much a twin but an older sibling with some family resemblance, some overlap. In fact, we could argue that the Reformation is really a religious Renaissance sparked by German humanism.⁵

The Renaissance was a rebirth of culture—classical culture to be precise, a revival of the liberal arts. As such it could not help but be linked to educational reform. When we hear the name Wittenberg, we think of Luther and theology. In Luther's day, a logical response

³ On these and more options see Lewis W. Spitz, ed., *The Reformation: Basic Interpretations* (Prentice Hall, NJ: D. C. Heath, 1972), a worthy sample starter, though other approaches have come in more recent years. See Abraham Friesen, "Thomas Müntzer in Marxist Thought," *Church History*, 34 (1965): 306–27, for the short version of the genesis and early history of the Marxist view. A longer, detailed study is Friesen, *Reformation and Utopia: The Marxist Interpretation of the Reformation and Its Antecedents* (Wiesbaden: Steiner Verlag, 1974).

⁴ A second opinion on Erikson's profile of Luther is Roger Johnson, ed., *Psychobiology and Religion: The Case of Young Man Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

⁵ Lewis W. Spitz, *The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

to “Wittenberg” in a word association test would have been “educational renewal.” Wittenberg would give shelter and space to the *studia humanitatis*, to the “study of man,” to humanism. Please do not confuse this with the secular humanism from the 20th century, the Bertrand Russell variety with no place for God and with man the measure of all things. Renaissance humanism in the 14th through 16th centuries is a very different movement. Those humanists really took their lead from the biblical story of man as a special creation, formed in the image of God. So, they asked, just what does that entail, and how do we go about living up to that?⁶ History would be part of that effort, learning from the long view. In fact, the “New Learning,” as the humanist movement was called, was so important for the theological change that came through Luther and others, that historian Bernd Moeller has said flatly, “No humanism, no Reformation.”⁷ The classical curriculum and especially a handful of core subjects proved useful to Luther and others, as we shall see, including history.

Luther’s Wittenberg would be a very different university, and Luther’s way of doing theology would take a very different approach from what was entrenched since the Middle Ages. We’ll look at that in a bit. But to appreciate that 16th-century turn, we ought to ask what was going on earlier. In the high Middle Ages—especially in the 12th and 13th centuries—theology came to depend on Aristotle. The growth of universities was part of a larger expansion in Europe’s economy that also fueled the rise of cities—not cities the size of our day, but compared to the limited view of village life, even the small ones then proved the saying *Stadtluft macht frei* (city air makes free). At the time when all this was happening, Aristotle showed up again after centuries of near hibernation. During Muslim conquests centuries earlier, ancient Greek manuscripts had been carted away and then studied by their learned men. They examined Aristotle, but since they really preferred Plato, whose idea of truth as one meshed much better with the Muslim mind, they tended to translate and comment on Aristotle in a platonic bent. Meanwhile back in the West, once Boethius was done in in Muslim-occupied Spain, knowledge of Aristotle shrank. It wasn’t gone completely, but there was less attention paid to the Greek philosopher, and Aristotle faded from sight as the West worried about

⁶ Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 volumes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

⁷ Bernd Moeller, “The German Humanists and the Beginnings of the Reformation,” in *Imperial Cities and the Reformation: Three Essays*, tr. and ed. H.C. Erik Midelfort and Mark U. Edwards, Jr. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 36.

other problems. Meanwhile two Muslims, Avicenna in the 10th century in the Mid-East and Averroes in the 11th in Muslim-occupied Spain, translated and commented on Aristotle. Their works in turn made it into Latin in the West by the start of the 12th century, part of the so-called Twelfth-Century Renaissance.⁸ Aristotle was back. So what? So here was a tremendous tool to be enlisted in support of education in general and of theology in particular. First, the West once again saw the value of Aristotle's logic (especially the *Posterior Analytics*). Syllogisms held power, and deduction, if done right, seemed to know no limits: if..., if..., therefore. It's of course much more complicated than that but that's the basic formula. Follow the argument. See the twists and turns through qualifiers and rebuttals. Listen to the options considered, and then ... (—wait for it, wait for it—) ... “therefore...” Yes, that's the moment: the all-important therefore—ergo. Case closed. That sort of logic became the standard method for what we now call scholasticism, the approach of the “school man” found at the universities. Scholasticism teamed up with dialectic. Abelard had given people a taste of dialectic already in the 12th century with his theological milestone *Sic et Non* (*Yes and No*). There he contrasted seemingly opposing ideas of theologians: on the one hand this theologian says this and that theologian says that, yet when we compare the two we find out that in fact a position emerges they both can hold when seen in a certain light, in a certain context. That's dialectic. Scholasticism would set syllogisms in opposition in an effort to find a truth somewhere in the course of this dialectic, this back and forth reading. If ..., if ..., therefore. Go for the “ergo.” And so Aristotle's logic became the only way that scholars really thought through problems. It was THE method of education. Scholasticism gained a stranglehold on universities (and by extension down the ladder at other schools). Any other ideas, any other approach? Not here, not now.

And what of the liberal arts? Weren't they the foundation of learning? Wouldn't they give one pause to read all through the lenses of logic? Well, first, what were the liberal arts? Medieval educators knew the trivium and quadrivium from ancient Roman days. Charlemagne had promoted their use at one point in an effort to weld disparate people into an empire. It was an earlier version of (dare we say it) Common Core. The trivium was a group of three subjects: grammar, logic, and rhetoric—really three ways to analyze or communicate, three

⁸ Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*, 8th ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

approaches to thinking. Grammar was just what you imagine it to be: how properly to construct sentences in order to assess and convey information and ideas. Better grammar meant better formed ideas. This could be complex, or just simple points like remembering to never split infinities. (Think about it.) Put well-formed grammatical building blocks together in a structured analytical relationship and you have logic—but by now you know at least one example of what that is: if ..., if ..., therefore. Logic would give the listener no option in the end but to accept the case at hand. Rhetoric went beyond logic, recognizing that not all arguments are airtight and so there might be a need to build a case with a mass of evidence or an appeal on another level—not inevitable acceptance but agreement, convincing the listener or reader of the wisdom of the matter. Master these three subjects in the Middle Ages, do well in a disputation—a public argument or debate using logic to prove or disprove theses—and you get yourself a bachelor's degree. Then onto the quadrivium, four subjects or four areas to consider as we look at the world in which we live. Mathematics was a kind of language used for more abstract analysis. Apply that to the physical, spatial world and you have geometry. Astronomy was a term not only for the heavens but for everything below it—in other words, the physical sciences (such as they were in that day). And music was a kind of shorthand for the fine arts, sure to touch the affective side of human nature. Study these four areas, survive another disputation, and you have your master's degree. From that point in European universities you could scale the heights to the three advanced areas of learning: law, medicine, and theology, the Queen of the sciences. (Italy was an exception, where theology was done not in universities but stayed with the monasteries.)

It is a nice, coherent package, except for one thing. The balance had been upset by the overwhelming domination of logic. Aristotle was thought to be so useful that he was the only way to study anything. And it wasn't just the syllogisms. He also gave scholars vocabulary and thought patterns useful for organizing their work. Some of you will recognize some still today from seminary dogmatics: formal and material principles—that is the form or structure of a thing and the stuff or contents of a thing. In theology we talk often still of the shape or formal principle of God's revelation (the Scriptures) and the stuff or the material principle (the gospel content conveyed in that form).

Or when analyzing an action, Aristotle talked about four causes: efficient, formal, material, and final. In other words what effects a change? What form or appearance does that take when happening?

What's the real heart of what's going on? And for what purpose or goal or end (what *telos*—teleology) is this happening? Those four questions do get to the basics of an action, and if you think about it, Aristotle is really quite natural, giving structure to things we see around us every day. Now there's nothing wrong with logic to a point. The problem comes when syllogisms—if ..., if ..., therefore—become the only way any of it is studied, and that skews the liberal arts.

Aristotle also skewed theology. How so? Here's a simple but highly important example: if God is wise and good and makes no mistakes and does nothing from wasted effort, and if God gives you the law and says, "Keep it," therefore there must be some way in which you actually can keep it, or else God would be an idiot, a liar, or a fool—and that's not likely to be the case. The form of that syllogism gives us the material substance of faith-plus-works. It's logical. But it also will drive people to distraction and despair: when have I done enough? Case in point: the younger Luther! As the saying put it, *desperatio monachos facit*—"desperation makes monks." Didn't Luther know it! It's reasonable and intellectually satisfying on paper, but it's not very comforting.

There were variations along the way in scholasticism, but the debates were in-house and revolved around other issues—just what could we really know about what was really real. Things did get worse when it came to how salvation was explained: Aquinas had said God initiates the process—an important word as one becomes righteous rather than is righteous—while the version Luther learned put the onus on people to initiate that, although God would give credit to just about any effort made as long as the response to God's demands was not "no." (Kind of like getting credit for writing your name on the test—but there's still a long way to go.) But no matter the species of scholasticism, it all came from the same tree when it came to method: Aristotle and syllogistic logic. If ... if ..., therefore.

We've spent a lot of time with scholasticism and logic, and we've only scratched the surface. But this is enough ("More than enough" you say) to make an important point for our topic in hand. You've heard a lot, but what haven't you heard in all this talk about curriculum and method? Where is history in all of this? The fact is, logic need not pay much, if any, attention to history. Logic is about the business of getting organization and relationships in order, putting things in their proper category, and marshaling syllogisms all along the way. Other parts of the trivium and quadrivium notwithstanding, logic rules the roost and does it with a vengeance. It is the neck on the hourglass, the Procrustean

bed that will stretch or trim everything to fit its template. Here we have a stellar example of what happens with tools, and why tools come with warnings. It's on the label: to be used for this purpose and not for But tools can work so well that they take over. Give a man a hammer, and suddenly everything looks like a nail. Think of all the things you used to do without much thought or effort—mundane tasks—but now there is an app for that, next a chat room for disgruntled users, and a help desk that assures you every other sentence that they are terribly sorry for the problem and they will do their best to fix this now thorn in the flesh that was supposed to make your life easier. Get a tool and you soon look to find more ways to justify the investment. The same is true of Aristotelian logic: because it worked so well for some things, soon everything looked like a nail. It's alive—run for it!

But don't give up just yet on education. There was hope, there was an alternative, a solution. Man does not live by logic alone. And to demonstrate that in spades, another educational approach—in some ways a *rival* educational approach—arose, another movement in the 14th century, parallel to the late Middle Ages. The movement was Renaissance, and the alternate approach was the “New Learning,” the *studia humanitatis*, the study of mankind: Renaissance humanism. The Renaissance sought to revive *all* the classical liberal arts. It was not opposed to logic. After all, logic was the middle stage in the trivium. But there was more to life than syllogisms.

The rise of humanism is a turning point and now finally brings history to the front lines as humanism sought to break the stranglehold of Scholastic logic. Its long and complicated story has a humble beginning with one Francesco Petrarch (d. 1374), an unlikely founder, given Petrarch was an Augustinian monk. But despite cloister walls, Petrarch managed to get out and around, to throw open windows, to shed light and bring in fresh air. It was quite by accident that Petrarch found himself at the headwaters of a movement. He stumbled on writings of Cicero and found them attractive. Here was classical Latin, markedly different from the medieval sort. More, there was a different spirit, an excitement and enthusiasm about engaging this life. But that posed a problem: Petrarch was a monk, committed (at least in theory) to *contemptu mundi*, a contempt or disdain for this world. The dilemma is seen in Petrarch's famous account of *The Ascent of Mount Ventoux*. Near Avignon where Petrarch was assigned, Mount Ventoux rises oddly above an otherwise rolling landscape, a kind of afterthought of the Alps. In his story, Petrarch went out with a traveling companion—monks go

in pairs—to hike to the top of the peak. At the summit Petrarch was overwhelmed with the vista, looking at the lands stretching in every direction: back to the Alps, across the great plain of Southern France, down toward the snowcapped range of the Pyrennes. The expanse was invigorating and exciting. Then Petrarch reached into his pocket and pulled out a copy of St. Augustine's *Confessions*. The book fell open to a passage where the church father warned: be not attached to the things of this world. Crushed, Petrarch put the book back in his pocket, and duly chastened, he descended from the peak to resume his monastic duties below. It is all very stylized, and it would come as no surprise if this were merely a literary device. But the point is clear: there is a struggle between the so-called *vita active* and the *vita contemplative*, the active life and the contemplative life. For a monk that really shouldn't be a choice. For others, where was the balance between the two: reflect and then act, and then reflect and act again. We juggle because we realize the world is not something merely to be survived but rather to be embraced. Live life. And to do that *well*, one needs to know where life has been in order to engage the present and to look to the future. In other words, there is a need and a place for history.

Early Renaissance humanist interest in classical languages naturally came to include also the ideas encountered in the texts. Comparing past and present, they quickly developed a historical perspective. They were still geographically in the place—Italy and the Latin West—but they were not in the same world, so to speak. So they set about to rediscover former times. It was their heritage. They also soon realized another world lay waiting: the Greek East, with language and texts to recover there as well, although it would take more work. And a few humanists even showed interest in Hebrew studies, although that always came in a poor third. As Muslim pressure grew on the remnant left of the Eastern Empire, Greek teachers often headed west, so it became possible to learn the language without too much trouble. The same was not the case with Hebrew. There were fewer texts and teachers. Yet there was some interest and eyebrows raised at time over whether Hebrew was still appropriate in that day and age.⁹

⁹ In addition, teachers likely were Jewish, and there was a reluctance in Christian Europe to cultivate that association. Later in Luther's day a controversy would break out when Johannes Pfefferkorn, a Jew who had converted to Christianity, argued that Hebrew studies should be banned and the books confiscated. He targeted Johannes Reuchlin, the leading Hebraist of the day (and Melancthon's grand uncle), and the Dominicans rushed in to lend weight to the purge. A paper war broke out, including the famous *Letters of Obscure Men*, a bombast authored by humanists but designed to

Beyond learning the languages to use in further study, humanist efforts to revive the liberal arts centered on five key subjects, a core made famous by the historian Paul Oskar Kristeller.¹⁰ They were still interested in the whole of the liberal arts, but they saw the value of emphasizing certain subjects initially. Get things back on track with this core, and other parts of the arts would follow.

Here is the five-point curriculum. First, grammar. This had to be returned to the real starting point of the trivium, not just a pro forma step to dwelling on logic. A revival would pay serious attention to both the rules and style of basic communication. If the start is not solid, what follows will be wobbly. Second, poetry. In the trivium, logic held that spot, but there's no need to spend time on logic. Academics in the 14th century could do syllogisms at the drop of a hat. Poetry, on the other hand, appealed not to the rational mind but to the heart, to the senses, to the affective nature of humankind. Again, man does not live by syllogisms alone. Third, rhetoric—already in the trivium core, but a subject that got short shrift when logic held sway. Fourth (drum roll please!), history. Actually, history was not entirely absent from the trivium. In classical antiquity, history was folded into rhetoric; it was illustration, used both for the sake of variety and to give solid examples of what the rhetorician was talking about. Now, however, history got a place of its own. Why? Because by now, the early advocates of humanism understand that there is a huge gap between their age and the classical world. Petrarch wrote letters to Cicero, not because he was crazy but because he actually was emphasizing a kinship and yet acknowledging the distance between the two. They were separated by what Petrarch called “the dark ages.” He is the inventor of the term.¹¹ History is a way to deal with this “thousand years without a bath.” The fifth subject: moral philosophy. In

lampoon their foes, so it was written as if it came from the other side. For a while it poured gasoline on the fire, but eventually more learned heads prevailed and Hebrew stayed. Luther used Reuchlin's grammar and other aids to teach himself Hebrew—a historical detail that always discourages modern seminarians striving to make it and not sink into obscurity themselves. The Reformation later would routinely use tools such as the textbooks of David Kimchi, a Jew—but he knew his Hebrew, and that was what counted.

¹⁰ Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought. The Classic, Scholastic and Humanist Strains* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961). Despite the dramatic change, Kristeller also notes there were smaller signs in the Middle Ages of what was to come. Kristeller, *Medieval Aspects of Renaissance Learning: Three Essays*, ed. Edward P. Mahoney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974).

¹¹ Theodore Mommsen, “Petrarch's Conception of the Dark Ages,” *Speculum*, 17 (1942): 226-42.

other words: ethics. History was a look at life past to present, and moral philosophy was dealing with current issues and problems. The two work together. And it was all to be done with a sense of elegance and beauty, learning as a kind of work of art.¹²

The inclusion of history and moral philosophy also says something about the nature and spirit of Renaissance humanism. In the early years there were arguments over what it meant to be a student and follower or a devotee of Cicero. Some argued they could only use vocabulary and grammatical constructions that Cicero himself had used. Others argued that to be Ciceronian meant not to be a slave to the past but to draw on its spirit and to apply the same to the present, to explore and to innovate. In the long run these people won out. The point: the trivium and the quadrivium may have roots in classical antiquity, but they're not stuck there. Life goes on, and education develops and changes. There has to be present application for words and ideas from old. We shall see that in Luther: a revelation that is timeless applied in time and as circumstances change. To do that well, one leans on history.

It's worth noting briefly another way in which history figured into Renaissance humanism. A contemporary of Petrarch was Coluccio Salutati of Florence. He is credited with being an early voice and what is called civic humanism.¹³ Florence was threatened by Milan. The Milanese intended to head south, lay siege, defeat, and then absorb Florence into their realm. Salutati sought to rouse the populace of Florence, to enlist them in the defense of the *patria*, the fatherland. He called up examples and good deeds from Florence's past, seeking to build patriotism at a spirit of sacrifice. Truth be told, Florence would most likely have been overrun. But other circumstances intervened, Milan abandoned its plans, and Florence survived. The self-congratulations may have been hollow, but no matter. The Florentines saw themselves as the latest in the line of those who come to the aid of the city. History was enlisted for civic purposes—civic humanism.

The Germans also would take an interest in history, particularly their own past. While the Italians could get excited over the Roman days of old—after all, those were their ancestors—Germans had a harder time connecting with the Mediterranean heritage. Germans weren't used to togas. In fact, they resisted, but they were not without heroes of their

¹² Hannah Holborn Gray, "Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 25 (1963): 497–514.

¹³ The term Civic Humanism was coined by Hans Baron who recounts the story of Florence and its efforts to resist Milan and the Visconti of Milan in *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955).

own. The Roman historian Tacitus gave them the gift in his account of the failed Roman efforts to conquer the Germans. The Romans armies were better trained, better equipped, and by all rights should have succeeded. But the Germans fought for land and family. In addition, while they may have been rude and crude, they embodied values that were fading among the Romans: honesty, truthfulness, faithfulness, a spirit of sacrifice. The barbarians deserve to be admired more than the legions from Rome. Luther knew the stories, and he discussed Tacitus with co-worker Philipp Melanchthon when the two traveled to Torgau in 1537. Many other Germans had Tacitus in mind with his tales of Arminius lying in wait in the Teutoburg Forest (or on the heights above the Minnesota River) as they resented the often high-handed behavior that came from the Italian-based church.¹⁴ Now in the sixteenth century they came to embrace their new champion, one Martin Luther, the German Hercules, as he is pictured in Hans Holbein's famous woodcut. Nationalism was an important factor as the case of Luther unfolded, fueled by history's tales of weal and especially woe. History as remembrance, history as propaganda helped spur the Reformation.¹⁵ And the humanists beyond the Alps certainly were not second rate. They simply had different interests in the Septentrional climes.¹⁶ So while the south embraced especially the pagan Romans, the northerners looked to their old Teutonic roots and then also to church fathers. It's a judgment call,

¹⁴ When Aeneas Sylvius returned from service in Germany to become Pope Pius II, he offered a backhanded comment that the Germans had made progress, coming a long way. The diets of the Holy Roman Empire would compile lists of grievances—*gravamina*—and those routinely included complaints about the attitude of the Italian churchmen who made no pretense of hiding their disdain for the Germans and yet were only too happy to take their offerings, with wagonloads of gold heading south over the Alps to fill church coffers and build papal Rome.

¹⁵ Hans Holbein's woodcut depicts Luther as Hercules, doing in the Cologne Dominican and inquisitor Jacob von Hoogstraten, after already having vanquished Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, William of Occam, and Peter Lombard, who lay at his feet. For a look at various angles of Luther and the Germans, see A. G. Dickens, *The German Nation and Martin Luther* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

¹⁶ Septentrional? Yes, a perfectly good, though rarely used, English word from Latin roots: *septem* + *triones*, that is, the seven stars of the constellation known usually today by the more familiar term, "the Great Bear" or Ursa Major, or also the Big Dipper. An alternate name refers to the "seven plow oxen"—*trio/triones* is Latin for ox/oxen. All the names refer to the northern constellation of that hemisphere, pointing to the northstar. So humanists, when they wanted to focus not on the Mediterranean but over the Alps, said Septentrional Humanism. They could as well have said "northern," but why use a common word known to anyone when you can show off your learning a bit?!

but the north seemed to have more of a Christian ring to its humanist learning.

In broad terms, humanism supported the Reformation by providing texts and tools for education, something that differed from the standard fare coming out of the Middle Ages. It raised up an alternative method to the Scholasticism that had long dominated university learning and by extension affected church and theology. It fueled cultural identity and nationalism, steeling nerves as the German people insisted on being taken seriously in the *corpus christianum*. And it provided manpower as bright minds turned their attention to problems and opportunities in both the theoretical and practical life of the church. Some of those bright minds came through Wittenberg, a university that was born with hopes of being something different and that lived out that hope beyond its founders' dreams. It opened with the intent of being a different kind of school. It became that and more. It intended to spearhead one kind of reform. It certainly did that and much more. As mentioned at the start, there are any number of ways to view the Reformation. Yet another is as the product of university educational change. Revamp content, and especially overhaul method, and you get a very different product. Different indeed!

Wittenberg was the university for electoral Saxony. Saxony has a long and complicated history with borders migrating and ruling houses changing. Political divisions brought political weakness—hardly desirable—so in the middle of the 15th century the territory was finally welded into one. There was grand talk of never dividing again. Saxony was divided again in 1485, partitioned between two brothers, Albert and Ernest. Albert chose arguably the better part of the lands with more important cities and with the university in Leipzig. Ernest, however, got the title of Elector, making him one of seven rulers who voted for the holy Roman Emperor. It was the plan of Ernest to found a university for his land, but he never managed that. Instead the task fell to Frederick, also called Frederick the Wise. In fact, Frederick had already spent considerable money on Wittenberg, upgrading the town and replacing an earlier but inadequate castle with a much larger fortress, complete with a large castle church. It would be the repository and showplace of his relic collection, the largest north of the Alps. Wittenberg means “white mountain,” a name given by earlier Dutch settlers. The low sand hills apparently looked like mountains to people from the lowlands. It was not much of a city in the 16th century: just over 2000 inhabitants and barely qualifying for legal city status. But because it sat on several

strategic trade routes, and because Frederick had poured money into the town, Wittenberg would be the site of his new university. The school was launched in 1502 in mid-October, opened with the requisite imperial permission but without papal approval. But that was no problem. Wittenberg is not at odds with Rome yet. The fact was that a horoscope had been cast to determine the most appropriate day for the opening of the university. Approval had been sought from Rome, but had not yet run through the bureaucracy by the time the university wanted to open. So the university went ahead, knowing that “the paperwork is in the mail.”¹⁷ Typically a new university took an older school for its model. Leipzig, for example, had Prague in mind when it opened in 1409, ironically as a place for German students to come to when they wanted to escape the pressure of the John Hus affair in Bohemia. Wittenberg took Tübingen as its model for administrative rules and organization. But Frederick the Wise did something new when he changed education and ultimately changed the face and heart of theology: he opened the door to humanism.

The Wittenberg difference is seen in its charter. Such documents routinely lay out courses and a curricular path to follow—all standard fare. But at the end of Wittenberg’s charter there was a phrase, a few words that might be overlooked by some, but which opened the door to a new era. The last lines of the Wittenberg charter committed it to teaching “posie and the arts.” Posie—that’s poetry, one of the five keys in Paul Oskar Kristeller’s core curriculum. Wittenberg would be different.¹⁸

That was unheard of! But it probably was not a rash move. Frederick the Wise didn’t get his nickname by accident. He was a shrewd man with advisors who probably pointed out that a change of this sort would play well with students, not to mention humanists who had been on the outside looking in. Humanists had long sought access to the university teaching ranks, but they did not share the singular enthusiasm for Aristotle and logic that the scholastics had, so for the most part they were frozen out.¹⁹ Occasionally a humanist was engaged to

¹⁷ The first university to be opened without papal approval was Marburg in 1527, founded by Philip of Hesse, with imperial but not papal approval. The first university to be founded without the imprimatur of either emperor or pope was Königsberg in 1544—both intentionally Lutheran universities.

¹⁸ Max Steinmetz, “Die Universität Wittenberg und der Humanismus (1502–1521)” in *450 Jahre Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg*, vol. 1: *Wittenberg 1502–1817*, ed. Leo Stern, et al. (Halle: Martin-Luther-Universität, 1952), 103–39. Maria Grossmann, *Humanism in Wittenberg, 1485–1517* (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1975).

¹⁹ Charles G. Nauert, Jr., “The Clash of Humanists and Scholastics: An Approach to Pre-Reformation Controversies,” *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 4/1 (1973): 1–18.

teach some topic if there were a hole in the teaching rota, but then they would be given a script to read—a scriptum it was called—and they were obligated to follow what had been written for them by the scholastics. No opportunity to add their own insights or angles, leaving them frustrated. Still, humanists hung around university communities and would often support themselves by teaching extracurricular subjects that might interest students. It's not unlike the university today: walk by the announcements kiosks and you see advertisements with tear-off phone number slips offering "Learn Korean Tuesday and Thursday evenings, call" A subject that might prove interesting, but which also didn't count for the students' program. Humanists were notorious gossips. Today they have their own chat rooms and bulletin boards. Then they wrote in a kind of informal, ad hoc network, sharing news—sharing hopes—of openings for humanist teachers at this place or that. Now it was finally going to happen, and Wittenberg would be the ground-breaker.²⁰

When the university opened, the first rector was Martin Pollich von Mellerstadt, a humanist of note, and the faculty included the likes of Hermann von dem Busche, a poet, and Christoph Schuerl, a humanist and legal scholar who had trained at Padua, the leading university in his field.²¹ Neither man stayed long. Humanists also were notorious for looking for greener pastures elsewhere, and it's conceivable that while having a university open to them was attractive, living in Wittenberg was not. "Academic Siberia" was what historian Gordon Rupp called it. Schuerl actually had good reason to leave: he became city secretary (an important administrative position) in his native Nürnberg. That proved a plus for the Reformation because he helped promote Renaissance

²⁰ The contrast between seeing the Reformation as an outgrowth of scholasticism or as the result of new educational trends is clear in the exchange found here: Heiko A. Oberman, "Headwaters of the Reformation: Initia Lutheri—Initia Reformationis," in Heiko A. Oberman, ed., *Luther and the Dawn of the Modern Era: Papers for the Fourth International Congress for Luther Research* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 40–88. Lewis W. Spitz, "Headwaters of the Reformation: Studia Humanitatis, Luther Senior, et Initia Reformationis," in Heiko A. Oberman, ed., *Luther and the Dawn of the Modern Era: Papers for the Fourth International Congress for Luther Research* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 89–116.

²¹ Wittenberg's 1507 *Rotulus doctorum* records early faculty and their course offerings. Humanist Balthasar Phachus, for example, taught rhetoric and poetry, handling such texts as the Aeneid. Other New Learning proponents included Georg Daripinus, Andreas Meinhardus, Kilian Reuther, Otto Beckmann in medicine, and Christian Beyer in law. Humanists often moved on quickly, lured by the hope of better circumstances or the possibility of associating with other sodalities of scholars. In theology Johannes von Staupitz was not a humanist, but he tolerated it as did others brought in for that faculty.

learning and in turn invited Lutherans to the city, making Nürnberg one of the early converts in the so-called Urban Reformation. When it came to theology, Frederick had decided not to favor one sort of scholasticism over the other (neither the older Thomism following Aquinas nor the newer approach of the nominalists with whom Luther had studied). Instead, Frederick opened the door to all and decided to let students in effect choose. They would vote with their feet, following one approach or the other, and the faculty would naturally self-adjust over time.²²

Luther came to Wittenberg in 1511 to finish his doctoral program in theology. The previous year he had gone to Rome to represent one side of his order in an argument over a reorganization plan. His Erfurt cloister was not happy with the result, and they were not happy with Luther's willingness simply to accept the decision. Friction arose, and Luther was wearing out his welcome. Just at that time Johannes von Staupitz, the vicar general of the Augustinians in Germany, needed a university theology professor. Staupitz actually held the post at Wittenberg, but with so many irons in the fire, he had a hard time meeting his classroom obligations. He saw an opportunity to solve two problems: move Luther from Erfurt and fill a spot at Wittenberg. So Luther finished his theological studies, was awarded his degree, and stayed on to teach, beginning in 1512. Luther arrived with an advantage of languages. He'd studied Greek with fellow Augustinian Johannes Lang starting in 1508, and soon after he took up Hebrew on his own. In the years following he used those skills to read classical era authors, so that at the Leipzig Debate John Eck commented on Luther's Latin, and Peter Mosellanus on his Greek. *Table Talk* is dozens of references just to Aristotle, and there are more than a dozen other authors whose works are cited.²³ Along with classical wisdom came an appreciation for history.

The university professor was obligated to add something new to his discipline. It was not enough to read what others had said. As a new prof, Luther had nothing in the files, and so he had to scramble to put together lectures for the first time. He picked Psalms as a subject, a reasonable choice for a monk who had recited them for years. But

²² Steven E. Ozment, "Humanism, Scholasticism, and the Intellectual Origins of the Reformation," in *Continuity and Discontinuity in Church History: Essays Presented to George Huntston Williams on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Forrester Church and Timothy George (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 133–49. James Overfield, *Humanism and Scholasticism in Late Medieval Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

²³ Oswald Gottlob Schmidt, *Luthers Bekanntschaft mit den alten Klassikern: Ein Beitrag zur Lutherforschung* (Leipzig: Verlag von Veit & Comp., 1883).

he needed something new to say, so he looked anywhere and everywhere for insights. Pressed to produce, Luther found value in the writings of Faber Stapulensis, a French humanist, whose ideas on Psalms and various epistles Luther found profitable and an oasis from scholastic logic. Luther was also helped by a better text—Erasmus's New Testament in both Greek and Latin, and while change does not come overnight, from early on it is evident that Luther was doing something different.

Renaissance humanists simply had a different approach to the Scriptures.²⁴ Rather than deal with them via logic, they looked at the language, at the grammar, and at the narrative meaning of the texts. Luther found that interesting. Over time he also found it helpful: he learned to read the vocabulary differently, to understand the Scriptures differently. Already in his Psalms lectures there are indications that Luther's coming to a different view of salvation. By the time of his Romans lectures in mid-decade, Luther clearly understood that he was following a different method for theology.²⁵ He was finding answers to his own spiritual problems, and assuming that his students were human beings like himself and plagued by the same problems, he took his insights into the classroom to share with those also seeking a loving God. Renaissance humanism helped Luther greatly through the languages, through the texts, and through the tools. And although he does not say much about it, history also played a part, because Luther was coming to read the Scriptures in a kind of historical-grammatical approach, appreciating the perspective and the context of the prophets and apostles and then drawing parallels to his own day. Scholastic logic didn't do that. Renaissance humanism did.

If devotion to the "new learning" for its own sake makes one a humanist, then Luther did not qualify. He always saw it as a means, not an end.²⁶ Still he was enthusiastic, and because Luther found the "new learning" so profoundly helpful, he not only used humanism personally,

²⁴ Helmar Junghans, *Der junge Luther und die Humanisten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985).

²⁵ Leif Grane, *Modus loquendi theologicus: Luthers Kampf um die Erneuerung der Theologie (1515–1518)* (Leiden: Brill, 1975).

²⁶ Luther did at least adopt the humanist affectation for rendering their names in some classical Greek or Latin form. Luther opted for the Greek Eleutherius, the "Liberated one"—fitting because he did that in the last years of the decade when he was under fire for his Ninety-five Theses and more. His name was a kind of declaration of independence from the old in many ways. Bernd Moeller and Karl Stackmann, "Luder-Luther-Eleuterius: Erwägungen zu Luther Namen," in *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen I. Philologisch-Historische Klasse*, no. 7 (1981): 171–203.

he sought to strengthen its presence and its hold at the university. During his first decade at Wittenberg Luther worked constantly behind the scenes to promote humanism.²⁷ He would write letters to the Elector's aides urging them to engage more people with humanist leanings. When someone who taught logic left, Luther would write and say to Georg Spalatin, Frederick's humanist advisor, don't hire another logician but spend the money on a biblical theologian instead.

In 1517 there was an investigation of the university to make sure the law professors were fulfilling their obligations. Luther used the occasion as would any university professor administrator today who is facing an accreditation visit and also wants to get something done. So when the team from the Elector arrived, Luther lobbied for more humanist instructors, and he specifically urged them to find language teachers and to make Latin, Greek, and Hebrew part of the standard fare at the university. No other university had a language program. As mentioned, humanists taught "off budget" at other schools, but now language study would be accepted as part of the regular curriculum. Frederick approved the addition of new professors, and Philipp Melanchthon came as the Greek prof.²⁸ He was not Luther's first choice. (Luther wanted Simon Musaeus, who later turned out not to be a supporter of the Reformation. One wonders how that would've played out.) Elector Frederick, ever the shrewd businessman, decided Melanchthon would be a good choice. He was eager to move up the ranks, so a professorship at Wittenberg would be attractive. He also had a Greek grammar to his credit, which only enhanced his reputation. And as a young professor, he undoubtedly came cheap. Melanchthon's interest in rhetoric also made him interested in history. (Remember the relationship in classical antiquity areas.) Luther would become famous for his table talk. Melanchthon did similar things and also routinely had students to his home to read aloud classical plays and histories.

How did Frederick's plan work? Students flocked to the new university. Perhaps the lack of a long history and tradition was attractive,

²⁷ Walter Friedensburg, *Geschichte der Universität Wittenberg* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1917). Friedensburg, ed., *Urkundenbuch der Universität Wittenberg*, Geschichtsquellen der Provinz Sachsen und des Freistaates Anhalt, Neue Reihe, vol. 3 (Magdeburg: Holtermann, 1926).

²⁸ The coming of Melanchthon for Greek is well known, but Wittenberg also pioneered in Hebrew studies. Gustav Bauch, "Die Einführung des Hebräischen in Wittenberg mit Berücksichtigung der Vorgeschichte des Studiums der Sprache in Deutschland," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, 48 (1904): 22ff.

because it meant that Wittenberg was not set in its ways. With new faculty coming and going all the time but with the liberal arts always being represented, students found Wittenberg exciting. Enrollment climbed, and the numbers stalled only in the early 1520s when several things came together. First, Luther would be under condemnation, so attending Wittenberg could have a stigma. Then while Luther was in the Wartburg Castle, in Wittenberg the Zwickau Prophets, three visionaries from the town of Zwickau, came to town, claiming that when it came to understanding God's revelation, the Holy Spirit informed them directly. No need to struggle with language studies. And so some students being students decided there was an easier path to enlightenment, and left the University. In addition, other universities felt the pressure from Wittenberg's curriculum and began to open the door just a bit for humanism at their places, and so students began to have options offered closer to home.

There were ups and downs during the first couple of decades at Wittenberg. Luther's arrival and backstage promotion of humanism helped push the university in that direction. By the early 1520s after a couple of visits by the Elector's representatives and after a couple of reorganization bill cycles, Wittenberg emerged as the university that championed humanist learning. When Philip of Hesse founded Marburg in 1527, Wittenberg was the model for the new school. Rather than open its doors and sort things out, Marburg simply copied what Wittenberg was doing at the time with one added twist. In Wittenberg, history would come up in the course of studying subjects. At Marburg University a professorship for history was established. The worth of history was growing, not declining.

Another way in which history figured into the Reformation was by being part of Luther's own outlook, insights, and sometimes also the arguments that he made in his clash with Rome. It is worth citing a few examples of how this worked. First, Luther's efforts to push Scholastic theology out the door culminated in his September 1517 theses, his "disputation against Scholastic theology." A year earlier one of Luther's students, Bartholomeus Bernhardi, had done one of his academic disputations using ideas he had gleaned from Luther's classes, repeating criticisms he had heard of Scholastic logic. Now in September 1517 Luther openly showed his disdain for the old method of dealing with theology and declared that it was not with Aristotle that one became a theologian (as people usually thought), but rather it was only without Aristotle

that one became a proper theologian. For, said Luther, Aristotle was to theology as darkness was to light.²⁹

The next month, Luther issued his Ninety-five Theses that went viral. The fuss over the theses eclipsed what arguably was a more important point in Luther's disputation against Scholastic theology, namely, that method matters. The Ninety-five Theses were not just a complaint against indulgences. They reflect some theological thinking on Luther's part. He had investigated and found what indulgences once had been in the life of the church and was willing to put up with them if they could be used as originally intended. Luther's complaint was not simply a present-tense tirade. He knew the precedent because he paid attention to the history of indulgences.

The Luther controversy did not simply go away. It was not simply a "monkish squabble" as Rome first thought. So Thomas di Vio—Cajetan, as we know him—was sent to Augsburg as the pope's representative to deal with (that is, to silence) Luther. When the two met, Cajetan challenged Luther's criticism of indulgences, noting that a medieval papal bull titled *Unigenitus* had declared that Christ has won for us a treasury of merit. The point was that Christ left merit as a kind of reservoir that could be tapped by indulgences. Not so, said Luther. *Unigenitus* actually said that Christ is himself our treasury of merit. We don't draw on some reserve; we embrace Christ. Luther knew from his historical studies about the papal pronouncement, and he had taken the time to track down the text. He knew the history and he knew the message of the papal bull. (The response from the papal representative was simply to order Luther to be silent.) The following year in 1519, when the furor over Luther was only growing, the debate was arranged between the Wittenberg faculty and professors from Ingolstadt. After preliminary rounds, the main bout between Luther and John Eck took center stage. Luther and Eck knew each other, and were on generally friendly terms (at least until now), and Eck already knew some of Luther's views from letters that had been exchanged. Now in public Eck maneuvered Luther to the point where Luther said that popes and church councils can and have erred. It was a dangerous thing to say, although Luther knew at least enough from history to know he was on solid ground on the error claim—at least solid ground when it came to the scholarship, not

²⁹ Leif Grane, "Luther and Scholasticism" in Marilyn J. Harran, ed., *Luther and Learning. The Wittenberg University Symposium* (Selinsgrove, NJ: Susquehanna University Press, 1985), 52–68. See also Grane, *Contra Gabrielem. Luthers Auseinandersetzung mit Gabriel Biel in der Disputatio Contra Scholasticam Theologiam 1517* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1962).

necessarily when it came to papal politics. It is interesting that twenty years later Luther thought he had not been versed well enough in history and had attacked popes and councils simply (?) on the basis of the Scriptures, and were he to do it again, he would attack while relying more on evidence from history. Luther did just that with a blistering attack on Rome's fraud in the Donation of Constantine by which it claimed imperial supremacy in the west.³⁰

In 1520 Luther wrote several treatises that attracted wide public attention. *The Appeal to the Christian Nobility*, as the title goes, depending upon the translation, is the first of these. Rome claimed that secular rulers had no business interfering in church matters. There was a wall separating the sacred from the secular. Luther rejected the argument and rhetorically tore down the wall, arguing that princes in fact had a responsibility to watch out for their people and to provide for their spiritual welfare when bishops, who ought to be doing the job, failed to meet their obligations. The background for Luther's argument was not new. Rather it was part of a longstanding dispute that Luther certainly knew from his study of history. For centuries during the Middle Ages popes and emperors had sparred over who rightly was the patron and protector of the church in a given land. Popes claimed international higher jurisdiction. Political leaders would argue that they were the rightful protectors of the church, and to prove their point they would cite historical examples from the Old Testament, especially kings such as David and Solomon. The role of the king as the epitome of the people was seen as a present-day playing out of the relationship that the Old Testament leaders have as the voice and sum of Israel.³¹ The dispute

³⁰ WA 50: 69–89. Luther also knew Lorenzo Valla's blast nearly a century earlier, as Valla exposed the scam on the basis of history—for example, the use of language that was historically anachronistic and allusions to events that did not happen. See Johannes Fried, *Donation of Constantine and Constitutum Constantini: The Misinterpretation of a Fiction and Its Original Meaning* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007).

³¹ Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), describes a relationship that sounds foreign to our ears. The King had his own personal, physical body, but at the same time he embodied the hopes, the wishes, the fears, and more, of his people. As he went, so went the people. A visual example of this theory is Hans Holbein's famous painting of Henry VIII. The usual fashion was to paint a monarch from a side—on angle, suggesting a bit of modesty. Henry wouldn't have it, and so resplendent in a lush golden toned costume, Henry is portrayed life-sized by Holbein standing shoulder square, feet firmly planted, facing directly at the viewers. It was said that the painting intimidated onlookers. Henry is nearly as wide as he is tall—no accident, but rather a kind of statement. Here is the body of the King: huge, powerful, and ready to sire a long line of rulers to make his dynasty firm and sure. It didn't turn out that way, of course, but all that is

between pope and emperor had serious practical consequences. Bishops in the empire were often de facto political leaders as well. The church held territory. Territory had to be administered. The territory also was subject to some degree, at least, to imperial rule. And so bishops were actually prince-bishops, that is, also political rulers. When political rulers and when bishops are put into office symbols of their rule are given them: a bishop's staff or a ruler's scepter, for example. This was an illiterate age when visual symbols mean a great deal. In a feudal system where there is a lord and a vassal or subject, it is important who gives the symbols of the office, because that person is the one to whom allegiance is owed. What did the people see? Popes may claim they are Christ's representatives, and so they ought to be the ones installing or investing, to use the term in question. But kings could cite Old Testament examples. David and Solomon were not members of the tribe of Levi, they were not priests, yet they are responsible for the people. When Luther argues that the spiritual welfare of the people is also the responsibility of the prince, particularly when the church fails, it seemed as if Luther were appealing to history.

Incidentally, in that same *Appeal to the Christian Nobility* Luther included the longest list found anywhere in his writings that laid out practical suggestions for changes in church and society, changes that he thought would make a difference. Included in the suggestions was the teaching of history, although oddly, while he pressed for many things at Wittenberg, he never pushed for a new faculty position specifically in history.

Those are some of the examples of theological controversies that we know from our study of the Reformation. We often look at the theology. We also want to pay attention to the history enlisted by Luther in support of his arguments.

Incidentally, it was Luther's 1520 treatises that brought a parting of the ways with some of the humanists. His *Appeal to the Christian Nobility* was thought by some to be dangerous, siding with the rulers as he did. His *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* was an attack on the seven sacraments and priestly power to control the same. And his *Freedom of a Christian* sounded to some like libertinism—"A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all subject to none"—even though the author's second sentence in the famous pair—"the Christian is the perfectly dutiful servant of all subject to all"—spoke of responsibility and service.

part of the painting. It stood in the historic tradition of the King being the embodiment of the people and the King being God's representative.

Many humanists thought Luther had gone too far. They knew from history that earlier voices of reform sometimes steered too close to the edge and met disaster. Some humanists had wanted moral and structural reform and a more simplified piety, but this was radical theology. It is interesting that no humanist who was older than Martin Luther ever became a permanent supporter of the Reformation. They may have flirted with it and dabbled a bit, but when things such as Luther's 1520 writings came out, they checked out of the movement. Not all younger humanists supported Luther, but all those who did came from the ranks who were younger than he. It's an interesting tidbit. It also goes with another observation about the humanists. Humanism tends to fall into three stages. There is an initial pioneering stage. Next comes the stage of development. Then a third stage where humanists who have learned their lessons well now look for someplace to practice. They want to branch out. They diversify and apply their skills in other areas including theology. The Reformation came just about the time of transition from stage 2 to 3. Humanists who have learned their core curriculum—grammar, poetry, rhetoric, history, and moral philosophy—now help make history by using their skills and serving the Reformation.

We could continue to sample Luther's career and writings to show how history played a part, sometimes as background and sometimes in a more prominent way. But perhaps this is a good place to stop and to shift to Luther and history in a different way on another level. What we sampled to this point are instances of history playing a role in Luther's personal development and in the unfolding of the Reformation. But we also ought to look at history as it figures into Luther's theology itself.

Medieval theology had been marked by scholastic method, with Aristotle's logic steering theologians into certain formulations and to certain conclusions. How you organize at the start affects the product in the end. "If ..., if ..., therefore" resulted in a theology that was certainly understandable, but which also was not particularly comforting. Yes, people knew (or thought they knew) what was expected of them when faced with God's commands, but what chance do they have of actually meeting their obligations? Yet God is no fool, so there should be some way to meet those. Grace might be added to the mix to enable our efforts. The tool of Aristotle and the method of scholasticism produced what people thought was a biblical theology. In fact, it was really philosophical. By using the tools of Renaissance humanism, Luther came to see things differently.

Logic said that when Paul talks law in Romans, he's giving us more and more to accomplish, presuming we somehow will manage the load. By studying Paul's language and the grammar, Luther knew different. He understood what the author Paul once had been (a Hebrew of the Hebrews, an ultra zealot for the law) and what he then became and how he then looked at the law. Knowing even that much history helped Luther hear a different message. In fact, Paul heaps up law in Romans not to remind us what we can do, but rather Paul keeps piling it on because we're too dense to realize we can't, until finally we're crushed under the load and give up. So Luther came to see that righteousness was not a quantity of good that he could amass, but rather a quality that God gives on account of what Christ has done. We have nothing and deserve nothing and can offer nothing, *nevertheless* Christ loves us. There is the word: *nevertheless*. Luther had been looking for the key, but he never would have thought of that. God had to put it in his ears. Nevertheless—*Dennoch* in Luther's German. Nevertheless. But on the other hand. That's the Lutheran way of thinking. That's Paul's way of thinking. That's the New Testament way of thinking.

But realize: to think this way means clinging to what God has done for us, while giving up on what we thought we could do for ourselves. Thinking this way means to lay hold of a historic message of what God has been working on since the beginning, of what God has done in his son Christ Jesus, and what God is doing still today. And history in this is in all caps. Scholasticism's logic really did not need history. Luther's understanding of the Christian message cannot do without it.

When we say that the Christian faith is historical, people sometimes think that simply means the faith, the teaching, is rooted in past events, and if those events in fact have not occurred, that is, if they are not historical, then the Christian faith is a house of cards. This is true, but it's only part of the story. Some people then feel it necessary to defend Christianity (although God can probably take care of himself). They act as if the answer to this all is to demonstrate the historic truth, the historicity of events. So, for example, they might go hunting for the ark—Noah's or maybe the one still eluding Indiana Jones. It doesn't matter, because what would finding it prove? That there was an ark. Nothing more. This is really the wrong approach to Christianity.

A better approach is to see Christianity like a hinge—two parts with a pin. You need both to have a hinge that functions. You talk hinge language every time you say the Nicene Creed. It's there in the Second Article. The pin connecting the two sides is Christ. And the sides? One

is facts, events. God of God, Light of Light—that's establishing identity that takes on a second identity (more facts)—who came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man, crucified, suffered, buried, rose. Those are all facts, strange, wondrous, one-of-a-kind facts, but still facts. Now is that enough to make the Christian faith? No. There's the second side of the hinge: the theology of the events, or put another way, the promises. "Who for us and for our salvation . . ." That has to be there too. Without that we don't now why God in Christ did any of that. He could have done it to show his power and our failure. Failures we are, nevertheless—there's that word again—he has done this all for us. So in the Christian faith, the historic side joins the existential side (not existentialist), a relational side that makes the history not past fact but also present event, present reality. Listen to that again: Christianity is not history because it has events at its roots in the past. (Of course events matter. "If Christ is not raised," says Paul in 1 Corinthians 15.) It is historical in a richer sense because the promise of salvation is now, and that brings the events forward with a present reality now. The Reformation understood this. Philipp Melanchthon was once asked why they recited the Christmas angels' song "To you is born this day," and Melanchthon is supposed to have replied simply, "Because he is." It is as simple as that.

We look for places and points where God speaks to us. And he does speak, not in general terms of to-whom-it-may-concern. That's what sometimes is called *Deus dicens*, God chattering. (*Dicens* from *dico*—to say, to dictate.) Rather God speaks in very specific words, a clear and personal address, so clear that we cannot miss it. That's called *Deus loquens*, a divine speaking of a different sort. (*Loquens* as in eloquent, something that focuses our attention because it is special, it is beautiful, it is thrilling.) God speaks all the time, Luther said, but most of the talk just sounds like noise to us. It's *Deus dicens*. But he also addresses us directly, each of us individually. He speaks in terms of his will—what he wants, the law—and also in terms of that he has done for us in grace and love, the Gospel. The Gospel is historical, not because it is built on Christ who lived back then and did things back there, but because the events never really came to a close but instead are still working for me right now.

History in this larger sense is essential to the Christian message, to the announcement of the good news of salvation. It is not some mere preliminary or background matter, but it is and remains an essential part of present proclamation aimed specifically at me. Luther understands

this about history. It's not a matter of knowing facts or events. (The devils also know these things, wrote James [2:19]. But that does them no good absent the existential "for you.") Rather we hold fast to facts *and* promises linked by Christ. We hold fast to a message that is present tense address creating a present reality. The hinge of history does its job.

Now if you expect an extended treatise from Luther on history (even though we've seen he used it plenty), or if you go looking for an complex discussion of historical method in the 120+ volumes of Luther's edited works, then we will be disappointed. It has been said that Luther was not a systematician—no *loci theologici* to fill a shelf or more. That did not mean he had no anchor and no framework. The same is true of history. Luther was no professional historian, but he clearly saw a place for history in theology, and it informed his work throughout his life. You won't find Luther spending time proving biblical events happened. No one did in that day. They were all pre-Enlightenment, living before the principle of the "Analogy of History" became gatekeeper for what later generations were convinced surely must have been fiction. Analogy of history argues that the more unusual or extraordinary a thing is, the less likely it is to be a historical event. So there goes Christ's death and resurrection (not to mention all the other that is miraculous). None of that was an issue for Luther living in an open universe where God actively intervened and did it constantly. So when it comes to Christianity being historical in that sense, facts are stipulated from the start for Luther. No modern worries for him.

But Luther sees beyond that and realizes that revelation as history is believing not only *that* events once happened but that those events are still happening. The past is still current—this because an event done for salvation is done by God in such a way that it continues to live and to connect with all those who cling to the promises attached to those events. When believers hear the proclamation of an event for salvation, it is not that God had once spoken and "full stop," but God is still speaking, meant here not in terms of general chatter (*Deus dicens*) but as *Deus loquens*, God's eloquent direct message "for you." The important aspect of the history is not a matter of pegging things in time but rather in realizing and embracing a relationship. "Who for us and for our salvation" is a matter of "I—Thou." Personal pronouns matter. Not "God," but "my God." Jesus, Priceless Treasure—great hymn. But while we kept the rhythm, we lost the pronoun: Jesu *meine* Freude. *My* joy.

It was important for Luther that people understand the personal nature of God's actions and words in history. (Actually an argument

could be made that his actions are words and his words are actions, but we'll leave that for the moment.) When God comes with a direct address so that there is no doubt about what he's saying and to whom he is speaking, when he gives promises to people, people are saved by virtue of holding to those promises—to those specific promises, not just anybody's. We see this in an interesting way as God moves through history, stopping to talk along the way. So he gives promises to Adam, and Adam is saved by believing those promises. God comes to Noah and gives him promises as well: build an ark and trust that I will bring you and your family through this. At that point if Noah were to say, "No, thank you. I will stay with Adam's promises," that would not do. Noah must cling to the word God gives him. To only look back and ignore the present proclamation is to turn faith into a museum piece. Abraham cannot be satisfied with what was said to Adam and to Noah. He has to believe what God has said to him. On and on it goes in the Old Testament, through the disciples, and up to us. God speaks to us with specific promises as well. "This water is your entrance into my kingdom. This bread and wine is Christ's body and blood for you for the forgiveness of sins. Christ's empty cross and empty tomb are your empty cross and tomb." God says this a lot to a lot of people, but that does not make it a generic message. It's just that we are all in the same sinking boat. "For you" is specific address, and God knows us by name ever since he met us at his font.

In each of those things that God says to us, we know it has meaning and eternal value because it is tied to what God has done—not events in the dusty past but actions that continue to wield present power. This is *Deus loquens*, God speaking beautifully and specifically, and the reliance on history as a testimony to the relationship that God builds with each of us.

But if God speaks, does this mean that we should be trying to make sense of everything going on around us? Should we be trying to understand the events of our daily lives? Some people seek to decode history, checking present signs and wonders against biblical texts, all in an effort to understand what God is doing in the world today. This kind of "natural magic" was a popular topic in Luther's day. This was no attempt to control or manipulate but rather an effort to read signs in the heavens and on earth, to know the present better, and to anticipate the future, and so to be prepared for what God would send. Astrology was a part of this interpretation of both natural and human events in history. The defense was obvious: God is the creator and preserver, and

no sparrow falls without his knowing, so if we can decipher the past and begin to make sense of the present, we will live better in the future. Melancthon put stock in this, as did Martin Chemnitz—at least enough for Chemnitz to cast a horoscope for the Duke in Königsberg. Apparently Chemnitz did well enough: he got a job as court librarian. (A lucky fluke paid off.)

Luther, on the other hand, would have no part in any of this. His own life's circumstances were so bizarre, he said, that no one would ever have seen that in the stars.

I am the son of a peasant. My great-grandfather, grandfather, and father were peasants. As he [Philipp Melancthon] said, I should have become a superintendent, a bailiff or the like in the village, a servant with authority over a few. Then my father moved to Mansfeld, where he became a mining operator. This is where I come from. That I became a baccalaureus and magister [got my BA and MA], but afterwards took off the brown cap [worn by law students], giving it to others, that I became a monk which brought shame upon me as it bitterly annoyed my father, that the Pope and I came to blows, that I married an apostate nun—who would have read this in the stars? Who would have prophesied it?³²

It was not a matter of God not being involved. Rather it was a matter of God being so much involved in so many ways through everything at hand, that it was impossible to listen to all the chatter. But it did not matter to Luther that he couldn't sort through this history. The fact is, that there was nothing else he really needed to know from God. History already had given him all the revelation he needed. And now he was waiting. Would-be stargazers ought to take a lesson from Luther's attitude. There still is nothing more we need to know from history. Nothing new or different is going to happen beyond the necessary that we already have. How can that be? Because all of the promises connected to Christ have been fulfilled except for one: he will come again to judge the living and the dead whose kingdom will have no end.

Here's how that works. At Christ's ascension he told his disciples to return to Jerusalem and to wait for the Paraclete. After that they would be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth. Once they got over some confusion, they followed through on what Christ said. Stage 1 happens in Acts 2 with Pentecost and the

³² WA-Tischreden 5: 6250 (hereafter WA-Tr).

explosion of the church: witness in Jerusalem. Persecution followed, and in Acts 6 they were forced out into Judea and Samaria—stage 2. And the ends of the earth? We tend to think of Greenland’s icy mountains and India’s coral sands, of the Pillars of Hercules and beyond. But the fact is that stage 3 happened in the disciples’ lifetime. In Acts 10 Peter is sent to Caesarea Philippi, to Cornelius—to a Roman city with the Roman army officer. Cornelius believes, and the gospel breaks out into the Gentile world, and stage 3 is fulfilled. How can that be? Caesarea is snug up to Palestine—and that’s the point. First-century Jews think like New Yorkers. Perhaps you know the famous cover of *The New Yorker* magazine with a sketch of Manhattan, a kind of cartoon street map. The view is to the west, with crossing the streets marked in detail one after another, until we get to the Hudson River. On the other side we see in short order: New Jersey, Chicago, Los Angeles, Japan. New Yorkers think the world revolves around them. (West of Manhattan is flyover country.) Cross the Hudson and you might as well be on the Great Plains. It’s all the ends of the earth to them. For first-century Jews anything outside Palestine is the ends of the earth. That means from Acts 10 forward there is no reason that Christ could not come again. There are no more promises to be fulfilled, and what we are really doing is reliving the second-last day over and over again, waiting for Christ’s return. (That’s certainly a mission imperative.)

But because the gospel is out already to the ends of the earth in the book of Acts, and since the next thing of importance is Christ’s return, there is no need to try to decode daily events of history now. God is working. God is chattering, but we don’t need to know the details. What we do know is what Luther said in the *Preface to Galeatus Capellae’s History* cited at the start: history shows us how God “upholds, rules, obstructs, prospers, punishes, and honors the world, and especially men, each according to his just dessert, evil or good.”³³ Note that Luther is not saying that we know specifically which individuals are getting evil or good, or whom God is punishing or rewarding. Luther is only saying *that* God does this. He operates this way all the time. We’re on a need to know basis, and guess what: we don’t need to know. Know rather the eloquent promises of God in his Word proclaimed and given as the sacraments. Know rather that he will come again.

For his own interest, Luther kept a large wall chart in his room: *Supputatio annorum mundi* (1541)—*A Reckoning of the World’s Years* it was called. He laid out as best he could the historical events described

³³ LW 34: 275.

in the Scriptures over against those from other histories. This is one of the handful of places Luther mentions the New World. He was aware of the discovery half a world away, but his focus was on his pagan Germans next door. Yes, Luther was certainly interested in history, although as we've seen, that was especially in a different, theological way. John Headley's book *Luther's View of Church History* has many useful chapters, although the title raises a question. Did Luther think specifically in terms of *church* history, or is the concept really greater? Another study by Heinz Zahrnt takes a very different approach. Rather than look at a chronological flow, Zahrnt looks at a snapshot, a view of what life is like at any given moment with people involved in the various callings God puts into their lives. So the emphasis is not on the march of time, but rather the relationship that exists at any given time—the vertical relationship of God and his creature, the believer, and a horizontal relationship within mankind, both within the household of faith and with those still being sought. Zahrnt's book title translated from the German (*Luther deutet Geschichte*) can be rendered as "Luther explains" or as "Luther clarifies history." Every day God applies all the things he's done and all the things he's promised once again just for me. History as revelation, as proclamation.³⁴

We've tried to cover a lot of ground in a short amount of time. But before we end, let's look at one last quote from Luther, some famous lines that offer one more take on his view of history. Clio may have been the classical muse, but Luther is getting his inspiration elsewhere.

When Luther died on February 18, 1546, the scrap of paper was found on which he had penned these lines:

No one who has not been a shepherd or a peasant for five years can understand Virgil in his *Bucolics* and *Georgics*. I hold that no one can understand Cicero in his letters unless he has been involved in efforts to govern the state for twenty years. And let no one who has not guided congregations with the prophets for a hundred years believe he has tasted Holy Scripture thoroughly. Because of this the miracle is tremendous in John the Baptist, in Christ, and in the apostles. Lay not your hand on this divine *Aeneid*, but bow before it and adore its every trace. We are beggars. This is true."³⁵

³⁴ John M. Headley, *Luther's View of Church History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966). Heinz Zahrnt, *Luther deutet Geschichte: Erfolg und Misserfolg im Licht des Evangeliums* (Munich: Paul Müller, 1952).

³⁵ WA-Tr 5: 5677; LW 54: 476.

Trying to master life, and to grasp the flow of history is impossible, thought Luther. Yet a diligent student could combine learning with practical experience, and could begin—just begin—to get a handle on things. Peasant life and politics were a challenge. Sorting through serving in the church, a near impossibility unless ... unless one knew where to look, where to hear God. It's interesting that to his end Luther found value in humanism and history. The Aeneid is the story of a journey from a defeat and a new beginning to a new end, a new city. Aeneas leaves Troy and travels until he finds a place that would become Rome, the Eternal City as some called it. It is a personal history played out.

The Scriptures in Luther's eyes were the story of a journey from a defeat, a bad beginning made new, heading onward toward a new city, also eternal: the heavenly Jerusalem. A new heaven and a new earth were on the way. This history is intensely personal to Luther and each of us. And where do we go to hear God? Promises proclaimed loud and clear for me—they are there in the Bible, in the divine Aeneid, as Luther calls it. History—God's actions, God's words—played out to an eloquent end. Bow before it and adore its every trace, for "wir sind Bettler; hoc est verum"—we are beggars, this is true.

And people think Luther was not a historian. ... LSQ

Captive to the Text: Luther's View of Literature and Meaning

Brian Dose
Professor, Martin Luther College
New Ulm, Minnesota

LSQ Vol. 56, No. 1 (March 2016)

HE IS STANDING AT THE SEAM OF AGES. HE stands in the place where one way of learning and communicating overlaps with a new way—a frightening and exciting spot. What can he, what must he pack up from the past? What can he, what must he appropriate from the new age?

Who is the man at the seam between the ages? He is William Shakespeare, who brought the ear, the imagination, and the vibrancy of the oral culture into the discipline, close analysis, and wide distribution of the new culture of text and printing. He is Martin Luther, who brought the treasure of the Church and the art of the classics into the hearts and minds of the Renaissance/contemporary world. He is your pastor and your church, who are standing at the seam of the ministry of the word and the ministry of the message.

Luther can help us as we consider what we can and must take from the passing age. And perhaps the reformer can also help as we think hard about what we can and must make our own from this time to communicate the gospel to our world. We can make this transition with confidence knowing that, as the prophet at the seam of Scripture recorded, “I the LORD do not change” (Malachi 3:6).¹ We should also step across the ages with our eyes and methodologies and media wide open. Another prophet, who was fully aware of the destruction coming on an ungodly world, knew that the future also would be wonderful with

¹ All Bible passages are from the NIV 2011.

opportunities of grace: “Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:22–23). The old unchanging but also new every morning—can we be that too?

The gospel is at the heart of our faith and lives: “It is the power of God that brings salvation” (Romans 1:16). This essential message we have considered for half a millennium to be primarily a text, a series of words written down. And so texts have been the lifeblood of the church. We are grateful for what God did through Luther in the Reformation as he, using the ideas and tools of the Renaissance, refocused Christians on the text, the written unchanging words that revealed the mystery of God’s grace and will. We too want to be grounded in and dedicated to the inspired text of the Bible.

Today I want to look closely at something else Luther understood and said about texts, especially about the inspired text. The Bible, God’s communication to people, for Luther was a text, but it was a rich text. It was literature. It was poetry. The art of the Bible did not make it any less inspired, less trustworthy, less of a rock and foundation. Luther seems to suggest also that the poetic nature of the Bible does not make it any less clear. The literary features of God’s Word can give us a fuller sense of the gospel. So perhaps the art in Scripture will help us see more possibilities for expressing it today, making use of today’s art in media. Luther was devoted to an inspired text of the Gospel. He also understood that it was more than a logical series of words; it was a rich text expressing the gospel with art.

As we stand at a critical seam between the age of print and the age of electronic media, Luther’s understanding of literature will help us negotiate this transition. We can and must hang onto the text of God’s Word. Luther also suggests we can and must see the artistic or literary nature of Scripture: “God is the poet, and we are his verses.”² The connection between God and literature seems for Luther close to the life-giving function of vine and branches. With a dedicated and close attention to the rich gospel, we will both understand the Gospel fully and express it effectively in our media age—text with art.

The Challenges We Face Today in Handling the Sacred Text and Media

If you want to scare a literature professor these days, conduct a poll among his students: “How many films/movies do you watch in a month?”

² Luther, “Genesis Lectures,” *Luther’s Works: American Edition (LW)* 7:366.

And how many books do you read in a year, including the ones assigned for your classes?" I don't want to know the answer. Students want to study the movie version, not the printed text. In Shakespeare class the request, "Why can't we watch the film instead?" has more justification, because he wrote the plays to be performed and watched, not read.

But I have held my (high) ground for text: I want students to be better readers of text, including challenging poetic texts. Then I play my trump card: God's revelation to us is a text, and a challenging one, much of it in poetry. What we know about him will always be grounded in a text. There will never be a divinely inspired movie version of the gospels. We don't call it the "Ministry of the Visual Aid;" it is the "Ministry of the Word."

I still think that way, but I wonder if we will (or have already) moved on to the "ministry of message" or even the "ministry of the media." Our hold on God's revelation to us will always be founded on a text. Ministers of the gospel need to be able to work well with texts. How the new generation will communicate that gospel to the people they will serve in the coming decades, I don't know. But the connection to God's will and promises, and the connection of every generation until Jesus comes again, will be wrestling with the text, a sequence of words. Is then the means of grace, apart from the sacraments, limited to the gospel in a text form?

This dependence on text is why the media age can frighten us. The age of the text, the dominance of print media, is waning. We are told that people, in particular young people, don't read much, don't read the same way, and perhaps don't even think the same way as generations before.³ What follows is a brief overview of text and media issues. My main purpose is to keep in mind the serious challenges the church and especially Christian higher education faces related to texts as we get deeper into the media age. We need to understand and react to these changes, but not overreact. Luther's hold on the text, a text with art, can help us find that narrow Lutheran middle.

Interpretation is just a matter of opinion

In the introductory literature course I teach, I wait nervously for the question to come: "How can you say my interpretation of this story is wrong?" I am surprised and somewhat disappointed that I don't hear

³ Carr, "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" This is Carr's well-known article from *The Atlantic*. The book-length version of his argument and research is *The Shallows*, Norton, 2010.

the question more often. Subjectivity in interpretation is a key issue, a necessary one today, but without an easy answer, or at least without an answer that satisfies most people. If I don't answer that question in a sound way about Hemingway or T.S. Eliot, the same query will surface about God and the Bible. There is both a theoretical and practical link between what we teach about literature and what we say about Scripture.

The current forces of modernism and postmodernism have moved from the theoretical discussions in classrooms to the practical debate and pain of Christians over marriage and sex, fellowship, and why God would ever say. . . . In particular the notions of "pluralism . . . non-objectivism," and the resulting "cynicism/pessimism"⁴ have made discussions about God different. And hard for us—we have spent years lining up the wonderful Scripture verses that support, reveal, and illustrate what God has said on the key issues and religious debates. At the end of a heartfelt and competent sharing of the Word of Life, the response these days may be, "So?" "That's just your opinion." Texts, in particular the biblical texts, may have lost currency today. Is our gold uncoined in today's marketplace?

Constructivist theories of education and learning are popular, but we need to consider how they affect our hold on God's Word. If you believe, and teach accordingly, that the text and the audience together construct or establish meaning, you will couple textual authority with some measure of sinful human nature. This is an attractive, even perhaps a realistic, relationship but not a marriage made in heaven. While co-constructivism will account for different interpretations and allow individual focus and freedom, it will raise harder questions about why and how Scripture functions differently than all other texts. Yes, the Holy Spirit is the necessary and sanctified counselor as we read and interpret the Bible,⁵ but does that mean the inspired text itself functions in a way outside of other secular readings? This leads, again, to theoretical and practical text problems. On what basis can we say the words of Scripture function differently than other words? And, more

⁴ Kelm, "Understanding and Addressing a Postmodern Culture," 4–5. At the end of his analysis, Kelm sees how God may use even the severe trial of contemporary thinking to the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose: "In a changing culture the church rediscovers in Scripture truths and purposes and possibilities that the previous culture obscured. Postmodernism, for all that is inimical to Christianity about it, may free us to see in God's Word truths and purposes and possibilities that modernism—equally inimical to the faith—obscured" (8). This raises an interesting question: what may have the age of print/text/close textual analysis obscured in Scripture for the past 500 years?

⁵ See 1 Corinthians 2:13–14, "... discerned only through the Spirit."

problematic, can we expect people who are raised and trained to read and construct their own meaning in literature class to flip the switch when they read the Bible?

Deep waters of modern literary theory—I can't swim here but I will wade in a bit. In addition to constructivism and reader-response approaches noted above, we have in the past century run into other movements that have limited the value and authority of texts. A key issue has been the relationship between a word and its meaning, between the sign and the signifier. Is language representational; do words have a discernible and trustworthy connection to reality? Or has the life-line been severed and texts are incapable of communicating a stable or clear meaning? These sound like very modern questions. Some, though, have said Luther also addressed the sign-signifier relationship, but in different terms, such as "*res* and *verba*" and "linguistic signs and sacramental signs."⁶ More on this later, but for now consider that Luther, in a complex era of rigorous debates, was able to hold on to and proclaim an inspired gospel that was faithful and accessible and stable. Luther believed the connection between the Lord's *verba* and the world's *res* was not arbitrary nor even figurative. In Luther's view there still was a text, and a solid, shared, and clear meaning of the text was still possible.

Temptations to handle meaning from the outside the text

Luther's approach for a stable meaning, though, was not Rome's way, nor the way of the enthusiasts, who both went for clarity by cutting the text out of the gospel or reducing it. Both temptations face us as we try to hang on to a text focus today. Rome decided to cut through the complexity and dangers of interpretation, which are certainly there, by its authority. The text of Scripture means what the church says it means. Because interpretation is a messy business, and there are many loud competing forces and ideas when you wrestle with what the Bible says, Rome said the container of the gospel was the church, not the text. Perhaps they believed the inspired text was inadequate, or at least unclear. Perhaps they believed the people were inadequate to find and understand the meaning of Scripture.

Both these reasons can be seen in modern literary theory's rationale for minimizing the text. Deconstructionists say language is slippery and texts are incapable of communicating a clear and consistent message. Social theorists say that people are so stuck in their particular culture and way of thinking, or that people are so pressed by society's power

⁶ Anderson, *Words and Word in Theological Perspective*, 341, 348–9.

structures, that they are incapable of expressing themselves or understanding others except through particular lenses or filters. Interpretation is challenging. So, like modern literary theorists, Rome gave up on the text of Scripture because the Bible does not express a stable and clear message, or because the people won't understand one. Meaning, then, is found in the church, apart from the text.

In an overreaction to Rome's heavy-handed authority to control meaning, the enthusiasts ended up also limiting the voice of Scripture. They cut loose from the text by stressing their inner light or spirit, by privileging, in a very modern way, the individual interpretation. The text means what I say it means. John Dryden, a sharp observer of the nonconformists in England in the late 1600s, described this approach and result with a vividness reminiscent of Luther:

Study and pains were now no more their care:
Texts were explain'd by fasting, and by prayer:
This was the fruit the private spirit brought;
Occasion'd by great zeal and little thought.
While crowds unlearn'd, with rude devotion warm,
About the sacred viands buzz and swarm,
The fly-blown text creates a crawling brood;
And turns to maggots what was meant for food.⁷

God's Word, the Word of life, becomes in the hands of the enthusiasts a mess you can't eat. Or it is the proverbial book chained to the wall by ecclesiastical authority. Both extremes happen when meaning is controlled by something outside the text.

Luther faced incredible challenges in understanding and communicating the gospel. Rome was pushing from one direction and the enthusiasts from another. We see the same pressures today, increasing pressure for ecclesiastical control—tell us, church, what God means. Increasing desire for individual interpretations and allowances. And added to all of this are the newer issues of media. God's Word comes to us in many different forms (text, audio, visual), from many different sources (ones sometimes not easily discernable), and with uncontrolled access, experimentation, comment, and reaction. If the Word of life had for Dryden in the 1600s become "a fly-blown text," how would he describe some of the expressions of Scripture today? From bull-horn admonitions at funeral processions, John 3:16 signs at football games, cartoons with biblical characters as vegetables, to political opportunist prophets?

⁷ John Dryden in "Religio Laici or a Layman's Faith," lines 413–420.

There are plenty of good reasons to be worried about understanding and communicating God's Word today. Plenty of good reasons to get really busy to make sure God's genuine voice is heard above all the media noise.

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed . . . and it will not be taken away" (Luke 10:41–42).

There will always be Scripture to listen to, the essential word, and a rich word.

Grasping Sacred Truth and Handling It Skillfully and Happily

With the challenges and opportunities that his own new era presented, Luther said we need to do a surprising thing to preserve and communicate God's Word. We need to study literature; we need to understand how literary texts work, both to see Scripture clearly and to express it effectively in our world. In a letter to the Reformation poet Eoban Hess, Luther wrote:

I am persuaded that without knowledge of literature pure theology cannot at all endure, just as heretofore, when letters have declined and lain prostrate, theology, too, has wretchedly fallen and lain prostrate; nay I see that there has never been a great revelation of the Word of God unless He has first prepared the way by the rise and prosperity of languages and letters, as though they were John the Baptists. There is, indeed, nothing that I have less wish to see done against our young people than that they should omit to study poetry and rhetoric. Certainly it is my desire that there shall be as many poets and rhetoricians as possible, because I see that by these studies, as by no other means, people are wonderfully fitted for the grasping of sacred truth and for handling it skillfully and happily. . . . Therefore I beg of you that at my request (if that has any weight) you will urge your young people to be diligent in the study of poetry and rhetoric.⁸

The rest of the paper will look at Luther's surprising claims in this passage. We will see how Luther's value of literature may both help us

⁸ Smith and Jacobs, 176–177. The *LW* reference is Vol. 49:34, which is based on the Smith translation.

hold on to the rich text of Scripture and offer it to our world. There will be four parts: the connection between literature and theology, Luther's understanding of poetry, his use of narrative, and closing hermeneutical or interpretive issues.

Grasping Sacred Truth—The Connection Between Literature and Theology

Luther in the quotation above gives the vivid picture of literature studies as John the Baptist, preparing the way for the gospel. Clearly this was the case surrounding Luther and the Reformation. The “rise and prosperity of languages and letters” provided the reformers with great tools to better understand the Bible. We immediately and rightly think of how in the Renaissance the biblical languages became a focus and method for the serious study of the theology. Greek and Hebrew are the sheath for sword of the Spirit, God's Word. But to the *ad fontes*⁹ emphasis the reformers valued and added “bonae literae”—“good letters” or secular literature. Wengert outlines this movement in Wittenberg under Luther and Melanchthon, where “trifling philosophisers” of Scholasticism were gradually replaced by genuine classic literature. For example Thomist logic was removed and Ovid's *Metamorphosis* was added to the curriculum.¹⁰ Wengert comments, “So-called ‘secular’ vocations had new worth—in this case the studies in the humanities were not inimical to studying the gospel but instead formed an essential propaedeutic [preparatory instruction] for it.”¹¹

Melanchthon had much to say about the value of literature for theology: “I believe that, as music, so also poetry was given to men at the beginning in order to conserve religion, and because that power to write poetry is without any doubt a kind of heavenly way, so it behooves the poets to use that power in illustrating divine matters.”¹² Melanchthon gave some particulars on how poetry can serve this way:

I see that those who do not attain poetry speak somewhat more tediously, and merely crawl on the ground, and have neither weightiness of words nor any strength of figures of speech. ... Those who make poems judge correctly about the rhythms of fine speech. ... When people begin to despise poetry ... it comes about that the ornaments and splendour of words are

⁹ *Ad fontes*—“to the source,” to the original languages of the Bible.

¹⁰ Wengert, 3–8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹² As quoted in Anderson, 212.

not held in high regard, people write with less care, everything is read more negligently, and the zeal for inquiring into things flags, a pretext for sloth.¹³

Perhaps Melanchthon started out a bit too zealous here for poetry, but he did see a real benefit the study of poetry has for Christians, and for pastors and teachers in particular. Poetry can teach the power of words and effective expression. To study poetry is to train our eyes and minds to be more discerning—of words and texts in particular, but also to see more clearly people and ideas with their concrete images or expressions. Melanchthon claimed that poetry can help provide people with a number of valuable personal qualities and attitudes.¹⁴

Later in the same oration, Melanchthon tries to win over students and, at the same time, demonstrate his point with a strong simile. He warns that earlier students for the ministry “did not apply themselves to elegant writings [and] rushed into the best and weightiest disciplines like swine in to roses. Theology was utterly overwhelmed by stupid and ungodly questions.”¹⁵ Luther adds milder but still vivid similes about earlier theologians who didn’t know literature and the languages well:

Even when their teaching is not wrong, [they] are of such a nature that they very often employ uncertain, inconsistent and inappropriate language; they grope like a blind man along a wall, so that they frequently miss the sense of the text and twist it like a nose of wax to suit their fancy.¹⁶

The biblical languages were the sheath of the sword of the Spirit, the case where the truth and power of God were kept. But the study of

¹³ Melanchthon, “Praise of Eloquence,” 72–73. With “sloth” here, Melanchthon may have been thinking of what Augustine said about the value of the challenging literary features of the Bible: “The fusion of obscurity with such eloquence in the salutary words of God was necessary in order that our minds could develop not just by making discoveries but also by undergoing exertion.” Book 4 of *On Christian Teaching*, 106.

¹⁴ A good question is whether Melanchthon and Luther would praise poetry so much if they were referring to modern poets and their work. A quick response is that there is poor poetry out there today, either the too-personal confessional poems or the professional self-referencing works (where poets are only writing to other poets or teachers of poetry). Both categories are nearly inaccessible to regular readers today. Even so, there are current poets who are very readable and who demonstrate the insight and vivid expression that Luther and Melanchthon valued. See, for example, Billy Collins and Jane Kenyon.

¹⁵ Melanchthon, 77.

¹⁶ Luther, “To the Councilmen,” 116.

secular literature was also a gift of the Renaissance to the Reformation. Poetry may be seen as the training ground, the exercises for the sword of the Spirit. In literature, theologians learn how to wield God's Word in our world.

Grasping the Sacred Truth: The Real Presence in Poetry

To see more how literature can aid in understanding the Bible, we will look at a complex case history: Luther's battle over the real presence in the Lord's Supper. This debate illustrates many interpretive and historical issues, most of which are beyond the scope of this paper and presenter. But the key point here is how poetry can help a believer see the great gift God has given in Holy Communion. In the sacraments we especially see God as a poet giving us through *verba* and *res* his grace. And the blessing is not figurative. Luther understood this better than Zwingli, in part because Luther was a better poet. Or at least, Luther understood better how poetry works in the Bible.

The difference between Zwingli's and Luther's poetics on the real presence can be seen in Zwingli's objection about Jesus' body being in so many places. How can Jesus, he reasoned, be present everywhere the sacrament is celebrated when the Bible says our Savior ascended to the right hand of God? We respond that clearly the Bible is using the well-known figure of speech anthropomorphism. When I quiz my freshmen students on figurative language, they always get this one right. Actually Zwingli, too, did understand the anthropomorphism, and, as Sasse points out, Zwingli agreed that God's right hand was everywhere.¹⁷ The Swiss reformer's argument was that only Christ's divine nature could be in so many places, not his humanity. The communication between the two natures of Christ, then, is the stumbling block. The division between Luther and Zwingli remains on this point for a less poetic but still basic reason—rationalism. Sasse says that Zwingli believed God “has bound himself to logic, which requires that a body cannot be in more than one place at the same time.”¹⁸ Zwingli bound himself to logic; Luther bound himself to the text, to a rich text.

It is an overstatement convenient for me to say that the Real Presence issue was a debate about poetry. But poetry was a big part of what Luther argued. Some of his statements and argumentation remind me of the twists and turns of poetic expression, the challenges

¹⁷ Sasse, *This Is My Body*, 148.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 154.

readers—even good readers—have when handling poetry.¹⁹ In this case we see Luther's insistent focus on the text and his belief in an accessible, clear, stable meaning even when the text is rich in poetic language.

We are familiar with the figurative crux in the Real Present debate. Zwingli said Jesus' words, "This is my body," were a figure of speech, a metaphor. His point was that Jesus meant his body was not really present in the bread of Communion. Zwingli said Jesus' "is" meant "represents." Luther takes what seems the unpoetical route and says "is" means "is." Jesus is not offering a figure or sign in the Lord's Supper, he is handing to us the real presence of his body and blood. There are some interesting lessons in poetry, though, in a fuller look at Luther's response.

First of all, Luther had a healthy fear of figurative language. He struggled with the allegorical interpretation of Bible, and later he struggled against it. He illustrated the problems with this method when he commented on the wild use of figures in a Corpus Christi song:

In it the Scriptures are so forced and pulled in by the hairs that God's worst enemy must have composed it, either that or it is the dream of a poor senseless idiot. Here Melchizedek is remembered, who offered bread and wine; then the lamb comes into it which the people sacrificed of old, and the cake of Elijah, the manna of the fathers, and Isaac, who was to be sacrificed, and I don't know what has not been thought of. All these have had to serve as figures of the sacrament. It is a wonder that he did not include Baalam's ass and David's mule.²⁰

With good reason Luther wanted to stick with the text Scripture gives us: "For anyone who ventures to interpret words in Scripture any other way than what they say, is under obligation to prove this contention out of the text of the very same passage or by an article of faith."²¹ Luther did not deny that there were figures of speech in the Bible, but he looked for the text itself to lead the reader to a nonliteral sense.

In fact Luther did say Jesus was using poetic language when he said "This is my body"—a synecdoche. Luther, though, insisted that this wasn't figurative like a metaphor. The debate here goes beyond Poetry

¹⁹ See Strand's "Slow Down for Poetry," 36. Some of my literature students groan when we start the poetry unit. The poet Mark Strand outlined why readers, even capable readers in other genres, have trouble with verse—the unfamiliar way poetry works, "verbal suspension," multiple senses, and lack of (rational) closure. The Real Presence controversy presents some of the same challenges, especially the lack of rational closure.

²⁰ Luther, "Misuse of the Mass," *LW* 36:181–2.

²¹ Luther, "This Is My Body," *LW* 37:32.

101. Luther defines “synecdoche” as “a very common figure of speech in sacred Scripture, where the part is put for the whole. Paul says ‘uncircumcision’ to mean Gentiles, and ‘circumcision’ to mean Jews.”²² In the Marburg Colloquy he gives an extended explanation direct to the real presence:

Synecdoche is a form of speech to be found not only in Holy Scripture, but also in every common language, so we cannot do without it. By synecdoche we speak of the containing vessel when we mean the content, of the content when also including the vessel, as e.g. when we speak of the mug or of the beer, using only one of the two to denote also the other. Or, to take another example, if the king tells his servant to bring his sword, he tacitly includes the sheath. Such an understanding is required by the text. The metaphor [as argued by Oecolampadius and Zwingli] does away with the content, e.g. as when you understand “body” as “figure of the body.” That the synecdoche does not do... . Figurative speech removes the core and leaves the shell only. Synecdoche is not a comparison, but it rather says: “This is there, and it is contained in it.” There is no better example of synecdoche than “This is my body.”

Philip, you answer. I am tired of talking.²³

In a sense the figure of synecdoche gave Luther a way, a legitimate poetic way,²⁴ to express the real presence between those who claim transubstantiation and those who say only representation. The poetic term “synecdoche” did seem a great resolution, but Luther says in an aside in the Marburg Colloquy, “We admit the synecdoche in order to satisfy the sophists.”²⁵ Sasse points out, “Luther was quite clear about the fact that the synecdoche is only an attempt to describe a fact that defies human explanation.”²⁶ We don’t have a rational closure here, as is typical in poetry. What we have is a text, an attempt to explain the ineffable, and it works.

²² Luther, “Lectures on Galatians,” *LW* 26:62.

²³ The Marburg Colloquy, Second Session, in Sasse’s *This Is My Body*, 254.

²⁴ Luther’s explanation and use of the term “synecdoche” fits the classical and current definitions. See “synecdoche” in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, which says “there is an evident connection, conceptual or physical between the figurative word and what it designates, whereas no such connection exists in the case of metaphor” (1261).

²⁵ Sasse, 254.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 163.

Luther was grounded in the text in a literal way that was not literalistic. He was aware also of the mystery and the transcendence of the sacrament without leaving the concrete text or turning it into only a figure. How are both the divine and the earthly really present? Sasse explained Luther's balance:

For Luther the bread is the body in an incomprehensible way. The union between the body cannot be expressed in terms of any philosophical theory or rational explanation. It is an object of faith, based solely on the words of Christ. ... The objection especially by Zwingli, that thus Luther himself [using the term "synecdoche"] did not understand the sacramental words literally, but figuratively, was refuted by Luther as not being to the point, because the reality of the body was not denied. ... The synecdoche takes the reality of the elements as well as the reality of the body and blood seriously.²⁷

Poetry, like Jesus' parables, is a way to combine the two realities in a way that goes beyond the rational but stays earthbound. Poetry is a way to express the ineffable but with clarity and power to all ears, a text stable and accessible. Poetry, for Luther, preserved the text and made it work in amazing ways.

But how can poetry be clear? Luther insisted on the poetic character of Scripture, but he also demanded that the rich texts be clear for practical and theoretical reasons.

For the text must be quite unambiguous and plain, and must have a single, definite interpretation if it is to form the basis of a clear and definite article of faith. But they [Zwingli, Oecolampadius, Karlstadt on the Lord's Supper] have a great diversity of interpretations and texts, each contradicting the others... . Not one of them has the text in this topic, and thus the whole crowd must celebrate the Supper without a text. For an uncertain text is as bad as no text at all. Now what kind of supper can that be in which there is no text or sure word of Scripture?²⁸

Over a hundred pages later, Luther answers his question: "Are these not pitiable people, who not only lose the substance, i.e. the body and

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Luther, "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper," *LW* 37:163.

blood, in the supper but also the sign or figure besides, and have nothing more left than peasants have in a common tavern?"²⁹ In the rich text we have the treasure of Lord's Supper.

But does the rich poetic text actually have an "unambiguous and plain" meaning? It did for Luther. We can explain this stable and accessible meaning in two ways. A simple one is that figures of speech in Scripture, beyond the literal, are still controlled by the text. Therefore readers, as they pursue the sense of a text, led by that text, will come to the basic understanding. This may involve the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as promised to and required by all those who believe. Another explanation that perhaps is saying the same thing, goes like this:

Because metaphorical language embodies the metaphorical content of Scripture, it is itself essence and reality, not something to be decoded. . . . Luther posits a kind of metaphor-sense based on the concrete and inescapable interrelatedness of things and words.³⁰

This metaphor plus explanation may be Luther's answer to the current literary critics who see no real connection between the sign/word and the signified/reality.³¹ There is a real and discernible connection when we communicate. There can be a stable, accessible, and shared meaning. We are not lost in a subjective and relative world. We have a text; we have a rich text that expresses a concrete relationship. There is a real presence of meaning in Scripture, in poetic expression.

The clarity of Scripture, though, does not mean the text is simple or simplistic. There certainly are complex passages and even ones that seem contradictory. We do a disservice to the Bible when we try to oversimplify God's Word, ignore the cruxes, and so reduce it to something we can more easily manage and understand.³² Meaning from a text can

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 296.

³⁰ Anderson, 405. See also her comments on p. 317: Luther "insisted that each word has one basic meaning, even when used metaphorically, figuratively, or allegorically (since these uses then became the basic meaning of the word)."

³¹ Luther has interesting explanations about how what seem to be metaphors in the Bible are not figurative but real and concrete. For example, when Scripture says "Christ is the true vine" The text irresistibly compels us to regard 'vine' as a new word, meaning a second, new, real vine, and not the vine in the vineyard. Therefore 'is' cannot be metaphorical here, but Christ truly is and has the essence of a real, new, vine." Likewise Luther says Christ IS the Lamb of God; he does not signify or represent it. *LW* 37: 174.

³² This is an understandable tendency when we study poetry and when we study Scripture. In our search for meaning and clarity we want to reduce the text. We want to

be messy and very hard with the competing voices, the challenges of language, and the ever present sinful human nature. But the difficulty of meaning should not lead us, as it seems to have done with contemporary literary critics, to give up the pursuit. Nor should our desire for clarity in meaning lead us to hermeneutical arrogance. One should never be smug when holding onto a greased pig.

How can we negotiate the challenges of interpretation and the complexity of the texts? How can we pursue meaning without reducing the text or wandering into the clouds of subjectivity? Luther tells us, again in the context of the real presence debate, we have two gifts to pursue meaning, God's text and faith:

So against all reason and hair-splitting logic I hold that two diverse substances may well be, in reality and in name, one substance. These are my reasons: First, when we are dealing with the works and words of God, reason and all human wisdom must submit to being taken captive. ... Secondly, if we take ourselves captive to him and confess that we do not comprehend his words and works, we should be satisfied. We should speak of his works simply, using his words as he has pronounced them for us and prescribed that we speak them after him, and not presume to use our own words as if they were better than his. ... Here we need to walk in the dark and with our eyes closed, and simply cling to the word and follow. For since we are confronted by God's words, "This is my body"—distinct, clear, common, definite words, which certainly are no trope, either in Scripture or in any language—we must embrace them with faith, and allow our reason to be blinded and taken captive. So, not as hairsplitting sophistry dictates but as God says them for us, we must repeat these words after him and hold to them.³³

We have the solid, accessible, and shared treasure of the sacrament because we have God's text, and we are captive to it. We have this meaning not because we fully understand it, not because it is rational, not because it is consensus. We are wrestling with Scripture not to

present a neat package. Interpretation, though, is sometimes like gift-wrapping a puppy. The text may not sit neatly in our box. Be careful that in an effort for a nice present, we don't cut off an unruly part or even press the life out of it. See the later discussion on analogy of faith and Wauwatosa theology.

³³ Luther, "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper," *LW* 37: 296. Luther's comments here sound similar to poets who resist paraphrases, reductions, or explanations of their poems. "Just read what I have written!" they say. "That's what I meant."

control it, but to be controlled by it. We have meaning because we are captive to God's rich text.

Grasping the Sacred Truth—The Uses of Literary Narrative/Story

Poetry is a great training ground to understanding words and God's Word. The poetic elements or techniques helped Luther understand and express the mysteries of God, the truths that are on a level above the rational. Luther also valued the more down-to-earth side of literature: narrative. Story telling is a way to help us understand the Bible narratives and, especially, to grasp the law. The particular case history I will use for this section will be Luther's project to produce his version of Aesop's Fables.³⁴

First a note about Luther's sense of literary genres. When Luther uses the term "poetry" in his letter to Hess,³⁵ he is using the word in a broad sense. He is referring to verse as we understand it, but included is all literature. In the following passage about Joseph in Genesis 44, Luther ends up touching on all three traditional categories of literature: poetry, drama, and fiction or regular story (as a part of the narrative Genesis). And at the end he broadens the definition to the highest compliment. Joseph's fiction or silver-cup stratagem is, according to Luther,

a very beautiful game and a most excellent poem of this poet. . . . From this it is clear that Joseph was a very outstanding man and an illustrious theologian. . . . Accordingly, since a good nature and the Holy Spirit were joined, he had to become a distinguished poet . . . a man of the highest talent and spirit. . . .

Therefore Joseph plays this comedy in a very kindly manner and leads his brothers to despair, destruction, and hell; and when all is lost, the element of comedy appears [a welcomed resolution] and scatters all danger.

When matters are in such a bad way and so desperate that no hope of deliverance is seen, we should know that it is the epitasis or the climax of the comedy and that the catastrophe is very near. For such is the nature of God's poems, as Paul neatly says in Ephesians 2:10: "We are his poinma."³⁶ God is the poet,

³⁴ In this section, as you will notice, I depend heavily on Carl Springer's study and translation, *Luther's Aesop*.

³⁵ See pages 4–5 above.

³⁶ The Greek word for "work" or "handiwork" (NIV 2011) is the same root for "poem."

and we are his verses or songs he writes. Accordingly, there is no doubt that all our works and actions are pleasing in God's eyes on account of the special power and grace of faith.³⁷

The Bible is great literature, and law and gospel can be understood in such drama or literary terms. Luther clearly sees theology and literature not as opposite forces, nor even as separate items as he moves between them. This combination of the secular and the sacred and, especially, Luther's high estimation of classical literature can be seen in several surprising ways in Luther's plan to publish a new edition of Aesop's fables.

In a particular piece of writing Luther gave his well-known advice to fathers: read to your children around the dinner table. After the reading, Luther directed fathers to ask their children, "What does this ... mean?" Luther was talking about his Small Catechism, right? No, but you are close, in a sense. Luther gives this encouragement in his Preface to Aesop's Fables.³⁸

Another testament to Luther's value for storytelling is the time period when he worked on Aesop. As Springer points out, it was in the spring of 1530 while Luther was in Coburg, during the weighty times of the imperial diet that would result in the *Augsburg Confession*. A pivotal moment in the Reformation, and Luther is working on Aesop? Even more surprising is what he wrote at that time to Melanchthon:

We have finally arrived at our Sinai, dearest Philipp, but we shall make a Zion out of this Sinai and build three tabernacles on it, one for the Psalter, one for the Prophets, and one for Aesop. But the latter is temporal.³⁹

Before we claim Luther is elevating the fable master too much, we should read on in Springer, where he explains that Luther here is cleverly outlining his writing agenda. He planned to spend his time at Coburg working on his Psalms commentary and his Old Testament translation of the prophets, as well as the fables.⁴⁰ Even so, Luther puts Aesop in some pretty strong company.

Why did Luther see Aesop's narratives as so valuable? This question is important because our objections to Aesop's fables as a part of

³⁷ Luther, "Genesis Lectures," *LW* 7: 365–6.

³⁸ Luther, "Preface to *Aesop's Fables*," Springer, 9.

³⁹ Springer, 1. His Luther quotation is translated from *WA Br*. 5:285.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Christian instruction may parallel the reasons some resist the use of new media and other storytelling techniques. Luther in his Preface to Aesop explains that he does

not know of many books, outside of the Holy Scriptures, which should be preferred to [*Aesop*] when it comes to speaking about our outward life in the world, if you want to take into consideration usefulness, art, and wisdom rather than high-falutin' yammer. For one finds in its plain words and simple fables the most exquisite teaching, admonition, and instruction.⁴¹

Notice that Luther is defining the scope of the fables' usefulness to "our outward life in the world." He understands that there are some things secular literature cannot tell us—the divine truths, the gospel. Luther said, "Smoke of the earth has never been known to lighten heaven, rather it blocks the stream of light over the earth. Theology is heaven, yes even the kingdom of heaven; man however is earth and his speculations are smoke."⁴² In its proper place, that is in teaching about our life in this world, in teaching the law, Aesop shines, he doesn't obscure. Springer says the Luther "seems to take a positive delight in the seductive way these untrue narratives [*Aesop's*] can help teach timeless truths, a paradox inherent in the fable."⁴³ And Springer suggests, "It is possible that Luther believed that fictional stories can illustrate how things work in reality as well as (or even better than) nonfiction."⁴⁴

There are several particular reasons for the effectiveness of such lively but obviously fictive stories. Luther in his preface explains why the truth of fools like Aesop and his protagonists is more acceptable than other instruction. "For fools they can tolerate and heed. They [the great lords and leaders] will not and cannot otherwise endure the truth from the lips of any wise man. Yes, the whole world hates the truth when it hits home."⁴⁵ Do we hear some bitter experience of Luther expressed here? After more than ten years of trying to get through to the lords and leaders with reasoned and not so reserved polemics, Luther was perhaps ready to try another approach. Luther continued the comment

⁴¹ Ibid., 83.

⁴² Luther, "Commentary on Lombard's Sentences" as quoted in Anderson, 163.

⁴³ Springer, 174.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 157.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 84. This function of a fool is seen well in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The wise and loving Cordelia and Kent were banished when they tried to talk sense to Lear. The only one left to tell the truth was his fool, and Lear did listen to him, even though the truth drove the king insane.

or complaint above with, “Well then, nobody wants to hear or endure the truth and yet we cannot do without the truth. So we are going to decorate it and coat it with a covering of pleasant lies and lovely fables.”⁴⁶ Again the tone here may need some comment. Was Luther conceding here or endorsing the proclamation of truth by fiction? Sarcasm or encouragement?

Luther did use vivid narrative in his own writing for the truth to hit home. He did this with his earthy language, which hardly fits the descriptors “decorate ... pleasant ... lovely.” He also used his strong sense for narrative more positively in studying and talking about the Bible. Springer compares Luther’s commentary with the dry rational, academic critics: “The lively exegetical instinct that so often brought scriptural stories vividly to life for his congregation and his students had a more powerful hold on him than the strict objectivity that characterizes the interpretive work of modern biblical scholars.”⁴⁷ In reading Luther today, sometimes his polemics are rough and probably not for emulation. But his commentary on the Bible is wonderful to read—enlightening, edifying, and exemplary. Much of the depth of insight and sharpness of expression is due to his understanding of drama and narrative. Springer says that Luther’s “real literary genius is more clearly in evidence in his exuberant exegesis of biblical narratives (especially his lectures on Genesis to which he devoted the last years of his life) than in dogmatic treatises.”⁴⁸ That is what a strong sense of story can give you: exuberance. It will only be actual “exuberant exegesis,” though, if you are also captive to the text.

When Luther encouraged fathers to read Aesop’s fables to their children, it was partly because these are great stories. The other part was because Aesop’s wit and wisdom give such a great look at people and our world. The fables are filled with vivid illustrations of the law, how the world works. This is why, perhaps, Luther seems to link the use of Aesop with his catechism, to the law sections. Though the moral focus limits Aesop’s stories, he still provides needed instruction and a key role, as the law does. Springer explains,

In [Luther’s] view, even the purist proclamation of the gospel would never render the fallen world a perfect place to live, so it was important for Christians in particular to be on their guard, to be aware of their own native inclinations, and not to

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 159.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 172.

be naive about those of others... The fables of Aesop consistently underscore the importance of knowing one's place in the society (as opposed to self-improvement or social betterment), fitting rather neatly with Luther's conviction that living in the end times makes irrelevant all grandiose schemes proposing dramatic social revolution.⁴⁹

Literature is good at countering grand optimism about humanity. It may be fiction, but if developed well the stories will be true to life: Novels can vividly show the pain of our actions. Classical tragedies and the new postmodern ones use pervasive irony and deception to display our lack of our control and understanding. Some criticize literature today for not reinforcing traditional values, for not offering answers to the human dilemmas, for being dark and twisted, for not building up civilization. Well, if this is what we expect literature to do, we need our grandiose literary schemes exposed. Literature does not give us the answers we need, but it can show us that we need them, showing us our sins.⁵⁰ Good storytelling builds our understanding of and our thirst for the greatest narrative—the gospel.

Grasping and Handling Sacred Truth—Hermeneutics: Recognizing Both the Art and Authority of Scripture

Above Springer calls Luther's interpretive method "exuberant exegesis." We can see both of our emphases here, art and meaning in the text, in a balance that honors the authority and also makes use of the richness of God's inspired text. This is how Luther modeled the benefit of poetry and rhetoric for students of the Bible. Dig into the text! And pay attention to the literary features. This will answer many of our hermeneutical questions, and will also raise a few more concerns.

One striking example of how to deal with God's rich text is the ongoing debate about translating the Bible. Ernst R. Wendland for decades has worked with Scripture translation issues, and he has written extensively about the need to be focused on the text and on its literary features if we want to faithfully express what God has told us. Below

⁴⁹ Ibid., 98–99.

⁵⁰ Springer comments on Aesop's fables functioning as the law does, and he points in a footnote (p. 98) to the three uses of the law in the Formula of Concord. Why not teach fiction, especially modern secular fiction as a curb, mirror, and guide? Mann says literature "functions quite effectively as the law does in Luther's theology: to curb society's excesses, to reflect our own shortcomings, and demonstrate faith [or lack of it]" (129).

are two quotations from his *Translating the Literature of Scripture: A Literary-Rhetorical Approach to Bible Translations*. The first one highlights the practical method and text focus we need, contrasted with interpretive theories that are not text-grounded:

In considering the artistry of the Scriptures, our focus is on the microstructure of the discourse—on those stylistic devices that serve to embellish and at the same time highlight or sharpen the texture of the text. It is a form-functional emphasis that encourages a clear perception of the lower-level artistic features, devices, and techniques of biblical discourse. This is different from the older historical “*behind-the-text*” studies and also from the contemporary vogue, reception criticism (“*before-the-text* studies”), in that it adopts a primarily “*in-the-text*” interpretive viewpoint.⁵¹

The artistry of the Bible need not lead us astray from the meaning, but rather it encourages us to see more of the meaning by seeing more of what the text itself is doing. The literary features in the Bible give us plenty to do, and to do it in the right place—“*in-the-text*.”⁵²

The artistic features in the Bible, Wendland also explains, are not some add on decoration. Rather they are essential parts of the Holy Spirit’s method and meaning:

The Bible stands as “literature” because it deals with momentous themes of continued existential and eternal relevance... . Not only is cognition affected, but also human emotions and volition as well. Indeed, one could argue that excellent artistic technique is absolutely essential for the communication of religious subjects, which by its very nature as the Word of God requires a distinctive, unconventional, captivating, and convincing method of communication in terms of genre and diction, if not style as well: [quoting Eugene Nida] “Any attempt to relate infinite realities to finite experience almost inevitably calls for figurative

⁵¹ Wendland, 139.

⁵² I think Wendland’s categories or labels here work well to summarize the complex array of theories of literary criticism, especially “in-the-text studies.” When in literature class I explain drawing inferences from the clues and hints in stories or poems, students sometimes say, “Oh, now I get it, professor. You want us to read between the lines.” I respond, “No, I am not asking you to see what isn’t there. Look more closely at what is there, what is actually in those lines.”

language, since there are not natural models which combine infinite and finite elements.”⁵³

In other words, God had to become a poet to communicate with us, just as Jesus became a storyteller to bring the heavenly truths to us in earthly form. Luther says,

God in His essence is altogether unknowable; nor is it possible to define or put into words what He is, though we burst in the effort.

It is for this reason that God lowers Himself to the level of our weak comprehension and presents Himself to us in images, in coverings, as it were, in simplicity adapted to a child, that in some measure it may be possible for Him to be made known to us.⁵⁴

We could be immoderate here and link literature to the incarnation. God wanted to dwell among us to more fully reveal who he is, so the Word became flesh. And in a sense, God became a poet. He expressed his truth in a concrete/flesh image.

Back on the ground and more direct to hermeneutical issues, God used literature in an essential way to reveal himself in the Bible. Those artistic expressions are integral to the inspired text, and, as they are so necessary, they can be (God in his providence will make sure they are) accessible and clear to the readers. As interpreters then, we need to keep asking, “What does this mean?” As we dig into the text, we can be confident Scripture will answer that question.

But this won't be easy. A rich text will always be a debated text, not because of some deficiency in the text (that needs the church's imprimatur or the inner light's revelation) but because our natures are corrupt. The answer to the debates over interpretation is to hold to the text. Luther says, hold to the simple or natural meaning of the text. “For anyone who ventures to interpret words in Scripture any other way than what they say, is under obligation to prove this contention out of the text of the very same passage or by an article of faith.”⁵⁵

Sounds great, but practically how do we do this? How do we arrive at a natural meaning in a contested text? First we think of the

⁵³ Wendland, 141. The Nida quotation is from Nida et al., *Style and Discourse* (Capetown: Bible Society of South Africa, 1983), 154.

⁵⁴ Luther, “Genesis Lectures,” *LW* 2: 45.

⁵⁵ Luther, “This Is My Body,” *LW* 37: 32.

Reformation's "let Scripture interpret Scripture." This principle is so ingrained in us that we may take it for granted. But Spitz points out that Luther was "the first [exegete] in a millennium to propose the simple religious criterion by which dark passages are to be understood in the light of a clear passage."⁵⁶ This is sound advice and a key stage in stable hermeneutics, but Luther in the quotation above wants the interpretive warrant in the verse in front of him. He wants to be even more captive to the text.

Another methodological suggestion for a text-grounded interpretation has to do with timing. When should we ask, "What does this mean?" In his *Aesop's Fables*, Luther says we should wait to ask that key question until after we read the story. This sequence seems common sense, but it runs counter to other editions at that time.⁵⁷ If you start with a principle before you read a text, you likely will skew your reading. You then may be looking for something in the text, rather than looking intently at the text.

Does this apply also to the "by an article of faith" consideration in Luther's quotation above? Here we can find an example and a warning about our interpretive methods, especially when we are handling the rich texts that tend to be debated. When and how do we apply the answers we have come up with to "What does this mean?"

Luther's interpretive method sounds close to what has been called "narrative exegesis." Mark Ellingsen did an instructive analysis of Luther's hermeneutics compared with the principles of the narrative approach. The key idea in this style of exegesis is the text "means what it says," a refreshing and simple, natural way of reading. "If a text does not mean what it says but has its meaning conditioned by the interpreter's life-perspective, it is quite possible for the text to be reduced to 'whatever the interpreter wants it to mean.'"⁵⁸ So, was Luther's reading of Scripture conditioned by his "life-perspective," and therefore subjective? Before we respond, "Of course not," we should consider the definitions and examples of life perspectives. Ellingsen explains that some see Luther's law-gospel "dialectic" and his focus on justification by grace as themes he looks for in the Bible, ideas that may be external to the literal-grammatical sense of a text. These overriding articles of faith, critics argue, make Luther's exegesis "arbitrary and individualistic."⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Spitz in "Luther and Humanism," 85–86.

⁵⁷ Springer, 106.

⁵⁸ Ellingsen's "Luther as Narrative Exegete," 396.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 397. To summarize what Ellingsen concluded: Luther's "spirit-letter" distinction in the meaning of Scripture is open to the charge of an "arbitrary and

When we share these themes or life-perspectives with Luther, we don't see such exegetical problems, but others do. At least we need to recognize our hermeneutical method and interpretive lenses that we use, even when they are justifiable and well-grounded in Scripture.

We need to ask and honestly answer: are we seeing the text as it is, or as we want it to be? Our exegesis can be too exuberant. And this temptation is greater with poetic or narrative texts that have more play in them. One check on this problem is to first ask, "What does the text say?" Only after we have struggled well with that question are we ready to ask, "What does this text mean?"

Do we see the text as it is? An example of where an overriding theological perspective may skew the reading of Scripture is the issue of analogy of faith. Should the understanding of a passage ultimately be controlled by the text, or by the body of teachings derived from the Bible as a whole? This is a complicated issue, which was made even more so by the context of the analogy of faith debate: the predestination and election controversy of the early 1900s.

The Ohio and Iowa Synods of that time appeared to ask, "What does this mean?" too early. They argued that the relevant election passages should be understood through the lens of established doctrines, which sounds good. "Now the doctrines of Scripture cannot contradict one another, but must be in harmony with one another. It is, therefore, the task of the theologian to discover this harmony, which must also be recognizable by our reason, and present the doctrines in this sense."⁶⁰ But listen to where this reasonable line of interpretation took them.

In the explanation of the so-called *loci classici* of the less clearly revealed doctrines, the expressions that contradict the clear doctrines of Scripture will have to be stripped of their usual, immediate meaning and be weakened or modified according to the pattern of other clear doctrines of Scripture.⁶¹

With good intentions—in pursuit of harmony and consistency—the synods of Ohio and Iowa were willing to strip and weaken what a divine text said. They wanted the passages to fit into their interpretive box, the analogy of faith.

individualistic exegesis" (400). Ellingsen sees this problem in Luther's polemic situations and contexts, not in his commentaries.

⁶⁰ J.P. Koehler's "The Analogy of Faith," 222.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Koehler responded that we have to live by and live with the text, even when it doesn't fit what we think it should say.

The Synodical Conference maintains that in explaining the so-called *loci classici* or the *sedes doctrinae* one may not, when it is a question of obtaining a doctrine, deviate from the grammatical-historical sense that is immediately and clearly contained in these passages. And if these passages contain terms that according to our human understanding even seem to contradict other doctrines of Holy Writ, one may not modify (*umgestalten*) these terms according to these other doctrines, provided that they are clearly present in these *loci classici*, and are integral parts of this particular doctrine.⁶²

Sometimes being text-grounded is hard and frustrating. The natural sense of a passage may not fit well with other passages, or more often not fit with our understanding of other passages.

In cases such as the predestination controversy and its analogy of faith debate, I think poets and students of poetry have a distinct advantage. People who have spent time studying rich literature, especially poetry, are used to contradictions, reaching beyond the reasonable, and are not overly frustrated by a lack of interpretive closure. Poetry students learn hermeneutical humility; they do not insist that the text fit into their interpretive package. They wrestle with the text, they follow the artistic features and figures, and at the end as they try to make sense of all it, they may only be able to conclude, "I can't say any more that what the poet wrote here." But that is still worth all the effort. Based on just the quotations above, I would say Koehler had studied more art and literature than his opponents. He didn't want to trim rich texts that wouldn't fit in his box. I think he learned that from Luther.

Grasping and Handling the Sacred Truth Skillfully and Happily Today

Perhaps we can learn a few things from Luther that will help us handle or proclaim the sacred truth in our time, as we stand at the seam between the age of the printed text and the digital age.

One of my professors at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, in a church history class, observed that Lutherans have a habit of celebrating major anniversaries of the Reformation by doing questionable things. Then he added, "I'm glad I won't be around in 2017." How are we going to

⁶² Ibid., 221.

observe the 500th? One project that has received much attention is the making of a new Luther documentary film. Would that sainted seminary professor rank this up there with the Prussian Union? The yoking together of the sacred text with the unholy and unruly media? I don't think it has to be a problem.

Perhaps confessional Lutheran films are how we, like Luther, are developing for the gospel a new Reformation vernacular. Perhaps we can take the gifts of the past ages and express them well in a new language, text to film, if we learn from Luther how to do it well.

We may be leaving the golden age of the printed text; perhaps we have already left it. But we must always be grounded in the words God has inspired. Luther also teaches us that to understand a biblical text well, we need to see it in its full, rich literary dimension. And to proclaim the gospel truth? With great art God told us his grace. With great art we can share his grace. With Luther may we always be captive to the gospel text, and captivated by it. LSQ

Bibliography

- Anderson, Sandra Mosher. *Words and Word in Theological Perspective: Martin Luther's Views on Literature and Figurative Speech*. Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Services, 1994. (Submitted to the Graduate School of Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, 1973).
- Augustine. *On Christian Teaching*. Translated by R.P.H. Green. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997.
- Carr, Nicholas. "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" *The Atlantic Monthly* July/August 2008. <<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/07/is-google-making-us-stupid/306868/>>
- . *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2010.
- Dryden, John. "Religio Laici Or a Layman's Faith." 1682. <<http://www.readbookonline.net/readOnline/27417/>>
- Ellingsen, Mark. "Luther as Narrative Exegete." *The Journal of Religion* 63, no. 4 (October 1983): 394–413. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1203406>>.

- Kelm, Paul. "Understanding and Addressing a Postmodern Culture." Presented to the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod's Board for Parish Services, January 21, 1999. <<http://www.wlssays.net/files/KelmPostmodern.pdf>>
- Koehler, J.P. "The Analogy of Faith." In *The Wauwatosa Theology*, vol. 1. 221–268. Translated by E.E. Sauer. Edited by Curtis A. Jahn. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997.
- Luther, Martin. "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper, 1528." Translated by Robert H. Fischer. In *Luther's Works (LW): American Edition*, Volume 37. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961.
- . "Lectures on Galatians." Translated by Jaroslav Pelikan. In *LW* Vol. 26. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963.
- . "Lectures on Genesis." Trans. by P. D. Pahl. In *LW* Vol. 7. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965.
- . "Luther to Eoban Hess." In *Luther's Correspondence and Other Contemporary Letters*. Vol. 2. Translated and edited by Preserved Smith and Charles M. Jacobs. Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1918.
- . "The Misuse of the Mass, 1521." Translated by Frederick C. Ahrens. In *LW* Vol. 36. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959.
- . "This Is My Body, 1527." Translated by Robert H. Fischer. In *LW* Vol 37. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961.
- . "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools, 1524." Translated by A.T.W. Steinhäuser. In *Works of Martin Luther: Philadelphia Edition* Vol IV. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982.
- Mann, Jeffrey K. "Luther, Libertines, and Literature." In *Literature of Luther: Receptions of the Reformer*. Edited by A. Edward Wesley and J. Christopher Edwards. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Pub., 2014.
- Melanchthon, Philip. "Praise of Eloquence, 1523." In *Orations on Philosophy and Education*. Edited by Sachiko Kusukawa. Translated by Christine F. Salazar. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999.
- The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Edited by Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993.
- Sasse, Hermann. *This Is My Body*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1959.
- Springer, Carl P.E. *Luther's Aesop*. Early Modern Studies 8. Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2011.
- Strand, Mark. "Slow Down for Poetry." In *New York Times Book Review* September 15, 1991: 1, 36–37.
- Wengert, T. J. "Higher Education and Vocation." *Pieper Lectures: The Lutheran Doctrine of Vocation* Vol 11. Concordia Historical Institute, 1998.

Wendland, Ernst R. *Translating the Literature of Scripture: A Literary–Rhetorical Approach to Bible Translations*. Dallas: SIL International, 2004.

Presidential Quotes From the Past

LSQ Vol. 56, No. 1 (March 2016)

THE WORLD'S PANACEA FOR THE WOES OF THE world lies in more and more education. Truth is merely a relative thing; man must search more and more for the truth. The world also depends upon science to deliver mankind from the throes of hopelessness and to translate it into the utopian realm of hope. Many religionists believe that the hope of the world lies in the church, but, to carry out its missions, the church must come out of its snug shell, must understand better the secular world and its problems, must more skillfully reach the heart of the modern scientific-orientated thinking man. Far be it from the child of God to cast aspersions on the value of education, of acquiring more knowledge, as long as that knowledge does not militate against the wisdom of God and the revealed Gospel of Grace; nor does the child of God object to the words "confrontation and relevance," when used according to Scriptural meaning and application. Certainly man needs to be confronted with his sins and total unworthiness before God. And what book other than the Holy Scriptures is relevant to man's desperate needs? Only the Gospel can deliver from the state of hopelessness and despair. Nor are we opposed to Biblical scholarship per se, but let him who interprets "speak as the oracles of God" (1 Pet. 4,11). . . .

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod believes in true knowledge, science and education, but only in that kind which "brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10,5). This spirit or attitude

may be called anti-intellectualism or dead orthodoxy, but it does offer and impart a solid hope. Bethany College is an institution of hope. The inscription over its portals, which greets the young hopefuls, could well be, “For we are saved by hope,” not the one which could well be placed over the portals of most modern halls of learning: “All hope abandon ye who enter here” (Dante). Souls shall not be disillusioned, “who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us, which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast” (Heb. 6,18–19). [LSQ](#)

Excerpt from J.N. Petersen, “President’s Message,” *Synod Report* 1966: 9-10.

Reviewing the Practice of Closed Communion

John A. Moldstad
President, Evangelical Lutheran Synod

LSQ Vol. 56, No. 1 (March 2016)

OUR SYNOD'S *EXPLANATION OF LUTHER'S SMALL Catechism* lists four points for a person's proper examination before receiving the Lord's Supper: 1) true repentance of sins; 2) believing in Jesus as one's Savior; 3) believing that the true body and blood of Christ are offered in the Supper for the forgiveness of sins; and 4) sincerely desiring, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, to amend one's sinful life. In light of these four points, the question often is raised: Should the Lord's Supper ever be refused to someone who successfully has self-examined according to these points and yet holds membership in a church body not of our fellowship?

A connection exists between point 4) above and confessing one's faith. A sincere desire to amend one's sinful life implies and includes a firm desire to confess *all* the doctrines of Scripture in their truth and purity. Normally included, then, is serious consideration of where one holds denominational and/or synodical membership. In thankful allegiance to the Lord Jesus who has instituted his Supper for holy use, the communicant wishes to adhere to the words of Christ in how one makes a clear confession of the faith ("...teaching them to obey *everything* I have commanded you..." Matt. 28:20). When communicants eat and drink the true body and blood of Christ at the same altar, doctrinal agreement is being indicated publicly. The common Table gives expression to confessional fellowship, providing outward evidence of unity in the faith.

A sizable number of Lutherans have difficulty seeing how synodical affiliations affect the body of doctrine they confess. The closed Communion practice followed in the ELS and in the WELS reminds all that these “membership connections” ought not be taken lightly. In love, we have a duty to warn our neighbor about every manner of false teaching. We also know how our Lord has forbidden fellowship with errorists (Rom. 16:17; Matt. 7:15, 20; Gal. 1:8–9; etc.).

Careful pastoral advice and direction especially is needed when dealing with those who may privately profess agreement and yet unsuspectingly hold membership in a Lutheran church body that promotes or tolerates error. As a rule, though, we would say one has not self-examined *properly* when there is disregard for the way church membership has a bearing on one’s public confession of the Christian faith.

At the 2015 ELS General Pastoral Conference, some questions were raised in connection with a popularly cited brief, “The Aaberg/Lawrenz Statement,” known by the names of its now sainted authors. For those unfamiliar with the statement, we are providing the wording in a footnote below.¹ The statement was written in 1976 and approved by leaders in the ELS and the WELS. Its intent was not to soften or deny our Communion practice since it solidly reflects the principle that we commune only those communicant members who are in good standing within our doctrinal fellowship (that is, the CELC). The Aaberg/Lawrenz statement does mention that an exception might be made

¹ A reply of the WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations and of the ELS Board of Theology and Church Relations based on their synods’ public confession on the doctrine of church fellowship to a question regarding church fellowship raised by pastors from the Conference of Authentic Lutherans.

Do we hold that the exercise of church fellowship, especially prayer and altar fellowship, can be decided in every instance solely on the basis of formal church membership, that is, on whether or not the person belongs to a congregation or synod in affiliation with us?

No. Ordinarily this is the basis on which such a question is decided since church fellowship is exercised on the basis of one’s confession to the pure marks of the church, and ordinarily we express our confession by our church membership. There may be cases in the exercise of church fellowship where a person’s informal confession of faith must also be considered. This is especially true regarding the weak. But whether one is guided by a person’s formal or informal confession of faith, in either instance it must in principle be a confession to the full truth of God’s Word. In addition, special care must be exercised so as not to cause offense to others or to interfere with another man’s ministry. Further, we are not to judge harshly concerning the manner in which a brother pastor after much agonizing handles such difficult cases. *Lutheran Sentinel* 59, no. 14 (July 22, 1976): 220–221; *Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Synod Report*, 1976: 65.

in admitting to the Table one who *formally* is not a member of ELS/WELS but whose *informal* confession of faith must also be considered. This is not to be regarded as a license for the pastor as gatekeeper to treat lightly the practice of closed Communion. Rather, the statement speaks to a case of casuistry where pastoral judgment is exercised in an extraordinary circumstance. Since a private, pastoral judgment is made in a special case as this where also the elders are informed, the “exception to the rule” should not be widely publicized lest needless offense be given.

We should take opportunity to remind ourselves periodically of the importance of adhering to the closed Communion practice. The two chief reasons for our practice are these:

1) *The vertical concern* –

By having a closed Communion practice we assist those who commune at our altars in examining carefully their need for the Savior’s forgiveness of sins, in understanding that it is the true body and blood of the Lord Jesus they are receiving in the Sacrament, and in knowing and believing without a doubt that through the body and blood of Jesus, under the bread and wine, the forgiveness of sins is conveyed personally to the repentant sinner. There also should be a desire to serve the Lord in thankfulness for this tremendous gift of his mercy, striving to conform our daily lives to God’s commandments. To discern the Lord’s body and blood is so vital in preparation for worthy reception of the sacrament that the Apostle Paul mentions a judgment can fall upon an ill-prepared communicant (1 Corinthians 11:28–33). This is the chief reason for having a closed Communion practice. It demonstrates to each communicant under one’s pastoral care the necessary love and concern for a proper and beneficial reception, not a harmful one.

2) *The horizontal concern* –

By the practice of closed Communion we also are making a confession of faith with fellow communicants, i.e., that the body of doctrine believed and confessed is in conformity with Scripture. We think here of the comment in 1 Corinthians 11:26 regarding “proclaiming the Lord’s death until he comes.” We think also of the words Jesus spoke in Matthew 28, impressing on his followers of every age to “observe all things as He has commanded.” This too involves a deeply loving reason for being cautious as to whom we commune at our altars. It serves as

a protection for the unity of faith inside the congregation of believers (locally and synodically). It also serves as a testimony to the serious nature of confessing the truth on all biblical teachings, a confession of faith ordinarily shown by the membership in a given congregation and/or church body. Here especially we see the need to observe in Communion the fellowship lines expressed through the holding of one's membership in a particular denomination or synod. Neglecting this procedure in how we conduct our Communion worship services readily results in a laxity of a clear doctrinal confession made by the regular communicant membership at a given church. It also sends an erroneous signal to a visiting communicant not of our fellowship that doctrinal confession must not be so important, after all. Again, love for God's doctrine and love for the soul of each communicant is at stake.

In light of the above, we encourage our synod's pastors and congregations to be sure to include a closed Communion statement of some type in the Communion Sunday bulletins. We assume this already is being done but, where an announcement may not be part of a regular routine, we urge a brief note be included. Two examples of such are given here.

Our _____ congregation has a practice of admitting to the Lord's Supper communicant members of our doctrinal fellowship (ELS and WELS). Visitors who may desire to commune with us are asked to speak with the pastor prior to the worship service.

We at _____ congregation desire to offer the Lord's Supper to communicants who are properly prepared to attend this holy meal. A beneficial reception of the Sacrament of the Altar includes a heart that confesses sin and the need for the Savior, trusts in the true body and blood of Christ as offered under the bread and wine in the Supper for the remission of sins, and desires to live a Christian life in thanksgiving for the blessings received. For this reason, we have the practice of serving the Lord's Supper to our own communicant membership and to those who hold membership in congregations of our fellowship (ELS and WELS). Visitors are kindly asked to speak with the pastor before approaching the Lord's Table.

May God help all of us as fellow members of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod to remain unified in both doctrine and practice. For this, we implore God the Holy Spirit! LSQ

The Liturgical Sequences: New Translations and Settings

Daniel J. Hartwig
Pastor, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Okauchee, Wisconsin

LSQ Vol. 56, No. 1 (March 2016)

A RUBRIC IN RITE TWO SUGGESTS THE USE OF A sequence. That rubric from the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (ELH) reads, “13. *The Alleluia, Verse, Sequence, an Anthem or Hymn,*”¹ suggesting that any of these things is acceptable between the Epistle and Gospel in the ELH’s rendition of the Common Service.² The question is, what are these things? The triple Alleluia follows the rubric. In ELH a “sentence” for Lent follows the triple Alleluia. Could that be a version of the “verse” mentioned? An “anthem,” I presume, would be a choir piece. A “hymn” would be a standard congregational song. But what is the “sequence”? This is the question which prompted this study. This brief article addresses liturgical sequences, and offers a few new hymnic translations and settings for their congregational use.

A Brief History of the Sequence

The order of Epistle and Gospel readings in the Divine Service is a long-standing custom with deep historical roots. In *The Lutheran*

¹ *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (St. Louis: MorningStar Music Publishers), 67 (emphasis original).

² The “Common Service,” published in 1888, was the product of a joint committee from the General Synod, General Council, and the General South Synod (a church body caused by the Civil War). The aim was to fashion a standardized English liturgy for American Lutherans. They were tremendously successful in their aims since the Common Service is still found in many hymnals today. See Fred L. Precht, ed., *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 100–104.

Hymnal's main service,³ the Gradual goes between the Epistle and Gospel reading, punctuated by the congregation's triple Alleluia. The ELH's revision of this service adds an additional Scripture reading prior to the Epistle, and the Gradual is placed between that first lesson and Epistle, leaving the triple Alleluia between the Epistle and Gospel.⁴ Either way, the liturgical function of the Gradual and Alleluia is to be a step of incline toward the Gospel and sermon.⁵

In the Western tradition, the Alleluia after the Gradual became quite elaborate, especially on high feasts. The final note of the Alleluia was often extended into a jubilant melody of its own.⁶ Before musical notation was common, these melodies had to be memorized by rote to be preserved. Swiss monk Notker the Stammerer (AD 840–912) was among the first to add extra words to these joyous melodies to aid his own memorization.⁷ Eventually, through this type of innovation, these jubilant melodies evolved into the sequence,⁸ so called because they were the next step after the Gradual and Alleluia.⁹ Unlike the extended Alleluias, the sequences were not composed of melody alone, but of lyrics as well. This was an improvement. So also, the sequences became much more structurally rigid, having a definite set of poetic and musical rules to which to adhere.¹⁰

However, by the sixteenth century the sequence posed many problems. New ones were written for most every occasion of which one could think,¹¹ and the authors were not always known for their brevity, making their use impractical for corporate worship and even detrimental in the

³ *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), 15.

⁴ ELH Rite 2.

⁵ "The word for this response, *Gradual*, comes from the Latin word *gradus*, which means 'step'" (emphasis original). Timothy Maschke, *Gathered Guests*, second edition (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 149.

⁶ This was initially called the *Jubilus*.

⁷ Andrew Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 46–47.

⁸ From the Latin *sequentia*, whose root, *sequi*, simply means "to follow."

⁹ Erwin Kurth and Walter Buszin, *The Graduals for the Church Year* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1944), 4.

¹⁰ "The standard sequence pattern has two strophes sung to the same melodic segment, which is repeated; the first and last strophes are the exceptions, and do not have parallels. The pattern can be illustrated thus: a bb cc dd ee ff g." Frank Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 219. A *strophe* is simply a verse of text.

¹¹ There were over 900 different sequences by the 12th century. Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, first edition (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947), 279.

worst cases.¹² The more serious problem, however, was the doctrinal content of these various sequences. Many of them were not biblically sound. In fact, in his *Formula Missae* (1523), Luther reduces the number of sequences to only three: “We allow no sequences or proses¹³ unless the bishop wishes to use the short one for the Nativity of Christ: *Grates nunc Omnes*. There are hardly any which smack of the Spirit, save those of the Holy Spirit: *Sancti Spiritus* and *Veni sancte spiritus*.”¹⁴

During the Counter Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church did much the same, reducing the number of sequences to four. Pius V’s *Missale Romanum* (1570) includes the Easter sequence, *Victimae paschali laudes*; the Corpus Christi sequence, *Lauda Sion*; the Pentecost sequence, *Veni Sancte Spiritus*; and the Requiem sequence, *Dies Irae*. A century later, the sequence for Our Lady of Sorrows, *Stabat Mater*, was added.¹⁵

Among the church orders which appeared after Luther, some were eager to drop the Latin sequences and adopt vernacular hymn singing in their place, while others were reluctant to abandon the sequences with which there were no doctrinal flaws.¹⁶ For example, in the mid-1500s, the Lutheran church order of Denmark suggested congregational hymn singing before the Gospel, excluding Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost, when the proper sequences could be used.¹⁷ Yet even with this allowance, the general use of singing the proper sequences fell into disuse.

The acceptable sequences were largely transformed into congregational hymns rather than choral works. This was another practical improvement because as the propers of the liturgy became more elaborate and drawn out during the Middle Ages, congregational singing decreased substantially, though not entirely.¹⁸ The Lutheran Reformation’s emphasis on congregational participation and singing meant that many of the choir’s former roles had to be assumed by the

¹² On this subject Luther says, “In church we do not want to quench the spirit of the faithful with tedium.” *Luther’s Works: American Edition*, vol. 53, *Liturgy and Hymns* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 24 (hereafter AE 53).

¹³ The *prose* was a less structured form of the sequence which ignored some of the sequence’s strict poetic and melodic rules. Kurth and Buszin, 5.

¹⁴ AE 53:24–25.

¹⁵ Vincent A. Lenti, “The Medieval Sequence As a Source of Hymn Texts,” *The Hymn* 47, no. 3 (July 1996): 28.

¹⁶ Kurth and Buszin, 6.

¹⁷ *Memoirs of the Lutheran Liturgical Association*, vol. 2 (Pittsburgh: Lutheran Liturgical Association, 1906), 63.

¹⁸ Paul Westermeyer, *Te Deum: The Church and Music* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 107–108.

congregation, and the easiest way to achieve this transition was through hymn singing.¹⁹ The result of this is that today several versions of the proper sequences and other ancient worship songs still remain as hymns, though their former use is long forgotten.²⁰

The ELH has a number of sequences hidden among her hymns. For example, the text of the Easter sequence is paraphrased in hymn 345, "Christ the Lord is Risen Today; Alleluia!" The text of the Corpus Christi sequence is abridged and translated in hymn 321, "Zion, To Thy Savior Singing." The Pentecost sequence is well represented by many hymns which allude to it, with hymn 11, "Come, Holy Ghost, in Love" being the most direct version. The Requiem sequence is well translated and appropriately arranged as hymn 537, "Day of Wrath." Perhaps surprising in a modern Lutheran hymnal is a purified version of the Our Lady of Sorrows sequence, hymn 294, "Near the Cross Was Mary Weeping." And even the Christmas sequence, mentioned by Luther but not retained in the Tridentine Missal, is at least alluded to in the first stanza of hymn 136, "O Jesus Christ, All Praise to Thee."²¹

A Proposal for Modern Sequence Hymns

There is no question that Christian worship is not a spectator sport. This is an emphasis which is highlighted by Lutheranism's emphasis on congregational hymns. Therefore the idea that the proper sequences should be unilaterally restored to their former liturgical position would be misguided. The proper sequences, because of the difficulty of their composition, were a part of the service which historically belonged to the choir. The congregation sat and listened. Though, in its proper place, choir music can be an effective addition to the beauty of the worship service, it would be disastrous to remove the congregation from participating. To this end, the choir's chief job is not to sing to the congregation, but to assist the congregation in singing their own songs.²²

¹⁹ Cheslyn Jones, et. al., eds. *The Study of Liturgy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 456.

²⁰ Fred L. Precht, ed., *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 496.

²¹ Though on this point there is debate. See AE 53:25n31.

²² F.R. Webber, *Studies in the Liturgy* (Eric: Ashby Printing Company, 1938), 70–71. "When it became fashionable to remove the choir from the west gallery to a platform adjoining the chancel, and finally into the chancel; the original function of this group of singers was forgotten. Their proper duty is to sing the parts of the service which vary from Sunday to Sunday, and to lead the congregation in the singing of the fixed parts of the service and the hymns. Now they became a group of entertainers,

Therefore it would be counterproductive to assign the singing of the sequences to the choir and leave it at that. The congregation should sing them themselves, as Luther preferred in his liturgical reforms.²³

To this end, the following arrangements of the historically significant sequences are provided as a means to take some of the forgotten parts of the Western liturgy and make them accessible to our parishioners today. Lyrically, the texts have been translated as stanzas, with the type of meter and cadence with which our congregations are already familiar. Musically, instead of the somewhat cumbersome plainchant, they have been arranged using melodies inspired by and invocative of the original chant tones. It is the author's hope that these settings and translations will be suitable even for a musically illiterate congregation to learn and use in their life of worship.

The sequence hymns arranged here are separated into two categories. First we will consider the sequences for the most important festivals of the Christian church year: *Victimae Paschali* for Easter Sunday, and *Veni Sancte Spiritus* for Pentecost. These are presented with the intention that they would make excellent stand-alone hymns, but they could also be used in their historical place as the gradual step toward the Gospel lesson. Such a usage would highlight the festive nature of the Easter and Pentecost celebrations. In addition, a new translation and setting of *Grates Nunc Omnes*, which Luther himself allows in his *German Mass* (1526), provides a proper sequence for each of the three high festivals: Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost.

Second, we will consider the sequences better suited as stand-alone hymns because of their historical connection to festivals not commonly celebrated in our circles.

as among the sects, and were expected to 'make the service interesting' by means of anthems, unblushingly sung to the congregation for their approval. Solo work soon followed."

²³ Robin Leaver, *Luther's Liturgical Music* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 229. "Here it is clear that Luther wanted vernacular hymnody to effectively replace the Latin Sequence on most Sundays of the church year."

Sequence Arrangements for Congregational Use

The Christmas Sequence: A New Translation and Setting

The first reference to *Grates nunc omnes* appears to be as an eleventh-century southeastern German hymn, properly called a “tropar.”²⁴ The Latin text is only a single stanza—a hallmark of the “troparion.” And from this eleventh century sequence a number of Low German “folk songs” (*leisen*) developed, eventually providing the basis for the first stanza of Luther’s Christmas hymn, *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ* (ELH 136, “O Jesus Christ, All Praise to Thee”).

This Luther hymn is not as widely known as some of his other work. It is important to remember that only the first stanza borrows imagery from the Christmas sequence proper. Luther wisely expanded the Christmas theme with his own words because the sequence is so short it is practically over before it begins. For this reason, it would probably be best to teach our congregations “O Jesus Christ, All Praise to Thee,” rather than introduce a new translation of the Christmas sequence to them.

Though teaching them Luther’s hymn will give you more long-term utility, for the sake of completeness, below is presented a new arrangement of *Grates nunc omnes* which would be suitable for congregational use.

Note the final “Alleluia! Amen” would be included only if this stanza is used as the sequence proper, and not as a stand-alone hymn.

²⁴ Hansjakob Becker, et al., *Geistliches Wunderhorn: Grosse Deutsche Kirchenlieder* (München: C.H. Beck, 2001), 70.

Highest Thanks Now Let Us Bring

A Congregational Arrangement of *Gratus Nunc Omnes*, the Christmas Sequence
77 77 77

Grates nunc omnes

Latin sequence

Tr. D. Hartwig, b. 1983

GRATES MELODY

Based on Latin sequence

D. Hartwig, b. 1983

High-est thanks now let us bring To God our Sav-ior and our

King For His birth at mid-night hour Saved us from the dev-il's

power. So with an-gel hosts we cry, "Glo-ry be to

God on high!" A - men. Al - le - lu - ia!

To The Paschal Victim, Christians

A Congregational Arrangement of *Victimae Paschali*, the Easter Sequence

87 87 77 88

Attr. to Wipo of Burgundy, c. 11th cent.

Tr. by D. Hartwig, b. 1983

PASCHAL VICTIM

Based on Latin sequence

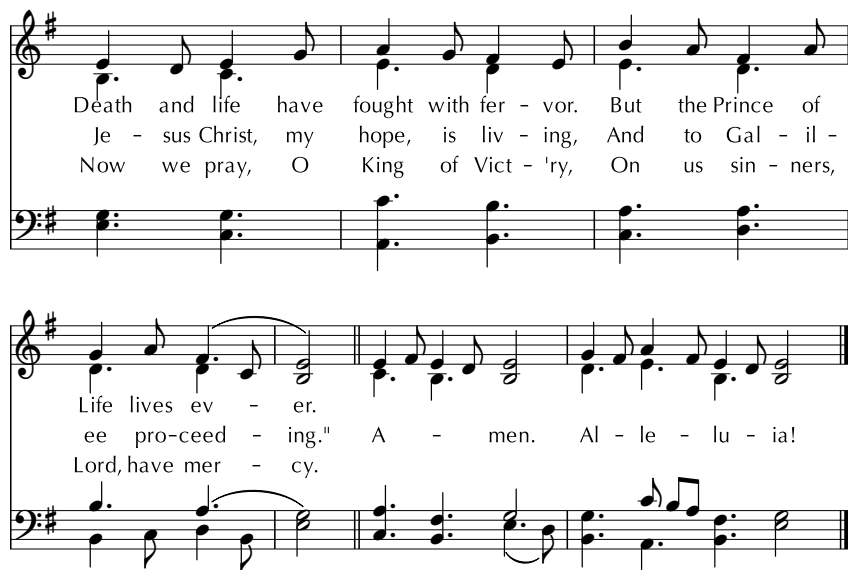
D. Hartwig, b. 1983

1. To the Pasch-al Vic - tim, Chris-tians, Off - er thank - ful
 2. Tell us what you saw, fair Mar - y, What you wit - ness'd
 3. Hap - py is the Chris-tian wit - ness, He who Mar - y's

prais - es sweet. He, the per - fect Lamb was giv - en
 on the way. "Je - sus' tomb lay bare and em - pty.
 words be-lieve, Trust - ing in the Gos - pel pro - mise

To re-deem His sin - ful sheep. Re - con-ciled are
 Glor - ious - ly He rose to-day! An - gels showed the
 Rath - er than words which de-ceive. We are cer - tain

sin - ful hordes To the Fa - ther ev - er-more.
 fun - 'ral cloth Fold - ed neat - ly in its spot.
 Christ now lives, Have no fear or doubt in this.



Death and life have fought with fer - vor. But the Prince of
 Je - sus Christ, my hope, is liv - ing, And to Gal - il -
 Now we pray, O King of Vict - 'ry, On us sin - ners,
 Life lives ev - er.
 ee pro - ceed - ing." A - men. Al - le - lu - ia!
 Lord, have mer - cy.

The Easter Sequence: A New Translation and Setting

Perhaps the most well-known of the proper sequences, *Victimae Paschali*, is an eleventh-century work usually ascribed to Wipo, a priest of Burgundy, France who served as chaplain to holy Roman emperors Conrad II (990–1039) and Heinrich III (1017–1056).²⁵ However, it has also been attributed to Notker the Stammerer, French king Robert II (972–1031), and notable sequence-writer Adam of St. Victor (d. 1146).

A hallmark of this sequence is the endearing picture of Mary Magdalene recalling her encounter with the resurrected Lord on Easter Sunday morning. Another interesting feature is the fifth strophe, often omitted since the sixteenth century,²⁶ speaking against the “outrageous lies of the Jews” (*Quam Judaeorum Turbae fallaci*) in regard to their denial of Jesus’ resurrection.

The Easter sequence is especially important because of its influence on other hymns, including two which are especially retained in the Lutheran tradition. *Christ is Erstanden* (ELH 344, “Christ the Lord is Risen Again”) came out of medieval Germany as a loose vernacular paraphrase whose stanzas would be sung interspersed with their proper

²⁵ Lenti, 29.

²⁶ Maruice Frost, ed., *Historical Companion to Hymns Ancient & Modern* (London: William Clowers & Sons, Ltd., 1962), 217.

Latin antecedents. This is how the hymn is presented in *Lutheran Service Book* hymns 459–460.²⁷ Luther himself was so fond of the hymn and sequence that they became the basis for his own hymn *Christ Lag In Todesbanden* (ELH 343, “Christ Jesus Lay in Death’s Strong Bands”).²⁸

The Easter sequence already has a very well-loved translation in “Christ the Lord is Risen Today; Alleluia” (ELH 345). However, the hymn is really a paraphrase rather than a strict translation because the thoughts of its base text are relatively loose as expressed in the hymn. Also the melody, *Llanfair*, though beautiful, carries with it none of the mood and character of the *plainsong* chant which historically accompanied it.

To remedy both of these problems, here is offered both a new translation of *Victimae Paschali* and a new musical setting, reflecting the basic melody and character of the old plainsong, while moving in a cadence which should be joyful and triumphant. To be used as a proper sequence on Easter Sunday, the final “Amen” and “Alleluia” are added. If used as a stand-alone hymn, the final “Amen” and “Alleluia,” would be omitted.

²⁷ *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 459–460.

²⁸ Lenti, 29.

The Pentecost Sequence: A Compilation and New Setting

The Pentecost sequence is the “Golden Sequence.” Strong tradition attributes it to Pope Innocent III (1198–1216), and it is “golden” because it is “generally regarded as one of the most significant and beautiful of all medieval Latin texts.”²⁹ It is composed of ten stanzas of three, seven-syllable lines, usually arranged as five stanzas of six lines. It is certainly not the oldest sequence written about the Holy Spirit. Predating the Pentecost sequence by about three centuries is *Veni creator Spiritus*, faithfully translated and set in the hymn “Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest” (ELH 10). Because of their similar titles, *Veni Sancte Spiritus* and *Veni creator Spiritus* are sometimes confused with one another. This is unfortunate because they are, in fact, two different hymns from two different eras.

Veni Sancte Spiritus has been used in the Roman liturgy as the sequence for Pentecost since its emergence in the thirteenth century. There are several English translations from which to pick. The most direct translation in our hymnal is ELH 11, “Come, Holy Ghost, In Love.” This translation is thematically fine, covering all the main parts of the Latin text, set to a melody which is enjoyable to sing: *Italian Hymn*. However, as with the Easter sequence, this tune would never be confused with the chant with which the Latin text was originally accompanied. Also, the Pentecost sequence was called the “Golden Sequence” partially because of its beautiful poetic structure of seven syllables per line, set in five (or ten) verses. ELH 11 is a wonderful stand-alone hymn, but to better connect the hymn to its historical usage, below is a translation set in 777 777, much like the Latin text. The tune has been composed to better evoke the feel of the original chant.

As with the previous hymns, the final “Amen” and “Alleluia” would only be used if this hymn is the proper sequence for Pentecost leading up the congregation’s “Alleluia” and the Gospel.

²⁹ Lenti, 29.

Holy Spirit, Come and Shine

A Congregational Arrangement of *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, The Pentecost Sequence
777 777

Attr. to Innocent III, c. 12th cent.
Tr. Composite

HOLY SPIRIT COME
Based on Latin sequence
D. Hartwig, b. 1983

1. Ho - ly Spir - it, come and shine On our souls
2. Come, O Coun - sel - or, the best, Tru - ly our
3. O most bless - ed Light of light, Fill the in -

with beams di - vine, Com - ing forth from heav - en
soul's dear - est guest, Sweet re - fresh - ment, sweet re -
most, sec - ret height Of Your faith - ful ser - vant's

bright. Come, O Fath - er of the poor,
pose. Rest in la - bor, cool - ness sweet,
soul! For with - out Your heaven - ly aid



Come, O Giv - er, great and sure, Come, our heart's
Temp - er - ing the burn - ing heat, Tru - est com -
Man would be for no - thing made; Not a sin



un - fail - ing light.
fort of our woes. A - men. Al - le - lu - ia!
could he con - trol.

Sequence Arrangements Better Suited as Hymns

Of the five proper sequences retained in the Roman liturgy, two are connected to festivals which are not commonly celebrated in our circles: *Lauda Sion* for the feast of Corpus Christi, and *Stabat Mater* for the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows. Another sequence which cannot be easily used in its original place is the requiem sequence: *Dies Irae*. However, these three can be profitably used as congregational hymns when the service theme permits it. Because *Stabat Mater* is a newer addition to the breviary for a festival scarcely found in our circles, all the essayist will do here is direct the reader to ELH 294, "Near the Cross Was Mary Weeping," a text-only hymn in the ELH's "Lent" section.

Dies Irae, the requiem sequence, will be similarly presented with neither a new translation nor setting because the current hymnic version of this sequence in ELH is perfectly adequate. In the ELH it is hymn number 537, "Day of Wrath." Practically speaking this hymn should probably never be used as a sequence for a funeral in our circles. So unfamiliar is this hymn among our people that to introduce it for such an emotional occasion would only serve to engender resentment against such an "unsingable hymn."

A wiser place for "Day of Wrath," is among the last Sundays of the Church year, focusing on the Last Judgment. Another interesting idea would be to use this hymn to highlight the eschatological themes of Advent. However, the inclusion of this hymn in Advent would undoubtedly mean the exclusion of some other much beloved hymn. If this hymn is utilized, it seems the last Sundays of the Church year would be the best place for it in modern times, as suggested by its placement in ELH.

The only new setting suggested in this section is the Corpus Christi sequence, *Lauda Sion*. Because of the frequency of the celebration of Holy Communion in our midst, this sequence can be readily used among us as a stand-alone hymn during Communion distribution.

The Communion Sequence: A Compilation and New Setting

The Corpus Christi sequence was written by the renowned systematician, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). It is filled with much beautiful and concrete imagery designed to highlight the reality of the sacramental presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. However, this imagery is tainted with the error of transubstantiation and propitiatory sacrifice. For this reason, Luther himself had a rather negative view of *Lauda Sion*.³⁰

The strength of *Lauda Sion* comes from some of the same sacramental images which lead to the hymn's downfall. A hymn with strong, concrete Eucharistic language can seem refreshing in a sea of representational schmaltz. However, in translation especially edited for Lutheran singing, the gross presentations of transubstantiation can be softened to reflect a proper real presence. The translation of this hymn in ELH accomplishes this by simply omitting several of the Latin stanzas. However, this omission causes the hymn to lose some of its more interesting teaching moments.

Therefore, in this suggested version of *Lauda Sion*, all but two of the Latin stanzas have been restored, albeit thoroughly edited for language usage and doctrinal content.

Melodically, a new musical setting based on the melody of the *Laudes Crucis attollamus* chant is arranged and provided. This hymn, with its 10 stanzas, would be a welcome addition to any congregation's Communion distribution repertoire.

³⁰ Because *Lauda Sion* teaches transubstantiation, "Martin Luther abhorred it, probably also because he had no good opinion of Thomas [Aquinas] himself. He accuses him of perverting the Scripture in this hymn, 'as though he were the worst enemy of God, or else an idiot.'" Samuel Duffield, *The Latin Hymn-Writers and Their Hymns* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1889), 269.

Zion, To Thy Savior Singing

A Congregational Arrangement of *Laude Zion*, The Communion Sequence

887 887

Laude Sion Salvatorem

T. Aquinas, 1227-1274

Tr. A.R. Thompson, 1830-87, sts. 1-4, 9-10;

and H.T. Henry, 1862-1946, sts. 5-8, alt.

ZION'S SUPPER

Based on "Laudes Crucis Attollamus"

D. Hartwig, b. 1983

1. Zi - on to thy Sav - ior sing - ing, To thy prince and shep - herd
 2. Of all won - ders that can thrill thee, And with a - dor - a - tion
 3. Fill thy lips to ov - er - flow - ing With sweet praise, His mer - cy

bring - ing Sweet - est hymns of love and praise,
 fill thee, What than this can great - er be,
 show - ing Who this heav'n - ly tab - le spread:

Thou wilt nev - er reach the meas - ure Of His worth, by all the
 That Him - self to thee He giv - eth? He that eat - eth ev - er
 On this day so glad and ho - ly, To each long - ing spir - it

treas - ure Of thy most ec - sta - tic lays.
 liv - eth, For the Bread of life is He.
 low - ly Giv - eth He the liv - ing bread.

4. Here the King hath spread His table
Whereon eyes of faith are able
Christ our Passover to trace;
Shadows of the Law are going,
Light and life and truth inflowing,
Night to day is giving place.
5. And as He hath done and planned it,
“Do this”—hear His love command it,
“For the memory of me.”
Thus as we Your Word obeyeth
Simple bread and wine do changeth
To the food which sets us free.
6. Thus in faith the Christian heareth
That Christ’s Flesh as bread appeareth,
And as wine His Precious Blood.
Though we neither feel nor see it,
Living faith doth still believe it
Over things not understood.
7. Lo! beneath the species dual
There is hid a precious a jewel
Far beyond creation’s reach!
For His flesh He’s truly feeding,
And His blood as drink He’s giving.
He is truly under each.
8. Good and bad, they come to greet Him
Unto life the former eat Him,
And the latter unto death.
These find death and those find
heaven;
See, from the same life-seed given,
How the harvest differeth!
9. Lo, this blessed food descending
Heav’nly love is hither sending,
Hungry lips on earth to feed:
So the paschal lamb was given,
So the manna came from heaven,
Isaac was His type indeed.
10. O good Shepherd, Bread life-giving,
Us, Thy grace and life receiving,
Feed and shelter evermore;
Thou on earth our footsteps guiding,
We in heav’n with Thee abiding,
With all saints will Thee adore.

The Liturgical Sequence Today

The proper liturgical sequences have been a part of the worship of God’s people for over a thousand years in some form, evolving from elaborate and lengthy plainchant to some of the most familiar hymns of today. When used carefully, they can still serve as reverent additions to Christian worship, offering both the strength of historical lineage and the variety of modern musical settings. Such was their usage even by Luther himself as he sought to reform the worship of the sixteenth-century church and make it accessible and beneficial to God’s people. ^[LSQ]

Works Cited

- Becker, Hansjakob, et al. *Geistliches Wunderhorn: Grosse Deutsche Kirchenlieder*. München: C.H. Beck, 2001.
- Britt, Matthew. *The Hymns of the Breviary and Missal*. New York: Benziger Brothers, 1922.
- Duffield, Samuel. *The Latin Hymn-Writers and Their Hymns*. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1889.
- Frost, Maruice, ed. *Historical Companion to Hymns Ancient & Modern*. London: William Clowers & Sons, Ltd., 1962.
- Jones, Cheslyn, Geoffrey Wainwright and Edward Yarnold, eds. *The Study of Liturgy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Kurth, Erwin and Walter Buszin, *The Graduals for the Church Year*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1944.
- Leaver, Robin A. *Luther's Liturgical Music: Principles and Implications*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2007.
- Lenti, Vincent A. "The Medieval Sequence As a Source of Hymn Texts." *The Hymm*. Vol. 47, No. 3 (July, 1996): 27–31.
- Liber Usualis: Missae Et Officii*. Paris, France: Desclée and Company, 1924.
- Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works: American Edition*, Vol. 53: *Liturgy and Hymns*. Ed. by Ulrich S. Leupold. Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1965.
- Lutheran Service Book*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006.
- Maschke, Timothy. *Gathered Guests: A Guide To Worship in the Lutheran Church*. Second edition. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009.
- Memiors of the Lutheran Liturgical Association*. Vol. 2. Pittsburg: Lutheran Liturgical
- Precht, Fred L. ed. *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993.
- Reed, Luther D. *The Lutheran Liturgy*. First edition. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947.
- Senn, Frank. *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997.
- Webber, F.R., *Studies in the Liturgy*. Erie: Ashby Printing Company, 1938.
- Westermeyer, Paul. *Te Deum: The Church and Music*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998.
- Wilson-Dickson, Andrew. *The Story of Christian Music*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.

Sermon on Luke 5:1–10: Seminary Opening 2015

Thomas F. Kuster
Professor, Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary
Mankato, Minnesota

LSQ Vol. 56, No. 1 (March 2016)

IT'S A BITTERSWEET TOPIC AS THE DAYS ARE getting cooler and summer is ending, but let's address it anyway. Let's talk fishing, this time with special attention to the tools. The two verses from Luke 5 highlighted in the reading will focus our attention. They are from the familiar story of the calling of the first disciples, which reads as follows:

Luke 5:1–10: *One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's*

partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men.”

When Jesus approached this important scene, the fishermen were taking good care of the main tool of their trade, their nets. Nets weren’t the only means of fishing back then; when Jesus told Peter in Matthew 17 to fetch a coin to pay taxes, he told him to cast in a hook. But for commercial fishing, catching fish in volume, making a living from it – for serious fishing there had to be nets. Without the nets, there was no trade, no occupation, no income.

So the nets had to be cared for. Nets can’t have been cheap back then. They may have been the most expensive occupational investment for fishermen, possibly more than even the boats, which were easier to get. And there was no strong nylon weave back then. The Egyptian nets of the day were made of water reed fibers. Others were made from the fibers of date palms, papyrus, and even grass. That’s why a good load of fish could start to tear the net, and so it happened this day. As Mark recorded this incident, the men Jesus encountered on the seashore were not just washing, they were mending their nets.

But Jesus called them, inviting them to catch not fish but **men**. And they left their nets and followed him.

Nets were the tool for catching fish. For “catching men,” what is the main tool of the trade, the implement without which there is no success? Of course, it’s the Word of God, and that includes the visible Word of God, the holy Sacraments. It’s what we call the means of grace.

That’s a person-catching net made not of crisscrossing strands of rope, but rather of these two strands woven together: objective justification, and Christ’s institution. One strand is the work of Christ to pay fully for the sins of the entire world; the other is his command: preach the Gospel, baptize them, take and eat and drink.

We saw at the shore of the Galilee Lake that there is a time for fishing, and a time for preparing the tools, washing and mending the nets. This is the time, in the seminary, when you prepare the tools, wash the net of the means of grace.

In **Biblical Theology** you study the Gospel itself, embodied in the Word throughout Scripture from beginning to end – the message that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not counting their sins against them, and that the Holy Spirit wants this forgiveness offered, conveyed, and sealed to all people through the means of grace.

In **Systematic Theology** you are learning how the means of grace, the Gospel and Sacraments, are correctly and properly understood, and you are learning how to defend the purity of Scripture's teachings about the Gospel and the Sacraments against the distortions of sectarianism and fanaticism.

In **Historical Theology**, you are learning how the good news was foretold in the early history of the world, manifested in the life of Israel, fulfilled in the incarnation, perfect life, atoning death, and justifying resurrection of our Lord Jesus, and proclaimed by the apostles. You are celebrating how the Holy Spirit has employed the means of grace to create his church throughout the world, and especially in the train of events leading to our particular fellowship.

In **Practical Theology** you are learning how the Holy Spirit will work through you as you rightly divide the Word of truth in your own flock, and administer the Sacraments as the Lord instituted them.

Seminary years (believe it or not) pass quickly. They are important years, a time for preparing the tools provided us by none other than God the Holy Spirit. Like Peter at the lake, we know we are not worthy. But by God's grace we have our Lord's forgiveness, and we have our Lord's call.

So let's get the school year started, washing our nets, getting them ready with the Holy Spirit's power to catch men. [LSQ](#)

Book Review

LSQ Vol. 56, No. 1 (March 2016)

Bible Study Review: The Gospel to Share

Koester, Robert J. "The Gospel to Share: Scriptural Foundations for Mission Work." Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2015. CD containing Leader's Guide and Student Lessons. \$42.50 (direct download for \$39.99).

While the ELS has been carrying out its five-year plan of "Engaging Others with Jesus," one emphasis has been to encourage every congregation of the synod to think of itself as a "mission" congregation. Robert J. Koester has produced a Bible study, "The Gospel to Share," part of NPH's "Bible Insights" series, which would be of great benefit to congregations looking to enhance their mission mindset.

It should be stated at the beginning of this review that Koester's use of "mission work" is appropriately

broad. He does not advocate making every member of a congregation feel that they have to go out knocking on doors or make Law-Gospel presentations to their co-workers in order to be involved in mission work. Rather, he emphasizes that the Christian's overall lifestyle, how they function in their various vocations *as* a Christian, is the way they are involved in mission work. Koester does touch on the congregation's mission work as well, producing a nice synthesis of personal and corporate efforts.

The study is divided into nine lessons which could likely be covered over nine sessions. Each lesson begins with a "worship" section, a responsive reading from Isaiah, Revelation, or the Psalms. A basic question-answer format is followed throughout. For a few of the longer lessons, smaller breakout groups are suggested for portions of the study.

Koester has laid out this study quite well, beginning with three lessons on

“The Good News We Have to Share.” The first lesson focuses on heaven as a great motivator for mission work: we want people we know or meet to be in heaven with us for eternity. The second lesson tackles “justification,” concluding that the statement, “God has forgiven your sins; believe it” (Leader’s Guide, 12) as the best way to think about our foundation for mission work. Mission work is also not about “growing” a congregation—the person with whom we share the good news of God’s love may not become associated with our congregation. We simply share the good news when we can. The third lesson, dovetailing well with the second, is a look at “reconciliation.” Here Koester uses biblical accounts, especially the parable of the prodigal son/loving father, to show what God has done for all people through Christ.

The fourth lesson concentrates on how mission work is related to the biblical teaching of predestination. A proper understanding of predestination actually helps the Christian relax in his approach to mission work, because the results of that work are not dependent on their actions or words. God and God alone will bring to faith his elect even while he works through us.

Lesson five examines various figures and accounts from the Old Testament to show that God has always wanted his faithful to be involved in mission work. Koester cites Noah, Joseph, Naomi, and David, among others, as examples of God’s people who shared his gospel. He also makes reference to observances such as the Passover that were witnesses to the unbeliever.

In lesson six, Koester shows how God not only prepared his disciples but also how he prepares modern-day Christians for mission work. Koester states, “Deciding what methods to use in bringing God’s Word to others is a very important part of spreading the gospel. But mission work cannot be reduced to methods. The foundation on which methods themselves are built must be laid first. You have this foundation, given to you by the Lord in a very natural way...” (LG, 32). Various accounts of Jesus’ interaction with his disciples are studied, focusing on what the disciples were learning as they spent time with their Savior. In like manner, “The key to mission work is the simple work of using God-given opportunities to express what you already know from having ‘been with Jesus’ in your own life” (LG, 34).

Lesson seven is an invitation to “Learn from the Apostles’ Approach to Mission Work.” The focus in this lesson is on the Apostle Paul’s attitude toward mission work (that he strove only to proclaim Christ in straightforward ways), his methods of mission work (that he did not deceive people to try to win them for Christ), and his sermon in Acts 17 (that he used a God-given opportunity to proclaim sin and grace). Koester’s comments about Paul’s methods are especially appreciated in this day and age; he encourages congregations to evaluate their outreach methodology so that “bait-and-switch” tactics are avoided. One application of this thought might be: Do we present ourselves as something we are not simply to get people through the door? Do

we downplay certain “objectionable” practices (e.g., close Communion) so that visitors are not discouraged from returning? As Koester points out, it is acceptable for a congregation to think outside the box regarding mission work, but we must keep in mind that we should not go outside of *God’s* box.

“The Numerical Results of Paul’s Mission Work” is the focus of the eighth lesson. Particular locales of Paul’s work are examined to show how God blessed that work. Koester emphasizes that while Paul did not enjoy the same “success” in each place he worked, God was still in charge of the results. Regarding why some congregations may be blessed numerically more than others, Koester states, “The key to mission work is being active and faithful in one’s own location, with all its opportunities and hurdles, proclaiming the Word and walking through the doors of opportunity God gives” (LG 48).

The final lesson, “Christians Are Gifted to Spread the Gospel,” is an encouragement that the Lord will use us in mission work to his glory

even though our efforts are far from perfect. Koester rightly holds that while not all members of a congregation would be comfortable in more “direct” mission work (e.g., door-to-door canvassing, evangelism calls), every member of a congregation can serve the Lord as they are enabled by him.

“The Gospel to Share” should be considered for inclusion in the Bible study curriculum of any ELS congregation. Koester not only reviews some of the central teachings of Scripture (e.g., justification), he does not “guilt” people into thinking they have to “do” mission work. Instead, mission work is presented as something that is an everyday part of the Christian’s life.

The Bible study includes the masters for the Leader’s Guide and the Student Lessons in three formats, reproducible in any quantity for the purchaser’s use. The study is available as a CD or as a direct download from www.nph.net.

– Michael K. Smith

LSQ



Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary
6 Browns Court
Mankato MN 56001

PRINTED MATTER