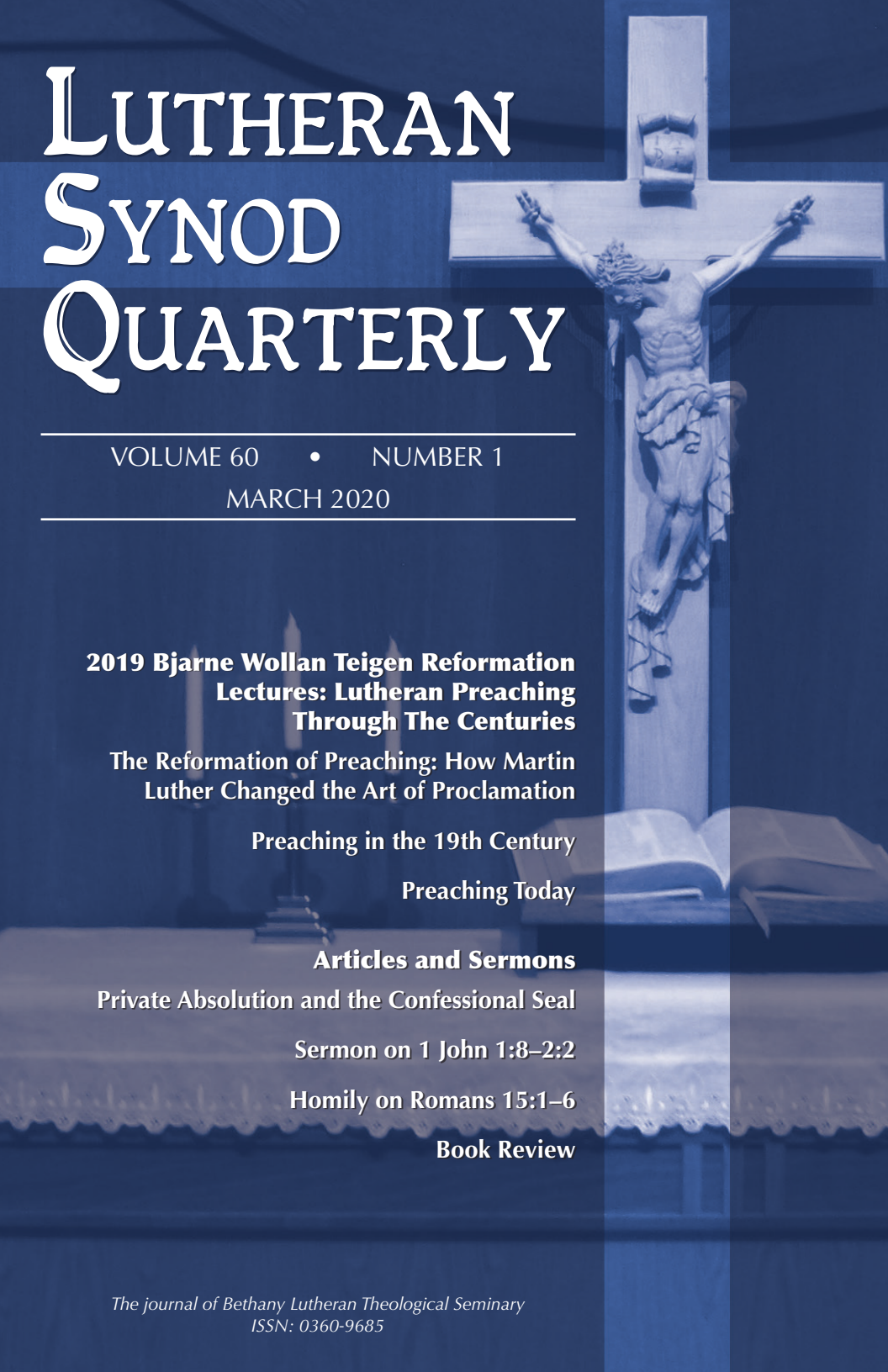
Lutheran Synod Quarterly

VOLUME 60 • NUMBER 1
MARCH 2020



The journal of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary
ISSN: 0360-9685

Lutheran Synod Quarterly

VOLUME 60 • NUMBER 1
MARCH 2020

The journal of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary

Lutheran Synod Quarterly

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: rtaed@rtabstracts.org; Website: www.rtabstracts.org).

Contents

LSQ Vol. 60, No. 1 (March 2020)

Foreword

LSQ Vol. 60, No. 1 (March 2020)

IN THIS ISSUE OF THE *QUARTERLY*, WE ARE PLEASED to share with our readers the annual Bjarne Wollan Teigen Reformation Lectures delivered October 31–November 1, 2019, in Mankato, Minnesota. These lectures are sponsored jointly by Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. This was the fifty-second 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 presenter was Dr. Paul W. Robinson of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. Dr. Robinson is professor of Historical Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis and has been on the faculty since 1996. His areas of expertise include the Crusades, the late Middle Ages, the history of preaching, and Martin Luther. He received the Master of Divinity and Master of Sacred Theology degrees from Concordia Seminary and the Ph.D. in medieval history from the University of Chicago. Prof. Robinson is editor of *The Annotated Luther Volume 3: Church and Sacraments* (Augsburg), to which he also contributed the selection "On the Councils and the Church." He is author of the biography *Martin Luther: A Life Reformed* (Pearson Longman). In addition to writing essays and articles for a variety of books and journals, Prof. Robinson has presented at conferences around the country and internationally.

His *Concordia Journal* article "Three Myths about the Crusades: What They Mean for Christian Witness" (Winter 2016 issue) received a second-place Award of Merit from the Associated Church Press. Prof. Robinson and his wife, Jane, have three grown children.

The second presenter was Dr. Thomas A. Kuster of Bethany Lutheran College and Theological Seminary. After teaching Communication courses in both institutions where he occupied the Eleanor Wilson Chair of Speech/English Communication since 1991, Dr. Kuster retired from Bethany Lutheran College in 2011, and from Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary in 2018. Earlier he served as assistant pastor to his father, A. V. Kuster, at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Madison, Wisconsin (1966–69), and pastor at Faith Lutheran Church, Muskegon, Michigan (1969–71). For twenty years he was a professor of English at Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota, where he still resides. He graduated from Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin in 1961, where he was especially inspired by the scholarship of Dr. Elmer Kiessling. He earned an M.A. in Speech from Indiana University in 1962. His thesis, written under Dr. Robert Gunderson, was titled *Frontier Homily: the Preaching of Indiana Methodist Circuit Riders.* After receiving an M.Div. (B.D.) degree from Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary in 1966, he studied at the University of Wisconsin, where he majored in Rhetorical Theory, with minors in Philosophy and Drama Theory. His 1969 Ph.D. dissertation, directed by Dr. Lloyd Bitzer, was entitled *The Fellowship Dispute in the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod: a Rhetorical Study of Ecumenical Change.*

Dr. Kuster was gifted with several leadership opportunities, among them president of Lutheran Collegians (1966–68), president of the League of Minnesota Human Rights Commissions (1981–84), president of the National Parliamentary Debate Association (2001–03), president of the Communication and Theatre Association of Minnesota (2003–04), and he has been executive director of the Christ in Media Institute at Bethany Lutheran College since its founding in 2009. While president of the NPDA, he twice led teams of Bethany debaters to tournaments in Romania, Macedonia, and Serbia. In the last two countries, he brought greetings from the NPDA and Bethany to audiences in the countries' legislative chambers. He has lectured at Southwest University Neofit Rilski in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria, and at the IDEA international debate conference in Krakow, Poland. With his wife Judy, a professor of Communication Disorders, he enjoyed Fulbright Specialist appointments teaching communication, conflict management, and critical

thinking at United International College in Zhuhai, China, and at Daelim University College in Seoul, Korea. He and Judy (Maginnis), married for 52 years, have nine children—seven of them adopted—and 12 grandchildren.

The third presenter was Pres. Emeritus Paul O. Wendland of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin. Prof. Wendland is currently a professor of New Testament and Homiletics at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. In the New Testament, his specialties are biblical interpretation, Romans, Galatians, and 1 Peter. He grew up in Zambia where he also served as a missionary. Later, he was called to be a parish pastor in Michigan and then to be a home missionary in Utah. From 1993 to 2001, he taught Latin and English literature at Martin Luther College, New Ulm Minnesota. Since 2001 he has been serving at the seminary, from 2004 to 2019 as its president. He is the author of two volumes of the People's Bible: *1 Chronicles* and *2 Chronicles* (Northwestern Publishing House, 1994 and 1998). On June 10, 1979, he was united in marriage with Margaret Anne Berg of Milwaukee. The Wendlands have three children: Miriam (m. to Ryan Rupprecht), Anne, and John (m. to Taylor Swanson). They have been blessed with one grandchild, Konstantin.

This year the theme of the Reformation Lectures was "Lutheran Preaching through the Centuries." The lectures emphasized proper Lutheran preaching. The first lecture, given by Dr. Robinson, was entitled, "The Reformation of Preaching: How Martin Luther Changed the Art of Proclamation." In this essay there was a discussion of homiletical work in the pre-Reformation and Reformation era. The works of Luther, Melanchthon, and Johannes Mathesius were highlighted. The second lecture, presented by Dr. Kuster, was entitled, "Preaching in the Nineteenth Century." Here the essay centered on the sermonizing of a number of important Lutheran preachers. Among those men discussed were Charles Porterfield Krauth, F. C. D. Wyneken, C. F. W. Walther, U. V. Koren, H. C. Schwan, and Henry Sieck. The third lecture, given by Pres. Em. Wendland, was entitled, "Preaching Today." In this essay the essayist reviewed current trends in preaching and outlined a Lutheran identity in preaching. He pointed out what makes Lutheran preaching distinctly and uniquely Lutheran.

At the General Pastoral Conference of the ELS in October 2019, the Doctrine Committee gave a presentation entitled "Private Absolution and the Confessional Seal." This presentation explains the use of

private absolution in the Lutheran church and of the confessional seal, concerning which questions have arisen.

Also included in this *Quarterly* is a sermon on 1 John 1:8–2:2 by the Rev. Shawn Stafford, pastor of Hartland and Manchester Lutheran Churches in Hartland and Manchester, Minnesota; a homily on Romans 15:1–6 by the Rev. Jerome Gernander, pastor of Bethany Lutheran Church in Princeton, Minnesota; and a book review of *Purposeful Grieving* by the Rev. James Kassera, pastor of Divine Mercy Lutheran Church in Hudson Oaks, Texas.

– GRS

The Reformation of Preaching:
How Martin Luther Changed the Art of Proclamation

Paul W. Robinson
Concordia Seminary
St. Louis, Missouri

LSQ Vol. 60, No. 1 (March 2020)

IN THE PAST 500 YEARS, HISTORIANS HAVE COME UP with a long list of things without which the Reformation would not have happened: the printing press, anti-clericalism, conciliarism, humanism, economic change, class struggle, the German political situation, and the Swiss political situation, and the French political situation … you get the idea. I will argue this morning that the Reformation would not have occurred and could not have occurred, at least in the form it did, without preaching. By the end of the sixteenth century, preaching took place more often and in more places than it had for a millennium. Without preaching, princes might have remained indifferent to the reformers. Without preaching, the Reformation message would not have penetrated the countryside. Without preaching, priests and pastors themselves would have had no reason to engage with Reformation theology—whether to promote it or to counter it. Without preaching, the devotional literature of the Reformation, relying as it did on collections of sermons, would have been impoverished.

While all of that could be said of any of a variety of reformations—Lutheran, Zwinglian, Calvinist, or English—I will confine myself to the Lutheran Reformation and primarily to Luther himself. Even within those limitations there is much to be said, but that was not always the case. When Fred Meuser, who was then president of Trinity Seminary in Columbus, took "Luther the Preacher" as his topic for the 1983 Hein

Lectures, he said he was addressing the aspect of Luther most frequently ignored by scholars and writers.

> Look through all the publicity of all the programs and publications of this anniversary year. If you can point out one, even one, that features a single lecture or program on Luther the preacher, you will be my guest for dinner at a restaurant of your choice. Literature on Luther the preacher is virtually non-existent in English.[1]

Fortunately for my topic today, that is no longer the case. Not only have scholars paid more attention to Luther's sermons, they have begun to study them as evidence for the subject of preaching rather than simply mining them for information about theology or society.[2] In this approach to studying sermons, scholars of the Middle Ages got there first and helped to pave the way—which may surprise you if you have imbibed the classic narrative of the Reformation in which the Reformers remedied a lack of preaching in the church. Yet preaching was alive and well, in a few places even abundant, in the century before Luther, and that is where I will begin the story.

Preaching in the Late Middle Ages

The myth that there was no preaching in the Middle Ages came about for two reasons. First, preaching had been lacking before the twelfth century when a revival of lectionary preaching in connection with the Mass and other church services prompted an increase in the number of sermons being preached. Though homilaries and catechetical sermons were available prior to 1100, after that date more and more sermons began to appear in circulation in manuscript form. Evidence from medieval libraries shows that by the beginning of the 15th century, in part because of the advent of cheap paper for copying, sermons made up a large percentage of the explosion of books in that century.[3] Second, the task of preaching was not assigned to priests, and for that reason there was little preaching in rural areas until the end of the 16th—and

[1] Fred W. Meuser, *Luther the Preacher* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1983), 9–10. In the same year, Detlef Lehman published "Luther als Prediger," *Oberurseler Hefte*, Heft 17, 5–23.

[2] Seven years after Meuser's lecture, Patrick Ferry published "Martin Luther on Preaching: Promises and Problems of the Sermon as a Source of Reformation History and as an Instrument of the Reformation," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 54 (1990): 265–280.

[3] Matthew Wranovix, *Priests and Their Books in Late Medieval Eichstätt* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2017).

possibly into the 17th— century. Traditionally, bishops preached in the churches, and when they were unable to preach, either through press of business or inability, church legislation instructed them to delegate the task. Some bishops preached and some delegated, but many did neither. This situation, too, began to be addressed around 1100 when the Europe-wide reform of religious life led to an emphasis on action rather than contemplation. Part of the call to action for clergy and monks involved preaching. Eventually, the mendicant orders, especially the Dominicans and Franciscans, supplied the church with a mobile corps of preachers. Their preaching mission arose from a recognition that the population in growing urban areas was poorly served by existing church structures. As the cities continued to grow, their wealthier populations often aspired to a better experience of church than the bishops provided. As a result, especially in the cities of the Holy Roman Empire, city councils routinely hired learned theologians whose sole task was to preach in the city church. Huldrych Zwingli became one such preacher when he accepted the position offered to him by the city of Zurich. We will hear from another city preacher, Johann Geiler von Kaisersberg, in a few minutes.

What form did these late medieval sermons take? First, we must recognize another common myth, namely, that preachers preached in Latin, the language of the church, and ordinary people could not understand them. This idea arose, no doubt, from the fact that most of the written sermons from this time are in Latin. Yet we know from some of the sermon manuscripts themselves and from other sources that preaching, except on rare occasions, was in the vernacular. Because medieval preachers memorized their sermons rather than writing them out beforehand, however, the vernacular language version of what was preached rarely survives. Written sermons were either transcriptions made on the spot or worked out later by the preacher himself for publication. Those who could write preferred to write in Latin, and Latin could be read by educated people throughout Europe. As a result, sermons that were preached in French, German, Italian, Spanish, or whatever language the audience required, were almost always written down in Latin.

Although it is true that the language in which a sermon was preached would have made it accessible to a wide audience, the content and structure did not always serve clear communication as effectively. The written evidence of medieval sermons displays a wide range of sophistication and complication—everything from a briefly sketched

outline that covers half a page to a large volume containing an entire series of densely argued sermons. By the end of the Middle Ages, one approach to sermon structure reigned supreme—the so-called university sermon. In such a sermon, the text was expounded through various divisions and subdivisions based on individual words. Each point was supported by other passages of Scripture, quotations from theological authorities, and examples. From even this brief description we can see why the structure came to be called a university sermon. The preachers had brought the university classroom into the pulpit with them, relying on the tactics that served them so well in theological debate to persuade their congregations. This type of sermon is also not unlike the sermons many of us were taught to preach back in the day, and we will come to the reason for that later.

The Reformation of Preaching

If there was regular, if not abundant, preaching on the eve of the Reformation, what is it that Luther changed, and why did he change it? Simply put, he changed who it was that preached in the churches and how Christians understood what a sermon was and what it did. Of all the important changes wrought by the Reformation, the transformation of priests into pastors probably gets the least attention. The change from priests to pastors was no mere shift in nomenclature but a fundamental reordering of the pastoral office and its duties. In the medieval church, the clergy in general enjoyed an exalted status separate from the mass of mere believers. Those ordained as priests were believed to have been given power to dispense the sacraments, especially the power to celebrate the Mass. This power, conferred in ordination, is what enabled the priest to transform bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. The priest's principle task was to offer this sacrifice on behalf of the living and the dead. Luther's conception of the church turned the office of priest on its head. He taught that all Christians were priests with equal access to God and equal power with regard to preaching and sacraments. The office of pastor was not based on special power conferred through ordination but rather was rooted in the power of God's word and the call of God's people to minister to them publicly. The pastor was simply one of the priests who had been given the vocational jurisdiction of serving the other priests with God's word in both its preached and sacramental form. In the Roman church, priests did not routinely preach; it was simply not part of the job description. Lutheran pastors, however, whose role was rooted in the ministry of the word, had the

responsibility to administer that word in its preached and sacramental forms. In contrast to priests, whose role was offering a sacrifice, pastors preached the word.

The transitional path from priest to pastor was far from quick and frequently rough going. The first Lutheran pastors, after all, had been trained and had served as Roman priests. Luther himself lamented the problems this shift initially created in the introduction to the Large Catechism.

> Some [pastors and preachers] do it [i.e., neglect the catechism] out of their great learnedness, while others do so out of pure laziness and concern for their bellies. They approach the task as if they were pastors and preachers for their stomachs' sake and had nothing to do but live off the fat of the land, as they were used to doing under the papacy. Everything that they are to teach and preach is now so very clearly and easily presented in so many salutary books, which truly deliver what the other manuals promised in their titles: "Sermons That Preach Themselves," "Sleep Soundly," "Be Prepared," and "Thesaurus." Yet they are not upright and honest enough to buy such books, or, if they have them already, to consult or read them. Oh, these shameful gluttons and servants of their bellies are better suited to be swineherds and keepers of dogs than guardians of souls and pastors.[4]

The problem Luther diagnosed in 1529 was preaching, or rather the lack of will and probably ability to do it. In order to support preaching, Luther and others had supplied books of evangelical sermons, and these books actually provided what older sermon collections had promised. Luther notes, however, that the evangelical books fared no better than the older manuals had and sat unused, if the pastors owned them at all.

Luther, at the same time he made Roman priests into evangelical pastors, promoted a second change concerning how God's people should understand what preaching did. As he noted as early as 1520, lack of preaching was not the real problem in the church of his day. The problem with preaching was the content of the sermons and the theology that underlay that content. Medieval preaching aimed at moving the hearers to use the church's sacramental system, often particularly the sacrament of penance, in order to receive God's grace. Preaching did not in itself confer this grace but could only tell the hearer how to obtain

[4] *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 379.

it. Preaching presented information about salvation but did not itself proclaim salvation. This aspect of preaching was one reason for Johann Geiler von Kaisersberg's lament about preachers.

> Preachers ought to follow God and themselves drink in what they pour out. But do you know how it is for us preachers? A preacher is like a tailor. A tailor takes a mouth full of water, but he does not drink it, it does not touch his heart. Instead he sprinkles and sprays it on the cloth. That's how it is for us preachers. We must ourselves master the things we speak about, the things we have drunk in from books, so that we treat our subject properly. This is a difficult thing. Therefore, there are many of us who are like pipes, but few like silver pitchers. A pipe receives the wine, which then flows through and does not remain in the pipe; but a silver pitcher, when one fills it full, runs over but still holds enough within itself. We are like pipes, through which teaching and Scripture flow, but nothing remains in them.[5]

Whether the preacher is a pipe or a pitcher, he is only a delivery vessel, and it is left to the one who receives the teaching and Scripture he provides to do something with it. Geiler was the cathedral preacher in Strasbourg from 1478 to 1510 and a learned man, but he had by no means freed himself from medieval notions of preaching. In the medieval church, preaching always played second fiddle to the sacraments, which could actually give the grace that preaching could only point to and promise.[6]

For Luther, such an understanding of preaching made God's Word too static by far. Kolb and Arand have summarized how Luther understood God's Word this way:

> When the Holy Spirit fashions the message of Christ in human language, these words are God's Word and an effective expression of his power. They do what he wants them to do. God acts through the words that he calls "gospel" to do more than inform human beings about his own disposition toward them. His Word is what modern

[5] Quoted in Rudolf Cruel, *Geschichte der deutschen Predigt im Mittelalter* (Detmold, 1879), 553–54.

[6] David C. Steinmetz, "Luther, the Reformers, and the Bible," in *Living Traditions of the Bible: Scripture in Jewish, Christian & Muslim Practice*, ed. James Bowley (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), 164–65.

> linguists call "performative speech." Indeed, it is "creative speech." It accomplishes his will and actualizes his presence in human lives.[7]

Among other things, God's Word has the power to condemn and forgive, or, as Luther often put it, to kill and to make alive. "With these two terms," Kolb and Arand write, "Luther both described *and brought about* two actions of God: his condemnation of sin and his restoration of human righteousness in his sight"[8] [emphasis mine]. From the very beginning of the Reformation, Luther described God's activity in this way. In *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520), he wrote:

> Christ, like John [the Baptist], did not only say, "Repent," but added the word of faith, saying, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." For we must preach not only one word of God but both, "bringing forth new and old from the treasure"—both the voice of the law and the word of grace. The voice of the law ought to be "brought forth" so that people may be terrified and led to a knowledge of their sins and thereby directed toward repentance and a better basis for life. But the word must not stop there. For this would be only "to wound" and not "to bind up"; "to strike down" and not "to heal"; "to kill" and not "to make alive"; "to humble" but not "to exalt." Therefore, the word of grace and promised forgiveness ought also to be preached in order to instruct and awaken faith. Without this other word [of grace], law, contrition, penitence, and everything else are done and taught in vain.[9]

Luther's idea for transforming the church was for faithful preachers to do God's work in the world by the power of his word. "*We* must preach" became the rallying cry for reform. It is appropriate, then, that we turn now to Luther's own preaching.

Luther's Preaching

Luther himself became a preacher in 1511 when Johann von Staupitz sent him to Wittenberg to teach at the university and preach in the monastery. Two years later, Luther found himself appointed as preacher at St. Mary's, the city church, as well. He preached almost

[7] Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 135.

[8] Kolb and Arand, 148.

[9] "The Freedom of a Christian," *The Annotated Luther, Volume 1: The Roots of Reform*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 518–19.

constantly there until he introduced Johannes Bugenhagen, a university colleague, as his successor in 1523. He continued to serve there when Bugenhagen was absent and also preached regularly in his home. He preached on Sunday and on weekdays, and he left behind thousands of sermons.

We must recognize at the outset, however, that the evidence for Luther's preaching is second hand. Like other preachers of his day, Luther did not write out his sermons in advance. He usually took only an outline (*Konzept*) into the pulpit with him as a brief sketch of what he planned to say.[10] When Luther did write out a sermon, it was almost always for publication in some form and, for that reason, did not necessarily reflect what he would actually have preached. The church postils are a good example of this. *Postil*, by Luther's day, had come to mean a published sermon intended for use by other preachers, either something to be read from the pulpit as it stood or as a model for the preacher's own sermon. Luther composed the Christmas and Epiphany parts of the postils while he was in seclusion at Wartburg castle. Although these sermons might reflect Luther's thoughts about preaching the texts, they cannot possibly have been preached in this form. Most of them are far too long, even by sixteenth century standards, to be used as sermons. They are better thought of as study guides for preachers. In addition, texts to which Luther affixed the title "Sermon" were often not actual sermons. For example, "A Sermon on Keeping Children in School" is an admonitory treatise rather than a genuine sermon.

The best evidence for Luther's preaching is the notes taken by friends and colleagues who did their best to record his words while he preached them. As you can imagine if you have ever tried to write down a lecture or sermon verbatim, such records are incomplete at best. When we have more than one version of notes for the same sermon, it is apparent that each recorder captured different aspects of the sermon. In addition, these notes were often expanded by others for publication. Nevertheless, we can gain an understanding of Luther's presence in the pulpit from this somewhat fragmentary evidence, even if we cannot always precisely recreate his words.

Luther's first sermons typified the medieval approach to preaching. Even when he broached revolutionary topics, as he did in his "Sermon on Two Kinds of Righteousness," the presentation was anything but

[10] Meuser, 36.

radical.[11] Luther essentially used the university sermon structure with its logical and numerous subdivisions, each point supported by biblical quotations. Soon, however, he developed his own distinctive style—so distinctive that scholars have struggled to describe it in simple terms.[12] Emmanuel Hirsch offered what has proven to be the most enduring description when he characterized Luther's sermons as biblical, focused on a central theme, antithetical, and concrete.[13] By antithetical, Hirsch meant that Luther used categories like law and gospel, active and passive righteousness, and faith and love to understand and apply the biblical text. His sermons were profoundly biblical but without being expository. Preachers influenced by humanism in Luther's day had returned to expository preaching, that is, working through a text verse by verse, as a method enabling them to go "back to the source" of the Christian faith. Such preaching distanced them from the medieval traditions they abhorred and connected them to the church fathers they idolized. We find numerous examples of this kind of preaching in the early sixteenth century. John Colet, who became dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London in 1505, preached in this way on the epistles of Paul. Huldrych Zwingli, when he took up his duties as people's priest in Zürich at the beginning of 1519, began preaching through the Gospel of Matthew.

Luther's preaching rarely dealt with every aspect of an appointed text but, instead, tended to land on a single main point.[14] In expounding this point, he followed no particular structure but let his thoughts carry him wherever they would. His language was direct and lively, and he used numerous stories and examples to make his points. There was always an application to the hearer's faith and life—even if the latter was at times only tenuously connected to the text. In fact, although Luther rejected the use of allegory in biblical interpretation for purposes of formal theology, he frequently embraced it in the pulpit. Paraphrasing Augustine, he saw preaching as both instruction and exhortation, and his sermons attest to that. His catechetical sermons—some of which

[11] As a printed sermon, "Sermon on Two Kinds of Righteousness" does not perfectly represent Luther's live preaching but it does demonstrate a traditional structure and rhetoric.

[12] Beth Kreitzer, relying on John O'Malley, describes Luther as in the tradition of the "Christian grammarian." That is one possible category but hardly exhausts Luther's approach to preaching. "The Lutheran Sermon" in *Preachers and People in the Reformations and Early Modern Period*, A New History of the Sermon 2, ed. Larissa Taylor (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 44.

[13] Emanuel Hirsch, "Luthers Predigtweise," *Luther* 25 (1954): 1–23.

[14] Hirsch ascribes this to the influence of Augustine and Tauler on Luther, "Predigtweise," 8.

became the Large Catechism—demonstrate his ability to combine doctrinal teaching and call to action.

Luther's Sermon on Cross and Suffering, preached at Coburg castle, offers a fine example of these tendencies in his preaching. It was the Saturday before Easter in 1530, and Luther was addressing the delegation from Electoral Saxony that would travel on from Coburg to the imperial assembly, the Diet, in Augsburg. They had been summoned by the emperor to give an account of their beliefs, which he believed were in violation of the imperial law and his commands. Among those in attendance were Elector John and Philip Melanchthon. Luther began his sermon by noting that it was traditional at that time of year to preach on Christ's passion, but he explained he would not be: "We shall not deal with this point now, for I have often spoken of it on other occasions."[15] Instead, he wished to address his critics who had accused him of not preaching good works and Christian suffering. He told his hearers that he would preach on the need to follow Christ in his suffering, but he added that this had to be real suffering of the kind "that is worthy of the name and honestly grips and hurts."[16] He contrasted this with those who flaunted and made meritorious suffering that they had chosen for themselves. Imagine how the congregation gathered in Coburg must have heard what Luther had to say next:

> If you are willing to suffer, very well, then the treasure and consolation that is promised and given to you is so great that you ought to suffer willingly and joyfully because Christ and his suffering is being bestowed upon you and made your own. And if you can believe this, then in time of great fear and trouble you will be able to say: Even though I suffer long, very well then, what is that compared with that great treasure which my God has given me, that I shall live eternally with him? Look what happens then: the suffering would be sweet and easy and no longer an eternal suffering, but only a modicum which lasts only a short time and soon passes away.[17]

In order to illustrate what it means for Christians to suffer, Luther refers to the story of St. Christopher. Christopher, the legendary giant who had carried the Christ child across a river without knowing who he was, was one of the most popular saints in the Middle Ages. He

[15] "Sermon at Coburg on Cross and Suffering 1530," *The Annotated Luther, Volume 4: Pastoral Writings*, ed. Mary Jane Haemig (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 67.

[16] Ibid., 68.

[17] Ibid., 69.

was often portrayed in large portraits in churches and would have been quite familiar to those in the congregation. Christopher had practically drowned in the river in his attempt to carry Christ. Luther explained that there was no such person as Christopher, but the story had been written to show what it meant to be a Christian.

> For a Christian is like a great giant, with great strong legs and arms, as Christopher is painted, for he bears a burden which the whole world, which no emperor, king, nor prince could carry. Therefore every Christian is a Christopher, that is, a Christ-bearer, because he embraces the faith.[18]

After the example of Christopher, Luther points out that merchants, knights, and papists all endure great suffering for worldly goals—how much more should the Christian be willing to suffer for Christ? Luther concludes that "Christians should so arm themselves that they may defend and guard themselves with the fine, comforting assurances which Christ, our dear Lord, has left us when we suffer for his Word's sake." This remarkable treatment of Christian suffering is framed, beginning and end, by a clear statement of salvation by faith alone. Even suffering for the gospel is not a work that saves; only Christ's suffering is able to accomplish that.

Instruction in Preaching at Wittenberg

In the years before this sermon was preached, Luther's optimism about the progress of reform had been shattered by the Saxon Visitations. In 1528, the Elector of Saxony authorized teams of visitors, made up of both theologians and government officials, to travel throughout his territory questioning pastors and people about every aspect of church life. We have already heard Luther's criticism from the Large Catechism of the pastors and preachers of Saxony, who were revealed by the questions of the visitors to be lazy and self-serving. In the Small Catechism, Luther linked his authorship directly to his own experience of the visitations.

> The deplorable, wretched deprivation that I recently encountered when I was a visitor has constrained and compelled me to prepare this catechism, or Christian instruction, in such a brief, plain, and simple version. Dear God, what misery I beheld! The ordinary person, especially in the villages, knows absolutely nothing about

[18] Ibid., 71.

> the Christian faith, and unfortunately many pastors are completely unskilled and incompetent teachers.[19]

The teaching task to which Luther referred was the regular preaching on the catechism that the church had mandated for centuries and that he himself had taken up in Wittenberg in the years immediately preceding the publication of his catechisms.

Luther and his colleagues at Wittenberg sought to remedy deficiencies in preaching in various ways. To begin with, they promoted the use of postils, especially Luther's. Scholars have argued, in fact, that the postils made Luther the de facto preacher in all the Lutheran churches. This was necessary for the many Lutheran pastors who had, until recently, been Roman priests and were incapable of preaching. For the long term, the University of Wittenberg reformed its curriculum with the education of preachers firmly in view. Despite that fact, no courses on preaching as such were offered. Instead, students combined what they had learned in courses on the Bible and rhetoric with the examples of their professors' pulpit prowess. Bible courses at Wittenberg exemplified the *sola scriptura* approach to theology that was also the norm for the subjects addressed from Lutheran pulpits. Lectures on Scripture, especially Luther's lectures, sounded more like sermons than we might imagine based on our own experiences of education, and they provided ample scope for the practical application of the biblical text.

The Wittenberg professors also assumed that preachers should bring that text to their hearers with conviction and liveliness, adhering to the best practices of rhetoric. The formal study of rhetoric had recently been revived by humanist scholars and educators. In the medieval universities, rhetoric had come in a distant third after the other disciplines in the trivium—logic and grammar—both of which were more important for theological debate. In the later Middle Ages, preachers were self-taught rhetoricians. The students at the University of Wittenberg, however, had the great Philip Melanchthon as their guide to eloquence. Peter Mack, in his book on rhetoric during the Renaissance, refers to the period from 1519–1545 in northern Europe as "the age of Melanchthon."[20]

Melanchthon's fame in this area was well founded. He wrote three textbooks on rhetoric: *De rhetorica libri tres* in 1519, *Institutiones rhetoricae* in 1521 and *Elementa rhetorices libri duo* in 1529.[21] *Elementa*

[19] Kolb/Wengert, 347.

[20] Peter Mack, *A History of Renaissance Rhetoric, 1380–1620* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 104.

[21] On Melanchthon's impact on preaching see Kreitzer, 49–52.

rhetorices was one of the most influential rhetorical texts in the sixteenth century, having been printed seventy-one times before 1610.[22] In *Elementa rhetorices*, he began with the three traditional cases—judicial, deliberative, and demonstrative—but also included a fourth of his own devising. He called it the didascalic or teaching case (*genus didascalium*), which he illustrated with examples that dealt with the topics of virtue, penitence, and faith.[23] Melanchthon stated that a sermon of this type should be drawn from Scripture, contain law and gospel, and follow the rules of rhetoric "in order to insure that the message of sin and grace was properly and effectively conveyed to the people."[24] He also recommended that Lutheran preachers follow a "loci" method in their sermons, similar to the method he had demonstrated for the study of biblical theology in his masterwork *Loci communes*. This approach is not unlike Luther's style of preaching, in the sense that Melanchthon's intent was for preachers to focus on the larger ideas of the text rather than simply move verse-by-verse through it.

The corpus of Lutheran treatises on rhetoric for preaching grew dramatically beginning in the 1530s, but all other texts owed a profound debt to Melanchthon. In this way, it could be argued, he became the greatest influence on Lutheran homiletics in the sixteenth century; in fact, Catholic preachers, too, adopted his theories.[25] Melanchthon, however, never saw himself as a preacher and had resisted Luther's efforts to get him into a pulpit in Wittenberg.

Preaching in the Late Reformation

Melanchthon's students carried forward the new approach to preaching that he and Luther had championed. That did not mean that the status quo was simply maintained, because the circumstances of the late Reformation were very different from those faced by the first generations of Protestants. Two developments in particular affected preaching in significant ways: doctrinal controversy and a revival of Aristotle.

To say that doctrinal controversy factored into Late Reformation preaching is not to suggest that there was no doctrinal controversy prior to that point—far from it. As confessional positions solidified, however, doctrinal distinctions became increasingly fine, and the occasion for doctrinal dispute within confessions increased exponentially.

[22] Mack, 107.
[23] Mack, 113–14.
[24] Kreitzer, 49.
[25] Kreitzer citing O'Malley, 50.

Lutheran preachers were expected to define and defend these confessional commitments for their hearers.[26] The resulting proliferation of pulpit polemics necessarily altered the homiletical landscape as distinctions between Lutherans, Catholics, and Calvinists became an ever more important part of the sermon. The assumed context for the hearers increasingly included the perceived need for them to distinguish themselves as Lutherans from Christians of other confessions, and the didactic task of the sermon, which had been important for both Luther and Melanchthon, shifted from basic catechesis to a more sustained treatment of dogmatic theology. Preachers came to expect a more sophisticated theological sensibility from their parishioners—an expectation that was almost certainly bound to be disappointed upon close scrutiny.

Increased expectations were not only a problem for the laity but also for the preachers themselves. Susan Karant-Nunn observed,

> The late sixteenth century was, then, an age of concern about the content of sermons. Those ministers who were attuned to their superiors did not mount the pulpit and expound on the Bible at will. Luther had done this, but his more ordinary successors could only seize such liberty at their peril.[27]

Preachers feared speaking heresy inadvertently should they be too creative in their approach to preaching. It was far safer to follow established patterns, even if that meant simply using the sermons of other preachers whose orthodoxy was beyond doubt. Numerous postils and other sermon collections were available, and ample evidence suggests their widespread use. In many ways, this development harked back to the early years of the Reformation, when Luther's postils filled the gap in the education of those men who had somewhat suddenly been called upon to preach. A similar dynamic came to operate in the late sixteenth century, but with a significant and stunning difference: the preachers relying on printed sermons had been educated in theology and taught to preach. Susan Karant-Nunn put it this way, "The irony is plain: a better-trained pastorate was made to revert to the late medieval pattern of reading out loud the sermons of reliable divines!"[28]

---

[26] Cf. Kreitzer, 52–53.

[27] Susan Karant-Nunn, "Preaching the Word in Early Modern Germany," in *Preachers and People in the Reformations and Early Modern Period*, A New History of the Sermon 2, ed. Larissa Taylor (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 203.

[28] Karant-Nunn, 203.

Preaching at the end of the sixteenth century came to resemble preaching at the end of the fifteenth century in another way laden with irony. Medieval scholastic forms of preaching reemerged, in part because they better served the doctrinal content of sermons and in part because of a return to the logic of Aristotle. This return to medieval forms, according to Beth Kreitzer, may have been an unintentional byproduct of using Melanchthon's *loci* method, with its logic and propositional truth, for crafting sermons.[29] Melanchthon was instrumental in reintroducing Aristotle to the curriculum at Wittenberg, though certainly in different ways than the philosopher's works had been used in the Middle Ages. This trajectory was furthered by a more formal revival of Aristotle that took place in the German universities later in the century. For the study of theology, this meant a return to logical and philosophical categories that had been abandoned earlier in the century. As a result, although teaching and preaching in the late 16th century was by no means identical to that of the late 15th century, there were profound similarities in method that led to a highly logical and somewhat predetermined study of theological topics in the Age of Orthodoxy. Those who learned theology in this manner tended to apply similar categories and methods to their preaching.[30]

Given these developments, it would be easy to characterize Late Reformation preaching as ponderous with polemic and logic, but that is not—or at least not entirely—the case. The most famous examples of creative preaching after Luther are provided by Johannes Mathesius. Mathesius became a convinced Protestant while in Bavaria and traveled to Wittenberg in 1529 to study under Luther and Melanchthon. After a year of study, he traveled through a succession of teaching jobs before becoming headmaster of the school in Joachimsthal, a new mining town in Bohemia (now the Czech Republic). Successful investment allowed Mathesius to pursue his dream of a theological education, and he returned to Wittenberg in 1540. He was invited to be present with other select students for regular dinners at Luther's table. He was the first of these students to publish a collection of Luther's conversation with his guests after dinner. These collections became known as *Table Talk*, and Mathesius was one of the few to record quotations that were humorous as well as serious. In 1542, Mathesius received his master's degree, was ordained by Luther, and then returned to Jochimsthal where

[29] Kreitzer, 49–50.

[30] Rolf Schäfer, "Aristoteles/Aristotelismus V: Abendländischer Aristotelismus," *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1978) 3:792–94.

he had been offered the position of preacher. In 1545, he became pastor, and served in that position until his death in 1565.[31]

Mathesius published collections of sermons on Noah's flood and the life of Luther, among other things, but the example of his preaching cited most often is a collection published under the title *Sarepta* that dealt with topics having to do with mining.[32] *Sarepta* is the Latin version of the name Zarephath, the town made famous by the widow who hosted Elijah. In the Roman era, the town came to be associated with mining, which is why Mathesius chose to preach on Zarephath and named his book of sermons for that town as well. Mining and its related activities provided the livelihood, in one way or another, of every single person in Mathesius's congregation. Recognizing the centrality of mining in his community, Mathesius began to preach a special sermon on a subject related to it once a year. He did this on the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday (*Fastnachtsdienstag*), which would have been a day of celebration for the townspeople. In 1562, he gathered some of these sermons, along with several others where he had touched on mining themes, for publication.[33]

The sermon from this collection titled "A Sermon on Mining and Miners" provides a good example of Mathesius's approach. He originally preached this sermon not on Fat Tuesday but on the day dedicated to Joachimsthal's patron saint, St. Joachim. Rather than focusing on a single biblical text, Mathesius treated numerous passages in which he found references to mining. He began with a question, Is mining a godly and blessed occupation? By way of answer, Mathesius recounted a brief biblical history of mining from Cain to the people of Philippi. Concluding that mining is indeed a godly and blessed occupation, the preacher adds that in their own time God's pure word had been preached once again "through a pious miner's son, Doctor Martin Luther."[34] The sermon proceeds in a similar way through a number of topics and questions both expected, such as, How then should a godly miner conduct himself?, and unexpected, such as, What kind of miner was Midas? Introducing the character of King Midas, who turned

[31] On Mathesius see the recent collection of essays *Johannes Mathesius (1504–1565): Rezeption und Verbreitung der Wittenberger Reformation durch Predigt und Exegese*, ed. Armnin Kohnle and Irene Dingel (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2017), especially Hans-Otto Schneider, "Sarepta: Die Bergpostille des Johannes Mathesius," 197.

[32] Schneider calls it "one of [his] most prominent works," 191.

[33] Schneider, 199.

[34] Johannes Mathesius, *Sarepta oder Bergpostill* (Nuremberg, 1562), 314v.

everything he touched into gold, allowed Mathesius to draw an array of classical fables into his sermon, explaining to his hearers what these ancient stories signified that might be of help to them.[35]

Certain aspects of Luther's preaching approach are very much in evidence in the work of Mathesius. The sermon has a thematic rather than expository focus, and life application specific to the congregation is very much in view. There is also evidence, however, of the development of a more scholastic style that became typical of Lutheran preaching in the later Reformation and in the Age of Orthodoxy. Specifically, the progression through discrete topics and questions as an organizing principle is rarely seen in Luther's preaching. Such logical progression, however, came to be standard in preaching after Luther. In addition, Mathesius reveled in displaying his erudition, even within a community that probably could not immediately relate to his etymologies and classical allusions. Nevertheless, he expounded this material in way that applied to and exhorted his hearers. In concert with Luther, Mathesius's message was always, "God's word is meant for you!"[36]

Conclusion

Preaching was central to the Reformation, and the Lutheran reformers did much with the goal of improving it. Luther blazed the trail and, through his postils, became the most influential preacher in Germany. Melanchthon followed close behind, contributing his erudition to the study of rhetoric, particularly with a view to preaching. From them, their students understood the singular importance of God's word and recognized its power in the lives of the people to whom and for whom it was proclaimed.

That does not mean that the manner and method of preaching remained unchanged in the course of the Lutheran Reformation. As I have demonstrated, Luther's own mode of preaching was left behind in favor of a more logical, detailed, and doctrinal approach. Because of these developments, Lutheran ideas about the ideal sermon structure have, until recently, often had more in common with late medieval university sermons than with those of the early reformers. The way I was taught to preach at seminary was worlds away from Luther!

This development in itself exhibits something profound about Lutheran preaching. The most significant thing about a Lutheran sermon is not its structure, rhetoric, or even specific doctrinal content

[35] 316r–317r.

[36] Schneider, 201.

but rather the conviction that it is the word of God. As the preacher speaks that word into the hearts, minds, and lives of his hearers, the Holy Spirit is at work. The work of God is done through the word of God, and God has chosen to use his people to speak his word. Through the sermon, as through other means of grace, God brings his word—the good news of forgiveness freely given in Christ—to his people. LSQ

Preaching in the 19th Century

Thomas A. Kuster
Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary
Mankato, Minnesota

LSQ Vol. 60, No. 1 (March 2020)

THE NUMBER OF INDIANA'S WHITE SETTLERS, 2500 in 1800, swelled to 24,000 by 1810 and to 150,000 by 1820. Statehood came in 1816. Still, most of Indiana remained Indian country as late as 1838.[1]

That year Wyneken made a missionary journey as far north as Fort Wayne, finding dire spiritual conditions among settlers:

> In a German congregation in Indianapolis, this Lutheran rider found an artillery man acting as a minister. In Wheeling, he discovered that the minister was a sodomite who had been expelled from a teachers' college in Germany. Further west, he found a congregation which had hired a cooper as a minister, only to drive him out after six weeks for cruelty to his wife and child. When asked why it had not investigated the man before hiring him, the congregation's leaders replied, "He could speak quite well, we had to have a pastor, and he served for little money."[2]

This hour let us time-travel back two centuries and witness life and preaching in 19th century America, sensing the times, and looking

[1] George E. Greene, *History of Old Vincennes and Knox County Indiana*, Chicago, 1911, I, 277.

[2] F. C. D. Wyneken, *Zeitschrift fuer Protestantismus und Kirche* (1843), 137. Quoted in Edward John Saleska, *Friederich Conrad Dietrich Wyneken*, STM Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1946.

especially for expressions of Law and Gospel in Lutheran sermons of the era.[3]

Generalizing to all "19th Century Lutheran preaching" will be limited by certain challenges:

- Extant sermons form a convenience sample, not a random one.
- Reading a sermon does not capture the entire experience of preaching.
- Printed texts, certainly edited, may not reflect actual words spoken.[4]
- English translations from German and Norwegian[5] reflect stylistic choices of the translator.
- Sermons in print were "the best" by honored preachers—no one publishes a collection of "My Worst Sermons"—not typical of myriad pulpits on Sundays.

Accordingly, re-title this presentation **"Observations of Several 19th Century Lutheran Preachers."**

Still I embrace this plucked chicken of a topic, since preaching, central to the Christian enterprise, seems neglected as histories focus on

[3] The 19th Century Lutheran sermons I examined are listed in Appendix A. My method was guided by the theory of my friend and mentor, the late Dr. Lloyd Bitzer, whose seminal essay, "The Rhetorical Situation," established that rhetoric emerges from a rhetor (preacher) sensing an "exigence" ("an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be") and responding to it with discourse (a sermon) designed to resolve it in the audience. In each sermon I tried to identify the problematic life situation the preacher was attempting to address, and how he did so, especially through applications of Law and Gospel. Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric,* 1 (1968), 1–15.

[4] Paul Koren described his editorial approach in the Foreword to the 1912 edition of his father's sermon collection:

> "With regard to the sermons it is to be noted that only a small number of them were available in complete form, either printed or as manuscripts. Those that are marked with an asterisk (*) were written with incomplete manuscripts. This explains both their brevity and, in part, the form. I have only made additions and finished incomplete sentences where this was necessary for the sake of context."

In U. V Koren and Mark E. DeGarmeaux. *U.V. Koren's Works*. Vol. 1. Mankato, MN: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 2013, 12.

[5] 19th century sermons in the established Lutheran churches of the East were in English; those of the immigrant churches of the Midwest used German or Norwegian. While English-speaking was making inroads into the immigrant communities as early as 1850, their church bodies sternly resisted use of English in preaching and in official publications until well into the 20th century. See John M. Brenner, "Doctrinal Challenges And Language Change," 5–6, in Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary files, and Harold Shiffman, "Language Loyalty in the German-American Church: the Case of an Over-Confident Minority," at https://www.sas.upenn.edu/~haroldfs/540/handouts/gachurch/biggac.html.

the changing partners of synodical dances, and the doctrinal issues that prompted them.

The century

In Europe, Napoleon and revolutions dominated the first half. Queen Victoria ruled from 1837 until century's end. In America wars bracketed the century, Britain in 1812 and Spain in 1898, bookending the Civil War. Immigration swelled U. S. population from five million to over 76 million; the Union grew from 16 states to 45.

While immigrant German Lutherans tracked religious stirrings in their homeland, America presented its own spiritual challenges. In the first half-century East Coast Lutherans scrambled to serve swelling migrations to "the West," then Ohio and Indiana. New challenges emerged termed by Nichols "Religious Unrest." In 1859 Darwin published the *Origin of Species,* which "became the focal point of a momentous conflict between old and new conceptions of the universe and of man… materialism, agnosticism, and skepticism flourished." Industrialization reduced men to "soulless cogs in a machine, placed human relations on a profit-and-loss basis, and made common sense and expediency rather than idealism and spiritual faith the guiding principles of life." Karl Marx turned history into "a sordid struggle for the goods of the earth… In every phase of life the most powerful forces operating on the mind of man tended to place religion on the defensive." In theological circles, "higher criticism" of the Bible emerged, the prestige and influence of organized religion declined, and many mainstream clergy, fighting their own doubts, tried to maintain the appeal of their churches by seeking unifying alliances and adjusting doctrine to popular tastes.[6]

Still, many longed for spirituality in this confused and groping world. After the Civil War some preachers gained fame and filled auditoriums—Henry Ward Beecher (1813–87), the Congregationalist in Brooklyn, and Philips Brooks (1835–93), the Episcopalian in Boston. But what of preaching among the Lutherans?

The first half

The dawn of the 19th century was scarce eleven years from the country's founding. America knew Lutherans long before. Swedish Lutheran

[6] Marie Hochmuth & Norman W. Mattis, "Phillips Brooks," in William N. Brigance, *A History and Criticism of American Public Address*. Vol. 1. New York, NY: Russell & Russell, 1971, 295–98.

missionaries were approaching native tribes in Pennsylvania as early as 1710.[7] The Pennsylvania Ministerium had been founded in 1748. Eastern Lutherans struggled with rationalism and unionism. The New York City observance of the three-hundredth Reformation anniversary (1817) featured a joint Lutheran/Moravian/Episcopal service. New York Synod president Fred H. Quitman, the "intellectual giant of that time and region, whose influence over New York Lutheranism during the first quarter of this century was commanding,"[8] published sermons exalting reason alongside revelation as the source of Christian truth. In Frederick, Maryland, David F. Schaeffer's sermon "emphasize[d] the fundamental accord of Zwingli and Calvin with Luther himself."[9] The General Synod meeting in 1837, involving representatives from the Hartwick Synod, New York Synod, West-Pennsylvania Synod, Maryland Synod, and South Carolina Synod, featured preachers from Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, and German Reformed churches.[10]

Two short-lived periodicals[11] appeared in the 1830s to assist Lutheran pastors in sermon preparation, along with brief reports on synod affairs. A report entitled "The West" echoed the experience of Wyneken:

> A letter from the Rev. E. Keller, written in Marion, Indiana … confirms all accounts of the destitute nature of our church in the west. In cities where congregations might be organized, our ministers are unable to preach in the English language. Should English preachers be sent to these cities, it would be necessary to afford them missionary aid, but this the present state of our missionary fund forbids…."[12]

---

[7] In a manuscript that remained unpublished at his death, Lloyd Bitzer explored the response of a Conestoga chief to Swedish Lutheran mission efforts at around that date, which echoed among Deistic circles in Europe throughout the following century. See private correspondence with this author in 2014.

[8] Frederic M. Bird, "Lutheran Hymnology," *Evangelical Quarterly Review*, January 1865, no. 61, 37.

[9] Abdel Ross Wentz, *A Basic History of Lutheranism in America*. Philadelphia, 1964, 96. Online at https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.32106015647131;view=1up;seq=11

[10] Ibid., July 29, 1837.

[11] *The Evangelical Lutheran Preacher and Pastoral Messenger*, a monthly publication by Rev. L. Eichelberg of Winchester, Pennsylvania, appeared in 1833 and 1834. *The Lutheran Pulpit and Monthly Religious Magazine*, edited by Rev. Charles A. Smith, began in 1837 and ceased publication in December 1838 due to the inability of the editor to collect sufficient subscriptions at $1 per year (today's equivalent, about $27).

[12] Pulpit, 1, 1837, 48.

A sampling of sermons in these periodicals revealed these exigences and responses to them:

From the *Preacher*[13]

Preacher / date	*Exigence*	*response*
Schmucker 1832	The claims of worldly happiness attract people more than religion does.	Compare the two ways of living, show religion produces more happiness.
Schaeffer 1832	[to synod meeting] Pastors need encouragement in difficult work.	Reaffirm "duties/ encouragements" of Lutheran ministry.
Miller 1832	[Prodigal Son] Listeners are prodigal.	Repent! return to gracious Father.
Hazelius 1833	Calvinists and Presbyterians teach falsely about election.	Refute false positions with Scripture.
Lintner 1833	Listeners do not understand what it is to be a Christian, hence are not.	Consult your inner experience, recognize truth of God's promises.
Endress 1834	Listeners are bogged down in trivialities of earthly existence.	Strive to be worthy of status to which Jesus has raised us.

[13] *The Evangelical Lutheran Preacher and Pastoral Messenger*

J. G. Schmucker, York, Pa., March 1835, vol. 2 no. 11, 161–69.

David F Schaeffer, President of the Synod of Maryland and Virginia. May 1833, vol. 1 no. 1, 3–8.

George B Miller, Professor of Theology in the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Hartwich, New York, 1833, vol. 1, 9–15.

Ernest L. Hazelius, Professor of Sacred Literature and Church History, in the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Gettysburg, PA, 1833, vol. 1, 17–24.

George A. Lintner, President of Hartwick Synod, and Pastor of the Lutheran church at Schoharie, New York, 1833, vol. 1, 33–40.

Christian F. L. Endress, Late Pastor of the Lutheran Church, Lancaster, Pa, [recently deceased], 1834, vol. 2, no. 3, 33–40.

From the *Pulpit*[14]

Miller 1837	Listeners' religion is not heartfelt.	Law-gospel motivation, ends with law.
Krauth (Charles Philip) 1837	Listeners are unmotivated about missions.	Logical case that heathen need Jesus, then envision effects of mission on the world.
Endress prior to 1834	Listeners do not understand the requirement: faith.	Explain what faith is, then urge: examine self to see if you have it.
Wackerhagen 1837	[to synod meeting] Pastors need encouragement.	Review the covenant which they possess and preach.
Eichelberger 1838	Some do not understand the central teaching of Christianity.	Define justification, explain the only way we are justified, several ways we are not.
Campbell 1838	Some believe that Gospel enables them to ignore Law.	The Law still demands obedience!

The overriding exigence in these sermons: people are not behaving as Christians should, and are falling away from the church. The remedy is to preach sanctification, a condition for salvation. Objective justification is rarely preached.

Gospel expressions appear from time to time, as here by Endress, 1837:

> When I truly believe in Christ, I acknowledge the truth that Jesus is the Saviour of the world. I believe he is the propitiation for the sins of the world, of the whole world, and also for mine… When I truly believe in the Saviour of the world, I am sensible of my sinfulness; I acknowledge the criminality of sin; I perceive the lost condition from which I need to be saved; I most of all include myself among

[14] Sources in *The Pulpit:*
George B. Miller, Hartwick Seminary, January 1837, 3–9.
C. Krauth, President of Pennsylvania College, June 1837, 121–34.
Christian F. L. Endress, August 1837, 169–77.
Augustus Wackerhagen, Clermont, New York, November 1837, 241–47.
L. Eichelberger, Winchester, Virginia, July 1838, vol. 2, no. 7, 149–57.
A. E. Campbell, Cooperstown, New York, November 1838, vol. 2, no. 11, 245–53.

> the number of those whom he has redeemed; and for salvation and future happiness I fully trust in his redemption.[15]

And yet the close of this sermon urges listeners to turn inward for assurance:

> Ought we not seriously to ask ourselves: Am I or am I not a true believer?… Do we love the gospel? Do we apply it to ourselves? Are we anxious for divine instruction? Are we willing to *obey?* Our life and conduct here must be the criterion… Let us turn our mind within upon ourselves… Let the need of our salvation deeply impress us with the solemn necessity of examining ourselves whether we exceed in faith, that we may not deceive ourselves, but pray, ask, and receive. Amen.[16]

Eichelberg does better, with his description of "justification":

> God *justifies* the sinner … or pronounces him *just,* when he does not impute to him the sins of which he knows that he is guilty, and does not inflict the punishment which these crimes deserve; but on the contrary, by an unmerited judicial act of pardon, imputes to believers an innocence and righteousness … for this freedom from punishment on the part of God, sinners are wholly indebted to Christ, as he suffered punishment in the sinner's stead.[17]

Frequently the preacher cannot help making the Gospel into something the listener has to do. Here is Miller:

> To you the Saviour still cries, Look unto me and be saved. It is but, look and live … [example of brazen serpent] … He will certainly save you, if you go to him. He will save you from your sins. Hence, again, it is the easiest thing in the world to be saved, if you earnestly desire it … "With the heart man believeth." Mind, *"with the heart."* Your understandings are convinced, your conscience is awakened, your reason is gained. Now, what is wanting, but that your hearts should be won. Could you but bring that proud, stubborn, presumptuous, despairing thing, your heart, to submit, all would be safe. Make the attempt. Your life, the life of your soul depends on it …

---

[15] Ibid., 175.
[16] Ibid., 177.
[17] Ibid., 151.

> This work—and you know it—must be done, or you perish in your sins.[18]

Thus a theme in the preaching of the era: do your part, namely, **do not reject** the Gospel. Campbell put it this way:

> He is a guilty culprit, condemned to die—the Lord Jesus Christ by his death has opened his prison doors and offers him a pardon. The great question then, to be settled by the sinner is this, whether he will accept the pardon; on that decision life or death is suspended.[19]

The word "conditions" is frequently connected with the Gospel. Wackerhagen elaborated on faith along with obedience as a "condition" of the New Covenant.[20] Hazelius asserted that the effectiveness of the Gospel is conditioned by our behavior:

> But if the offers of grace and salvation are made to all men without distinction the question arises, *Are all alike benefitted by them?* We answer, all are alike benefitted by the gospel, who accept it, and who in obedience to the commands of the gospel, comply with the conditions under which alone it can prove salutary to men. These conditions are, to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, that is, to trust in him as the only Saviour, to lay hold by faith of his atonement offered for our offenses and to abide in him.[21]

Lintner's sermon is the most disastrous;[22] he explicitly directs listeners for assurance inward to their own feelings, based upon their own works, rather than to the objective promises of the Word:

> There are certain duties to he performed, before we can enter into the Kingdom of God, and assume to ourselves the promises of the gospel. God has premised salvation upon certain terms and conditions. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life." "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." These are the terms upon which God hath promised to save the sinner, and the sinner must comply with these terms before he can hope to be saved. This the believer has done…. He knows that he loves the Lord

[18] Ibid., 7–8.
[19] Ibid., 252.
[20] Ibid., 245.
[21] Ibid., 4.
[22] His text: "Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart." 1 John 5:10.

> Jesus Christ, and keeps his commandments. He knows that he has performed the conditions upon which God has promised to save his soul and that God will perform his promise.[23]

This, he insists, is especially important when facing death. His concluding paragraph:

> In that final hour, it will not be sufficient for us to say, "I am willing to die and I hope God may have mercy on my soul." We shall then want something which enables us to say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth; I am not afraid to die…" And there is only one thing that can enable us to say *so: experimental religion.* [earlier defined as loving God with all one's heart]. This is the religion that we shall *want,* when we come *to die.* If, therefore, we would not be left comfortless in that trying hour let us now give our hearts to God… Let us live truly devoted to God, and we shall *know* that we are his children.[24]

So the Lutheran listener of the day not infrequently left the service with a head ringing with Law messages.

These preachers were not above holding up pagan heroes as exemplars for Christians. Campbell made the Greek ruler Zaleucus into a type of Christ.[25] Schaeffer urged the example of Alexander the Great upon pastors:

> Alexander, it is said, had a soldier in his army of his own name, but who was a notorious coward. "Either be like me," said the brave general, "or lay aside my name." And thus should ministers either fearlessly and faithfully act.[26]

Instances like these perhaps prompted Theodore Graebner, in his list of "Homiletical Don'ts for Young Preachers," to include this

---

[23] Ibid., 36–37.

[24] Ibid., 40.

[25] "Whoever supposed that Zaleucus, prince of the Locrians, meant to repeal his law when he inflicted the penalty in part upon himself. He made a law, the penalty of which was the loss of both eyes to the culprit; the first person guilty was his own son! The father was a just prince and still a kind parent. He at once saw if he were to save his son, his law was a dead letter—null and void—all his subjects would say he had no regard for the principles of his own law. On the other hand if he inflicted the penalty in full upon his son he was ruined. He resolves upon this expedient. He causes one of the eyes of his son to be put out. Then he descends from the bench, lays aside his robes, and receives the other part of the penalty in his own person." 248.

[26] Ibid., 4.

warning: "Do not, above all, refer to some shining deed of the ungodly (examples of courage, persistence, etc.)."[27]

Despite the newsworthy events of the 1830s, few references to current affairs appeared in these sermons. The decade saw the race of a locomotive against a horse (1830), Nat Turner's slave rebellion (1831), the "trail of tears" native removals (under Presidents Jackson 1833 and Van Buren 1838). Abolitionist agitators stirred up mobs in 1835; yet I found no reference to slavery in any of these sermons—but then, even in the U. S. Congress, the infamous "Gag Rule" of 1836 prevented any mention of slavery in those chambers for nearly eight years. Battles at the Alamo and San Jacinto occurred in 1836. Queen Victoria ascended the throne in 1837 at the age of 18.

Schaeffer, preaching to the meeting of the Synod of Maryland and Virginia on November 25, 1832, referenced the great cholera epidemic which had ravaged Europe, and in June of that year had broken out in New York City, causing enormous panic and prompting half the city's population to flee to the countryside.

> Brethren! when a fierce disease or epidemic prevails, are we not solicitous to obtain the counsel and aid of a skilful physician? … Did we not, under the late pestilence, see the importance of prudence and promptness in abandoning what was known to facilitate the march of disease?... Why, then, should we be so indifferent as to the awful disease of the soul, and not seek one who can remove it?[28]

Finally, observe Schaeffer's rationale for paying pastors poorly:

> It is therefore well that our church grants no great salary to a minister; it is to be presumed that she will have the fewer who are actuated by filthy lucre.[29]

Charles Porterfield Krauth[30]

In 1841, two days after being licensed to preach at age eighteen, Krauth returned to Canton, near Baltimore, and in his journal described his first congregation:

---

[27] Th. Graebner, *The Expository Preacher, A System of Inductive Homiletics*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri, 1920, Part 2, 93.

[28] Ibid., 7–8.

[29] Ibid., 5.

[30] (1823–83) Served congregations near Baltimore, Virgin Islands, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia. Became full-time editor of *The Lutheran* in 1861, launching a Confessional

> A large portion of the inhabitants are from the very dregs of the city … Of the twenty or twenty-five who attend the chapel, but one man makes a profession of religion. He, together with two or three pious ladies and myself, are the forces with which the Lord has seen proper to take field against Satan in this place.[31]

Even a decade later, preaching in rural Virginia could be daunting:

> Rode on Saturday morning about twelve miles to the church on horseback. My horse stumbled and fell, completely rolling over on his side, with my left leg partly under him. Thanks to a good Providence I remained unhurt. Concluded that buggy-riding was safer, but had not got a mile before I was convinced of my mistake. Caught up to Mr. K., with his carriage kicked to pieces by the horse, his family by the roadside only saved by a merciful Providence from having their brains knocked out. Found a congregation of plain country-people. Preached a sermon on Matth. xxvi. 39. A large assortment of babies generally roaring, save when their mouths were stopped only as a mother could stop them. Day warm, bucket under the pulpit, people drinking incessantly.... On Sunday we had a crowded house and many about the doors and windows unable to get in…. Was told to go ahead; that the people would listen for two hours. Babies in greater strength and numbers, lungs and "sugation" than before, aided, abetted, and aggravatingly backed by a choir of black babies in the gallery.… A double handful of silver money was given me in the afternoon—about ten dollars, I believe; this pays my expenses. I was treated with the greatest cordiality."[32]

Charles Philip Krauth, then Gettysburg College president, advised his young son regarding sermon preparation:

> Whilst you should make it your aim to become a good extemporaneous preacher, you should write as much as you can, and acquire the habit of committing sermons [memorizing], and thus fit yourself for efforts when you cannot write." [33]

revival. Founded the General Council in 1867. In 1880 visited Lutherland. Krauth was termed the "American Chemnitz" by David Jay Webber in these lectures in 2004.

[31] Adolph Spaeth, *Charles Porterfield Krauth*. New York, The Christian Literature Company, 1898, 47. Online at https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.ah5wsp;view=1up;seq=15.

[32] Written to his wife from Staunton, Va., May 11, 1852. In Spaeth, p209–10. Ten dollars was worth about $300 in today's money.

[33] Spaeth, vol. 1, 51.

To read, memorize, or extemporize delivery was a continuing issue. Krauth puzzled in 1842:

> I write a sermon every week, and in the pulpit I alternately extemporize and use the MS. I would prefer committing to reading, but I cannot do it. The question therefore is between occasional reading and exclusive extemporizing. Which shall I do?[34]

In the elder Krauth's reply he explained "extemporizing":

> I would aim to be ready to extemporize, but you ought to write at least one sermon a week, and make large preparation in notes for the other. If, when you do not use a manuscript, you cannot commit words, you probably can ideas. Perhaps you could get into Mr. Haesbart's plan.[35] It is a very excellent one, and you are at the right age to undertake it. It consists in making a skeleton of a discourse, and then thinking it out in the mind till every idea is clear, and the whole discourse before the soul.[36]

Krauth himself, while arguing against exclusively extemporaneous preaching, still observed that

> reading sermons, word for word, is abominable. How many noble sermons have we seen thus utterly murdered, of which we could only utter with the poet "pure, but O! how cold"…. [But] he who has his thoughts in train well impressed upon his mind, need but start them and they will remember themselves. But is not this method as difficult as any other? We answer that it is: that at first it may be more difficult than any method except the stupefying one of committing words to memory.[37]

The elder Krauth wrote to his son at first parish, "It will be best for you not to preach too often, and to avoid preaching in a large church."[38]

---

[34] Letter to his father in October, 1842, in Spaeth, 86.

[35] Rev. Mr. Haesbart was a Lutheran pastor in Baltimore who vetted, then welcomed Wyneken in 1838. They became good friends and Wyneken succeeded Haesbart in Baltimore in 1845, when Haesbart "left for parts unknown"—probably due to health reasons., Rudolph F. Rehmer, "The Origins of Lutheranism in the Fort Wayne Area 1829–1847," *Old Fort News,* vol. 30, no. 2, 11, 24.

[36] Spaeth, 88.

[37] "A Homiletical Leaf: Extempore Preaching," *The Lutheran Observer*, April 10, 1846. Quoted in Spaeth, 61.

[38] Spaeth, vol. 1, 51.

The younger Krauth, it seemed, had a somewhat weak voice.[39] While deferential to his father always, Krauth may have resisted the advice about preaching too often, as when he embraced the contemporary practice of revivals, or "protracted meetings." The *Lutheran Observer* of April 7, 1843, reported,

> Some weeks ago our young brother Krauth, pastor of the Second English Lutheran church in Lombard Street, commenced a protracted meeting among his people which he continued for several weeks, until the decline of his physical powers admonished him to discontinue. … The preaching, which he performed mainly himself, was pointed, close, and practical, and attended by the signal blessing of God. A considerable number of individuals were awakened….[40]

Krauth's conduct of revivals diverged from the customary, avoiding sensation and doing all the preaching himself, thirteen times in fourteen days. Once he carefully laid out a series of 28 topics and texts for such use. In 1845 he reported he was preaching 3 times a week.[41]

Krauth's tenure at Baltimore's Lombard Street Church bought him "a brilliant reputation as a preacher. His imagination was capable of lofty and sustained flights, his literary taste and culture were exquisite, his dramatic powers were of a high order, his mind in all its faculties was intensely active and quick in its movements."[42] Spaeth attributed Krauth's preaching, in part, to his receiving a D.D. degree from Pennsylvania College in 1856.[43]

His father, however, did not hesitate to critique his son, conveying reports that his preaching was "too showy"[44] or "too abstract."[45] Distressed by such charges, Krauth first examined, then defended himself, convinced that he was "preaching Christ for the salvation of his hearers."[46] He wrote his father, "I try to present truth in fresh aspects. I try to address my people as though they were rational and could understand 'the reason of the hope that is in them.'… I don't, however, tell anecdotes in the pulpit nor do I say, 'shan't' and 'look here,' and so forth, and speak of the 'devil's last kick' and such like forms of speech

[39] Ibid., 15.
[40] Ibid., 310.
[41] Ibid., 105.
[42] Ibid., 61.
[43] Ibid., 288
[44] Ibid., Jan 11, 1844 letter, 95.
[45] April 26, 1843, 91
[46] Ibid., 62.

and figures of rhetoric unknown to Blair and decency.[47] My members profess to be instructed and edified."[48]

Krauth reported numerous invitations to preach. In 1844 the Maryland Synod invited a sermon on the Lutheran view of the Lord's Supper.[49] He reported in 1845 to his father: "I wish to preach, by request, a sermon on the 'Genius of Lutheranism,' a work for whose execution I have sufficient Lutheranism, if I have very little genius."[50] He wrote excitedly about an 1851 sermon on "popular amusements" which denounced dancing and "vulgar and obscene concerts" and propelled him into "the midst of the greatest row it has ever been my fortune or misfortune to kick up."[51] The effect: "The streets, even on Sunday afternoon, were occupied with groups of persons discussing the sermon of the morning. Of course among the 'lewd fellows of the baser sort' there has been a great buzzing—but never have I been so thanked by intelligent and good men for any sermon I have delivered." The following Sunday he doubled down, condemning dancing again, then "exhibitions of a demoralizing kind, concerts of low and corrupting songs, stage dancing, and the performances of the theatre and circus in general," and "those spewings of infidelity and lewdness, under the decent title of 'Lectures for gentlemen only.'" He closed with a solemn appeal to abstain from such things. A contemporary minister commended him: "That sermon was written in hot blood, with the mercury standing at one hundred."[52]

Two other Krauth sermons are much referenced, even reprinted today.

The first, "The Burning of the Old Lutheran Church,"[53] honored a church building recently destroyed by fire. As a sermon it is admirable for its eloquence, disappointing for its theology. After rejoicing that the German Reformed, the local Episcopal bishop, and "our Methodist brethren" had worshipped and administered Holy Communion there, he began an expressive ode to the building—its situation, construction, and style. He described the Lutheran doctrine taught there: "the

[47] Apparently a reference to Hugh Blair (1718–1800), a Scottish minister, whose *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783) emphasized the importance of clarity.

[48] Ibid., 1844, 93.

[49] Ibid., 114.

[50] Ibid., 102.

[51] This and following from Ibid.,145ff.

[52] Rev. J. A. Seiss, 148.

[53] Preached on 19 Trinity 1854. *A Discourse Suggested by the Burning of the Old Lutheran Church on the Night of September 27, 1854.* https://www.lutheranlibrary.org/pdf/247tc-krauth-burning-of-the-old-lutheran-church.pdf.

supremacy of God alone over the conscience, the divine authority of the Bible in every question of faith and life, the great doctrines of human corruption and loss, of the repairing and healing of our stricken nature in Jesus Christ, the regenerating power of the Holy Ghost, salvation by grace, justification by faith, which works holiness by love, the uncontaminated sacraments." Asking what makes a church holy, he replied it is the heartfelt acts of the people who go there.[54] He described at length the spreading fire, and speculated about the supposed arsonist—was it "boys" with no proper upbringing, "our domestics" without moral instruction, or the "poor and ignorant" lacking our help? Despite society's failure in producing such a person, he closed optimistically: "The church is burned, but the God whom men were taught in it to reverence, the truth and holiness it cherished, these live and perpetuate themselves through generation after generation."

Though first delivered in church on Sunday, this sermon became a "discourse" when printed, edited for publication: "I compressed the sermon a good deal—generally on the principle of Dean Swift's 'Advice to Young Clergymen,' in regard to the fine passages."[55] While perhaps no longer a "sermon," the publication seems an opportunity for Gospel proclamation missed.

The second famous Krauth sermon, preached on Thanksgiving Day 1857, was entitled "The Altar on the Threshing Floor."[56] Spaeth characterized Krauth in this sermon "like a veritable John the Baptist [who] lifts up his voice in the wilderness," delivering "a truly prophetical discourse, pervaded by a spirit of divination of the chastisements of the Lord which only four years afterward were to break over this country in the horrors of civil war."[57]

Krauth began by asserting this should be a day of mourning, not thanksgiving. On the threshing floor the wheat is separated from the chaff. As individuals, so nations too can be chastised. After vividly describing the suffering from the current financial recession caused by selfishness, Krauth previewed three parts: "First, that our land has great

---

[54] One can't help note a missed opportunity to identify Word and Sacrament as the marks of the Church, rather than the Pietistic notion that the Church is identified by its faithful people.

[55] Spaeth, 310. Jonathan Swift wrote his "Letter to a Young Gentleman Lately Entered into Holy Orders" on January 9, 1720, which included advice on preaching.

[56] *The Altar on the Threshing-Floor, A Discourse Delivered in the First English Ev. Lutheran Church, Pittsburgh, PA on Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 26, 1857*. W. S. Haven, Corner of Market and Second Streets, 1847. It was based on 2 Samuel 24:25.

[57] Spaeth, 300.

sins; secondly, that her afflictions are the divine chastenings of her sins; and thirdly, that His strokes are fewer than our crimes, and lighter than our guilt"—the last meriting our thanksgiving.

The national spirit of "self-reliance" has gone wrong, he said: "We are verging fast toward a reckless and arrogant trust in ourselves; a sentiment, practically, that we are the source of our own blessings, that we will prosper at any rate, whether God favors us or not." [Is he preaching today?] He goes on:

> When the thoughtless and indolent, tricked by the great swelling words of vanity, seem to believe that by some legerdemain of language, evil has actually become good, and darkness light, and bitter sweet—then is it time for the hearts of the good to grow sick with fear.… Is it not true, that in our land, with all its boast of equality, men are deemed worthy of honor merely for being rich, and are despised simply for being poor? "Put money in thy purse—make all the money thou canst," is a watchword of our land.

To money-making, add preoccupation with empty distractions and amusements.

> Now we are all excitement about a great Author—then about a great Actor—or some Danseuse of distinguished impudence; now it is a Swedish Nightingale, and then a Hatter, who advertises himself and his wares by giving some hundreds of dollars to hear her sing."[58]

This befouled national spirit embraces covetous laziness, "men that would eat without working," and the prophets needed to speak these truths are missing. The solution:

> The divine Word, which is as a fire, should enter the inmost heart of our nation, either to purge it at once of its follies, or to burn till we can endure it no longer… The spirit of the mob, of repudiation, of wanton assault on the rights of others, is rife; a spirit which destroys the moral sense of a nation, makes convenience their law, saps all principles of integrity, and puts gigantic power into the hands of the worst men. The nation that cherishes this spirit, must die.

[58] P. T. Barnum brought Jenny Lind, a close friend of Felix Mendelssohn, to America in 1850, where she performed more than 100 concerts in two years, earning $350,000 ($10 million today), most of the proceeds donated to fund free schools in Sweden. I don't know the "Hatter" reference. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jenny_Lind

But here is reason for thanksgiving: God mingles mercy with judgment. The nation's financial situation is not as bad as it could be—not as bad as Ireland. And the "scourge of nations," war, has not come, such as happened in France—here Krauth provided a vivid, lengthy description of the horrors of the Napoleonic wars. Consider too the plague (cholera) of not long ago—again an extremely vivid description of families watching loved ones die, then dying themselves.

> The swiftness of corruption forces the living to hurry the dead from their sight, and fearful stories are whispered, of those who seemed to be dead, but who came to consciousness, only to struggle in vain to escape from the shroud and the stifling grave.

After 3½ pages of this, he cried, "Enough! The soul grows sick of these images." Just be thankful it's not that bad now. "Resting on God, our prosperity shall be abiding … While we rest on Thee, thou wilt neither permit this people to be sundered, nor suffer the overthrow of the rights dearest to man to be the price of their union." And finally the close: "O my country! I salute thee with reverence; I stand in awe before the image of the greatness which Jehovah offers thee… Hail to thee! Serve God, and prosper."

In this entire sermon as published, the name of Jesus does not appear, and the word "Christ" only once—the pastor visiting plague-stricken people was "the devoted minister of Christ." God, he proclaimed, shows undeserved mercy, but no explanation of why, nor any mention of forgiveness of sins.

Krauth sent a copy of this sermon to C. F. W. Walther, whose approval was expressed in a thank you note in Latin, somewhat inexplicably noting: "Not only have you made evident the illness, but you have applied the remedy for it as well."[59]

Frederich C. D. Wyneken[60]

Many stories trace this genuine pioneer missionary's route from Germany to Baltimore, to the "west" (Ohio, Indiana), and to affiliation with Walther and leadership in Confessional American Lutheranism.

Saleska described Wyneken's sermon preparation and pulpit style.

---

[59] Ibid., 300. Walther's note to Krauth is in Appendix B.

[60] (1810–1876) Came to Baltimore in 1838, back to Germany seeking help, then missionary in "the west." Succeeded Walther as second president of the Missouri Synod 1850–64, and first president of Concordia Seminary.

> Conscientious to a fault. … he always spent much time and effort in preparation. … Wyneken's concern, anxiety and nervousness (quite common to many good pulpit men) over his Sunday sermon reached its climax late Saturday night and approached something of an illness... His lamp burned steadily into the night and past midnight as he still sat writing and rewriting after having filled himself to the brim with Luther and the Fathers. He then slept fitfully for a few hours and early Sunday morning found him again in his study where he remained undisturbed until the time of service. In these last minutes of preparation his sermon was blended into his very being.
>
> Standing before his congregation in the first moments he seems to have lost his nerve. His voice breaks. He coughs, stutters, makes a misstatement and one would think that he is ready to step down again as he doesn't know where to begin. But finally he strikes a keynote. The word which has eluded him is caught and his nervousness is at an end. From this point on the words flow as a rushing stream. He never stumbles, never needs to grasp for a right word; language is at his command, his timidity and uncertainty are forgotten, his eyes flash, every facial muscle, every gesture, his entire being gives the assurance that he knows whereof he speaks and that his sole purpose is gaining completely for Christ those to whom he speaks.[61]

In an 1876 letter Pastor Herman Fick of Boston wrote of Wyneken's preaching:

> As I recall his sermons, the themes always brought to the fore justification by faith. He virtually lived in the doctrine that Christ died for man's sin and that by faith in Him alone we are saved... Then he pleaded for sanctification and true brotherly love. His motto, insistent and ringing was always: 'More Love!' ('Mehr Herz!')"[62]

[61] Edward Saleska, *Frederich Conrad Dieterich Wyneken 1810–1876*, unpublished M.S.T. Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. 1946, 74–5. The precise source of these observations is vague; Saleska cites only "Con. Hist. Ins., Wyneken files."

[62] Ibid., 75.

Wyneken preached from terse, scribbled notes,[63] regularly speaking for an hour and a half.[64] He easily divided listeners into two kinds, pretending and true Christians, quoting Wesley as he did so.[65] His powerful Law pronouncements sandwiched Gospel thoughts among them; his approach: since you know the Gospel, how can you be so wicked? since you know the love of God in Christ, now DO THIS. In these ways, he combined Law and Gospel almost in the same thought.

In 1841, three years before discovering Walther's *Der Lutheraner,* his Fort Wayne sermon addressed the exigence that people were leaving the fellowship, switching churches, even deserting. His response emphasized duties: to gratitude, to reparation for harming others, and to love received from God. Notice the interplay of Law/Gospel:

> And what would you do now, after the grace of God and His marvelous mercy have been demonstrated to you, in spite of your sins, and after you have found the forgiveness for those sins in the blood of the Lamb through faith? Would you increase your guilt? Would you do incalculable harm instead of your duty to do good through a God-pleasing life, through true piety, through diligent works for the conversion and edification of your brothers?[66]

Wyneken's New Year's Day 1868 sermon in Cleveland commemorating the Circumcision and Naming of Jesus addressed listeners' anxiety about the future, entering the very thoughts of listeners:

> My beloved, we stand once again at the threshold of a new year. It is natural for us to wonder: What will it bring? But no man can answer the question. Only God knows the answer. We also ask: How will it go with your office and vocation? We must answer, God knows. We ask: What fortune or misfortune will come upon you? Again, the answer is: God knows. We ask: Will you live through this year or die this year? And again: Only God knows. So we are in the dark about all this, you say, in darkness and uncertainty, and this bothers me! Behold, there your God has painted over the entrance and door a beautiful painting with a name over it. Take note of it and ask God

[63] Matthew C. Harrison, *At Home in the House of My Fathers: Presidential Sermons, Essays, Letters, and Addresses from the Missouri Synod's Great Era of Unity and Growth*. Concordia Pub. House, 2011. Harrison translated three sermons posthumously reconstructed from Wyneken's notes by his son Heinrich, 428.

[64] Ibid., 345.

[65] Ibid., 348. We will later observe Koren dividing listeners in this way too.

[66] Ibid., 351.

> that He bring to you that dear picture and place that name into your heart. The painting is the circumcision of Christ. The name is the sweet, precious name *Jesus.* Through the painting and the name, you can look into the fatherly heart of God in heaven. And when you tell me how you stand with respect to the picture and the name, then I will ask you whether you enter the New Year with joy and confidence or with sighs and terror.[67]

In this sermon, at last, a clear and extended expression of the Gospel:

> These drops of blood that the dear child Jesus sheds here at His circumcision are, as it were, the earnest money, the down payment, which our Guarantor lays down against the judgment of God. Through it He pledges to pay the entire debt. As a real guarantor, He pledges to accomplish all this for us so that a thorough peace between us and God and His Law be established. This was completed on the cross by His death. His life was a sin offering given for the sins of the lost children of Adam. His precious blood paid the full ransom and purchased us back from the curse of the Law. The Law can now no longer threaten you [with the phrase]: "Perfect obedience or death!" So you are redeemed from sin, death, and devil. The righteousness of God is absolutely fulfilled. He is now a reconciled Father, who, for the sake of Christ, forgives us our sins, receives us again as His children, and will give to us life and salvation. To this end, through the Holy Spirit, He grants repentance in faith that we become righteous and holy before God."[68]

In this sermon's opening words, Wyneken alluded to the Lord's parable:

> BELOVED IN CHRIST! By God's grace we enter into a new year today. Where would many of us be if Christ had not prayed for us: "Lord, let him alone for one more year so I can dig around his roots and throw on some manure"? Then God, the vine tender, as in the parable of the fig tree, spoke: "Behold, I have now come each year and sought fruit from this vine, and have found none. Pull it up by the roots. Why let it take up the space?"… The plea is: "Lord, let it alone for one more year so I can dig around its roots and throw on

[67] Ibid., 432–3.
[68] Ibid., 431.

> some manure that it might produce some fruit. If not, I shall tear it out." [69]

Indeed, where would any of us be had our Lord not pleaded, "Let him go one more year, while I pile on more manure?"

C. F. W. Walther[70]

For Walther the sermon is every minister's most important task. In Eggold's summary: "Every other function of the pastor's office is ancillary and must serve this chief function. Nothing, therefore, can compensate for failure in the pulpit."[71] Said Walther:

> Bear in mind that the preacher is to arouse secure sinners from their sleep in sin; next, to lead those who have been aroused to faith; next to give believers the assurance of their state of grace and salvation; next, to lead those who have become assured of this to sanctification of their lives; and, lastly, to confirm the sanctified and to keep them in their holy and blessed state unto the end. What a task!"[72]

Walther held that sermons, based entirely on God's Word, were primarily to preach doctrine—there should be no exhorting, reproving, or comforting without the basis of doctrine.[73] Every sermon should show listeners the way of Salvation—repentance, faith, regeneration. Observing proper Law/Gospel distinction, the sermon's emphasis rests always on the Gospel, its overriding goal to comfort believers.[74]

Walther's pulpit appearance was non-theatrical and direct. Unimposing in size—height 5½ feet, weight 140—with a moderately strong clear baritone voice, his speaking was clear despite having lost his teeth to illness. Eggold again: he possessed "in an eminent degree the two chief requisites for a preacher of the Gospel: a genuine conviction of the truth and eternal significance of his Gospel, and a sincere love

---

[69] Ibid., 428. The reference is to Luke 13:6–9.

[70] (1811–1887) To America in 1839, founding of Missouri Synod 1847; president of the synod 1847–50; president of the synod again 1864–78; founding of Synodical Conference 1872.

[71] Henry J. Eggold, Jr., unpublished Th.D. Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, May 1962, 179–80, 41.

[72] C. F. W. Walther, and W. H. T. Dau. *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel: Thirty-Nine Evening Lectures*. St. Louis, MO, Concordia Publishing House, n.d., 248.

[73] Eggold, 51.

[74] Ibid., 50–67 and his entire chapter on "Theological Accents in Walther's Preaching," 72–155.

of people and a burning desire to have them share the blessings of his faith."[75]

Walther admitted to being a poor extemporizer. Eggold quotes Guenther:

> Almost without exception he writes out his sermons word for word, and continuously corrects them, so that his manuscript much of the time is filled with additions and improvements made on the margin and between the lines. He also memorizes his sermons word for word with painstaking care. On Sunday morning he arises at four o'clock, refreshes himself with a cup of coffee prepared by his attentive wife, and zealously memorizes until it is time for the service. He confided that this painstaking memorizing caused him much trouble and that he wishes he had not fallen into the habit of memorizing his sermons."[76]

For Walther sermon-writing was not easy: "I am, as always, in great distress, for I must preach again."[77] He told his students, "I can assure you that I must wrest every sermon from the Lord with fervent prayer and hard work. The children of my pen are all born in great travail."[78]

Regarding his use of the text, Eggold observed:

> Nor is Walther to be classed among the great textual preachers. He is rather a thematic preacher who gets his theme from his text, but who then develops his theme using whatever aids the text can provide him. His sermons, therefore, for the most part, are discussions of a subject rather than discussions of a text.[79]

Walther's skill in finding stimulating insights in Scripture impressed Broemel: "He can pick on the seemingly most insignificant words and from them reveal the greatest riches of the faith." He observed that learning shows up in Walther's sermons as "he is as familiar with the church fathers, Luther, and the old Lutheran theologians, as he is with

---

[75] Ibid., 253. Eggold draws these descriptions together from scattered sources in his chapter, "Walther in the Pulpit," 249–53.

[76] Ibid., 227, quoting Martin Guenther, *Dr. C. F. W. Walther*, St.Louis: Lutherischer Concordia-Verlag, 1890, 162–63.

[77] Ibid., 225, Guenther quoting Walther, 163.

[78] Ibid., 228, quoting Julius A. Friedrich, "Dr. C. F. W. Walther," *Ebenezer*, ed. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1922), 39.

[79] Ibid., 224.

the Bible. He quotes Eusebius, Bernard, Luther, Bucer, Melanchthon, and the Confessions with ease."[80]

My own first thought upon reading Walther sermons:[81] Ah, here at last the Gospel thoroughly dominates! Walther's sermons are exemplars of elaborating on the Gospel, with page after page of refreshing expressions of God's grace, forgiveness, and love. In an Easter sermon, of the thirty-one paragraphs, five are informative, and all of the rest contain Gospel. Even the "Law section" contains an appealing Gospel invitation:

> And you who have continued to live in willful manifest sins, oh, repent today! Just think, with your sinful life you have shown that you have despised the grace that God has awarded you. If you have regarded what this means, "Christ has arisen also for me," you will not serve sin any longer. Depart from sin today, rise with Christ from the grave of your sins, and seek your desires now in the boundless grace of your Savior who rose also for you.[82]

And also this Gospel declaration:

> When Christ suffered and died, He was the Lamb of God who did not carry His own sins but the sins of the *world*. And when He rose, we see no sins in Him; we see that He no longer bears the form of a servant, the form of sinful flesh. He threw off the burden of sin and left it in His grave. Where are our sins? They are carried out of sight of God; they are forever buried.[83]

> And after that flowed two more full pages of Gospel expression.

This is not to say that Law was neglected in Walther's sermons. Eggold said Walther's rebukes of sin fell into several categories: first, "church-member sins" (neglect of church attendance and the Word, failures of love), then "money sins" (greed, cheating on taxes), third, worldliness.[84] Here is his expression of the Law in a Lenten sermon:

---

[80] Ibid., 140.

[81] Harrison's selection includes several delivered to synodical conventions and special occasions. Heck's collection of "Gospel Sermons," though the absence of date and place information limits its value to scholars, appear to be sermons delivered on ordinary Sundays. Walther, C. F. W. *Gospel Sermons,* vol. 1, trans. Donald E. Heck, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 2013.

[82] Heck, 234.

[83] Ibid., 231.

[84] Eggold, 179–80.

> After conversion, the germ of sin does not remain only in a few but in all human hearts. … At times even a Christian deals unjustly with his neighbor—injures, vexes, and lovelessly judges him. At times even a Christian permits himself to be misled to speculate, yes, even defraud his neighbor in a business deal and swerve from the strict truth. At times even in a Christian anger, hatred, jealousy, envy, or malicious joy fills his heart, for Scripture says we fail in many ways. However, when a true Christian has failed, it is as if he had a sliver that continually pained him. He cannot rest until he has removed this sliver from his conscience by true repentance … Ah my friends, let us not deceive ourselves with a Christianity without a continual battle.[85]

So Walther addressed the internal struggles of the Christian life with sin and resulting afflictions, and his cure is the Gospel: that God forgives and deals with us graciously. Broemel recognized the centrality of the Gospel in Walther's preaching: "He prays fervently. He brings in the sweetest verses and sayings. He knows how to speak powerfully from heart to heart. He knows from rich experience to put the main subject, the Gospel, the comfort of the forgiveness of sins, right into the center, the heart. One listens from beginning to end with greatest joy."[86]

Both Eggold and Lukomski claimed to sense a remnant of Pietism in Walther's preaching, particularly in his emphasis on faith as a living force in life, and even a touch of legalism in his comments on manners, dress, entertainment, and theatre.[87] But Lukomski defended Walther by noting the word he used for "experience":

> The Formula of Concord warned against judging the presence of the Holy Spirit on the basis of experience (*Empfindung*). Walther's word for experience is *Erfahrung*. While the Formula word focuses on the feelings and emotions, Walther's word is more a term of empirical, observable knowledge… Unlike the Pietists who called

[85] Heck, 168.

[86] A. R. Broemel, "Chapter Nine: Walther the Preacher," 1897, translated by Donley Hesse, in Arthur H. Drevlow, John M. Drickamer, and Glenn E. Reichwald. *C.F.W. Walther, the American Luther: Essays in Commemoration of the 100th Anniversary of Carl Walther's Death*. Walther Press, 1987, 138.

[87] Eggold dedicated his dissertation to demonstrating Pelikan's thesis that Walther's preaching represented a synthesis of Orthodoxy and Pietism, which he says had joined forces in opposing Rationalism in the early part of the century. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Jr., "Amerikansches Luthertum in dogmengeschichtlicher Sicht," *Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*, VI (July 25, 1952), 250–251. Eggold, op. cit., 2–3.

> upon man to seek the presence of the Holy Spirit through his feelings, Walther simply is saying that the presence of the Spirit through Gospel and Sacraments can be empirically witnessed in the life of the Christian."[88]

Still, both Eggold and Lukomski noted that Walther always emphasized the objective truth and operation of Law and Gospel as the bedrock of Christian faith.

Walther could engage in polemics—though they never dominated his sermons—against threats to his flock: rationalists, anarchist socialists, the enthusiastic sects, and a variety of Reformed perversions (self-appointed ministers who without a call sneak from house to house; the Church as an institution of morality with Christ a law-giver; legalistic views of the Sabbath), "Protestants" who have lost the atonement, secret societies,[89] and Rome, as well as "false Lutherans."[90]

Yet Walther refrained from answering frequent attacks by hostile newspapermen and by the Native American Party, an anti-alien group who held that "the American was in every way superior to a foreigner and used the public press to vilify the Germans."[91]

Many secular issues impacted Walther's listeners, not least slavery, the Civil War and the assassination of the president. Labor strikes beset St. Louis in the 1840's, financial panics in 1857 and 1873 ruined thousands, and St. Louis was one of the most unhealthful cities in the world, with 25% of children dying in their first year and 40% by age 6.[92] Eggold found no reference to slavery in Walther's sermons, and only a general reference to the Civil War in an 1863 sermon referencing "rivers of blood flowing on battlefields, the misery of the thousands of wounded and humiliated, the grief and tears of widows and orphans."[93] Addressing two tragedies close to home—the 1849 fire that consumed the entire St. Louis business district (640 buildings and 27 river steamers), and the great cholera epidemic that reached St. Louis and his congregation that same year—Walther discerned a three-fold purpose of God: to

---

[88] John Lukomski, *The Heart of Lutheran Pentecost Preaching: A Comparison of Luther, Walther, and Spener*, unpublished STM Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1987, 157 ff.

[89] Eggold cites Forster who reported that by 1842 there were six Masonic lodges in St. Louis, along with seven of the Odd Fellows, one especially for Germans. Walter O. Forster, *Zion on the Mississippi*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953, 310–311.

[90] Eggold, 161.

[91] Forster in Eggold, 164.

[92] Forster in Eggold, 166.

[93] *Epistel Postille*, 4, cited in Eggold, 175.

punish sin, to awaken the unbeliever, and to chastise the Christian so that faith might be purified, poverty of the spirit deepened, prayer made more fervent, and hope in God stronger.[94] Elsewhere Walther expressed concern for native Americans, who had been cruelly treated and thereby awaken Christian duty to bring them the Gospel. [95]

In his 1863 presidential address to the synod, Walther expressed the reasons for his near-constant silence on such matters, declaring that religion and politics must not be mixed; when people come together as Christians, they have nothing to do with the world.[96]

Eggold summarized:

> Old and cold, his sermons still vibrate with a passionate concern that his hearers be and remain children of God. How Walther could plead! A century after his sermons were first written one can tell that they were not produced to be admired but to be tools to do the Spirit's work in the world of people. HIs sermons made a difference in men's lives.[97]

Ulrik Vilhelm Koren[98]

By 1850 Norwegians were settling in Iowa, still a frontier. Only five years earlier had Chief Keokuk negotiated away his Indian territory and moved his Sauk tribe to Kansas. Statehood came a year later.

Rev. N. Brandt, later a Luther College professor, from his base in Wisconsin had explored the area for mission possibilities. C. L. Clausen conducted the first services at Paint Creek in 1851, and was given $20.[99] In 1853, Koren, fresh from Christiania University, arrived in Winneshiek County with his new wife Else, and settled on Washington Prairie, a few miles south of Decorah, in a shared one-room fourteen-by-sixteen-foot log cabin that was both residence and place of worship.[100] For fifty-seven years he was the faithful pastor of that parish, also

[94] Eggold, 176.

[95] Broemel, op. cit., 135–48.

[96] Eggold, 168.

[97] Ibid., 205.

[98] (1826–1910) To America 1852, president of the Norwegian Synod 1894–1910.

[99] Value of $20 then is over $600 today. Elisabeth Koren and David Theodore Nelson. *The Diary of Elisabeth Koren, 1853–1855*. Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum, 2006, 115.

[100] The cabin, shared with Erik and Helene Egge and their two children is described in Elisabeth Koren, op. cit., p97 ff. See also Edwin C. Bailey, *Past And Present Of Winneshiek County Iowa: A Record of Settlement, Organization, Progress and Achievement.* Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company 1913, 176. Online at

serving scores of churches in Iowa and Minnesota that count him as founder, holding services any day of the week in log cabins on trips lasting days or weeks at a time.[101]

By the 1870's conditions in Winneshiek County, and Decorah its main town, had improved considerably. Luther College had been dedicated in 1865. In 1870 Elizabeth Cady Stanton delivered women's suffrage lectures in town. Electric lights first shone in Decorah in 1882. By 1888 Koren could comment that nobody in his congregation was in financial need.[102] But frontier flavors remained in the Winneshiek County chronology for the year 1876:

- January 4th, John B. Stickles died; it was supposed that he was poisoned.
- January 31st, J. Ellen Foster lectured at the courthouse on temperance.
- March 3d, first accident on the Decorah branch of the railroad. Train was ditched three miles from the city. Eleven persons were hurt but none was killed.
- July 9th, in Frankville township Simeon Oleson shot and killed Anderson Theonson, who came to a party uninvited. After two trials Oleson was acquitted.
- December 21, 1876, near Locust Lane, while several teams were on the way home from Decorah, a quarrel arose and Helge Nelson struck Ed Torfin a fatal blow on the head with a club. Nelson escaped with six months in the penitentiary.[103]

Koren's sermons[104] show him acutely aware of the life experiences and inner spiritual struggles of his listeners; by vividly describing them

---

https://web.archive.org/web/20041213085621/http://www.usgennet.org/usa/topic/historical/winneshiek/titlepage.htm.

[101] "A large crowd had gathered at Rognald's where a few boards in the ceiling had been taken up so that many could take places in the loft." Elisabeth Koren, op. cit., 168.

[102] U. V. Koren and Mark DeGarmeaux, *U. V. Koren's Works*, Mankato, Minnesota, Lutheran Synod Book Company, 2013, 151.

[103] Bailey, 312.

[104] The sermons we have from Koren were gathered first by his son Paul in his 1912 collection *Samlede Skrifter*, and then in the translation of that four-volume work by Mark DeGarmeaux. Thirteen of the 64 sermons in Volume I of *U. V. Koren's Works* are represented as complete sermons, the rest as "incomplete manuscripts"; it is unclear whether these latter reflect pulpit notes from which sermons were delivered. My analysis is drawn primarily from the complete sermons. While sermons of other Norwegian Lutherans—Herman Amberg Preus and Jakob Aall Ottesen—appeared in scattered periodicals and publications, this readily available collection of Koren's sermons from the 1870s and 80s will represent Norwegian Lutheran preaching in the 1800s.

he produced sermons of unique strength.[105] His overall theme: God through Jesus helps us in all our needs so we can trust him to be our Savior. In his 1888 sermon on Danger and Rescue, Koren touched the worries in his listeners' hearts. To each worry he devoted a paragraph on how Jesus responds:

> He asks nothing of you, but He will give you everything that you need. Are you poor in respect to temporal things and do you suffer want?... Are you and yours bothered by sickness and sorrow?... Are you tempted by sin, by the flesh and the world, and worried about your weakness to resist?... Do you find that you are forsaken and alone in the world?... Is it death and judgment that terrify you?... Is it your sins which trouble you, maybe one particular sin? Maybe it is old sins from earlier days that now return and remind you that God knows them and that nothing has been forgotten? Speak to him, confess to him, hide nothing, speak right out, even letting yourself hear it! What will he answer? He will say to you that he has suffered for these sins. He has born the punishment for them. It was laid on him so that you should have peace."[106]

He drew on the listeners' experiences to illustrate God's love.

> You also talk about love. Picture some mother sitting among you, who thinks she knows something about love. She looks at her sick, suffering child and her heart is drawn to it with fervent, yearning, and sacrificial love. Her heart burns with this love, and it shines from her eyes. And yet, this love is only like a spark compared to the love with which God loves you.[107]

---

[105] I found little about Koren's method of preparation, but he may have preached to himself; his wife Elisabeth in her diary: "Now he is in the midst of his writing and talks to himself … and I keep thinking he is speaking to me and become confused in my work." Op. cit., 145.

[106] Ibid., 448–50. In another 1888 sermon, Koren provided a long and sensitive list of the variety of spiritual/temporal situations that trouble people, each in a different way: weak body, sickness in loved ones, the burden of age, temporal needs, concerns in vocation, concerns about children, "some of us have concerns over the congregation and the troubles and afflictions of the church, really a hard cross to bear… all of us have sins…" individual particular sins, sins that cause uncertainty and doubt, and having no joy in their Christian faith. 151. A similar list and treatment of situations that may trouble listeners is found in his 1881 sermon on Christ's ascension, 233–34.

[107] Ibid., Holy Spirit sermon, 1888, 258.

In his 1888 Advent sermon, Koren placed listeners into the crowd as the Savior's procession entered Jerusalem. Questions floated into their minds: can this be the Messiah? What about the miracles—on the one hand, this, on the other hand that. What about the sayings—on the one hand this, on the other that. He then drew listeners out of the crowd in Jerusalem into the crowd of witnesses to the Savior throughout the ages, with God's rule over them and in them, under God's care.[108] Listeners must have left the service feeling they had experienced an intense spiritual journey.

Like others, Koren at times directly addressed those in his audience he believed were not yet converted. In his 1874 Helper sermon, Koren addressed a frequent theme, shallow churchgoing without a commitment to Jesus. He said to those in front of him:

> If you are someone who despises God… whether you are a Christian in name only, whether you belong to his church only outwardly and dress yourself up or perhaps even take comfort in the name Christian, but basically just live for getting ahead in the world and think about that and having good and comfortable days—He knows![109]

In the Ten Lepers sermon, he said,

> But I also know that there are some among you who have not believed, even though you may have said "yes and amen" to everything said. What is the reason for this in those of you who do not believe? Perhaps it comes from not being concerned about being cleansed, since you are quite content in your unclean condition and wickedness, and therefore you will not repent and begin to walk a new way of life.

Then stern Law follows.[110]

As a stylistic device, Koren often used a common formula of the day—stating questions as if from a skeptical listener, and then answering them. In his 1890 sermon on Simeon and Anna, he invented a dispute:

- You say "salvation is not valid"—but God prepared it so it is valid.
- "Isn't it more reasonable that we prepare our own salvation?" God prepared this one so we can base our faith on it.

[108] Ibid., 20 ff. In a similar way, in an 1881 sermon on the Word, he takes his listeners into the experience of following Jesus through his ministry, 228.

[109] Ibid., 394.

[110] Ibid., 357.

- "Can we 'depart in peace' knowing we are sinners?" Yes, because we are saved sinners.
- "But Simeon had served God ("let **your servant** depart…") and I haven't done that." But his (and our) service is that we believe God.[111]

Bible passages flowed freely through Koren's preaching. In an 1887 sermon on being with Jesus in the ship, he quoted Scripture 33 times, all exactly to the point.[112] In his 1888 Holy Spirit sermon there were five in one breath:

> The Holy Spirit reminds us of what our Lord Jesus has done and said. Come to Me, He said, you tired and troubled souls [Matt 11.28], the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out [John 6.37], Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world [Matt. 28.20], I will not leave you orphans [John 14.18], I will receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also [John 14.3].[113]

Hymn verses, too, appeared frequently; the 1881 Ascension Day sermon included six hymn stanzas.[114]

While Koren preached clear Gospel, he did not spin it out paragraph after paragraph as we observed with Walther. He did, however, spin out sanctification at great length, addressing the question, how will we then live? Application of the Gospel to a Christian life formed the greatest portion of some sermons, as in this 1877 sermon on God's invitation:

> However [having believed the Gospel], you are still in the world. Should you no longer have anything to do with your farm, your business and your household, with these things that perhaps hindered you so long from coming to God? Yes, indeed you should still deal with them, but with an altogether different attitude than before… You will learn to see the duties of your earthly calling in a different light. Your farm and your business and your worldly relations held you back and alienated you from God, not because these things were evil, but because you were evil, full of sinful covetousness. But now these things will be sanctified for you as gifts from your heavenly Father.[115]

[111] Ibid., 61.
[112] Ibid., 96–110.
[113] Ibid., 259.
[114] Ibid., 223–38.
[115] Ibid., 292.

While Krauth stimulated listeners' imaginations with vivid and emotional images of suffering, Koren explicitly rejected sensationalism in his preaching. Speaking on the ten lepers text he said,

> If I now would picture the misery of leprosy with all its horrors and paint the glory of healing and in a striking manner show the points of similarity between leprosy and sin itself… if the presentation were really vivid, we could sit here as casual onlookers in spirit and still remain as we are. But then we would be using the word in vain…. [instead] We should let the familiar word be a mirror in which we can see ourselves so that we can seek and find grace to help us in time of need.[116]

We expect that Koren did not let politics enter the pulpit, even when in 1888 a Luther College professor, L. S. Reque, was nominated by the Democrats of the fourth district for Congress. He was defeated at the polls by J. H. Sweney of Osage.[117] But Koren did expect that listeners had been reading the papers. In an 1887 sermon he commented, "Now, there is no question that we hear impressive oratory about freedom in the world."[118] In his Advent 1888 sermon on the Procession of the Savior, he said,

> Have you, my hearers, ever seen a mighty king or a celebrated conqueror's entrance among his people? Most of you have at least read or heard about such a thing. In fact, only a few days ago such a reception took place in one large city after another in our country. There were lengthy accounts of the great and festive preparations, and of the thousands and tens of thousands who received the hero with spirit and rejoicing. But with that it was all over…. It was indeed only an earthly victor's entrance."[119]

Koren displayed awareness of public discourse in his treatise on "cliché's"—an array of verbal formulations that deceive, such as equivocation,[120] vagueness, glittering generalities, and band wagon.[121] In so critiquing secular political speech both in Norway and in the US,

[116] Ibid., 352.

[117] Bailey, 323.

[118] Koren, 102.

[119] Ibid., 26. I was unable to discover, in histories of the fall of 1888, to what this might have referred.

[120] E.g., terms such as "freedom" and "slavery" are used in both secular and spiritual senses, switching back and forth between them.

[121] E.g., "everyone knows" "it is indisputable that…."

Koren anticipated the "propaganda devices" identified prior to World War II by the Institute for Propaganda Analysis in the radio harangues of the anti-semitic pro-Nazi Father Coughlin.[122]

Koren's sermons reward readers with insights into how the Word of the Gospel speaks to the Christian condition.

Heinrich Christian Schwan[123]

Schwan, Wyneken's nephew, arrived in Missouri in 1850 to serve a small congregation of impoverished Germans, its church building "a small, forlorn blockhouse, the pews, rough boards."[124] Three Schwan sermons from several decades later represent the final quarter of the century.

The first he preached in 1877 as president of the Missouri Synod's Central District at the opening of the Synodical Conference convention in Fort Wayne, celebrating the 300th anniversary of the *Formula of Concord*. In a very masculine tone—addressed to "delegates, fathers, and brothers"—and a mere dozen years past the carnage of the Civil War, the sermon overflowed with military imagery.

> A banner, a standard, a flag, is placed on an occupied location where it can be seen far and wide. There the soldiers are gathered for battle. Where the banner stands, the general has his encampment. Where it is raised, there is the army. Wherever the banner is carried, the multitude follows. Where the flag falls, the columns fall into confusion. But as long as it flutters in the wind, the troop, the squad remains undefeated. Thus a soldier stands with the flag to which he has sworn. To leave the flag, to abandon the flag, is an act of dishonor.[125]

The flag, of course, is the *Concordia*, a symbol of unity. The sermon reviewed doctrinal history from Luther's death to the *Formula*, then urged listeners to "wave the banner," but "rightly." Several wrong ways filled a series of "woe to us" paragraphs:

> Woe to us if we… use the banner for self-boasting… use it to threaten others… use it to seek a unity not pleasing to God

[122] Elizabeth Briant Lee, "Coughlin and Propaganda Analysis," *Humanity and Society*, vol. 10, no. 1 (February 1, 1986), 25–35.

[123] (1819–1905) Missionary to Brazil, to America in 1850. Third president of the Missouri Synod 1878–99.

[124] "Reminiscences of an Old Bush Pastor," in Harrison, 563.

[125] Ibid., 503.

> [necessity of doctrinal unity]… Woe to us if the unity that the merciful God has already graciously given through His Word and Spirit be destroyed by secret mistrust, oversensitivity, base self-interest, or squabbles about peripheral matters. Indeed, let these all be gone![126]

Schwan took for granted an understanding of the Gospel—his audience after all was Synodical Conference leaders. He referred to "the pure Gospel," "the correct doctrine of justification," and "the Gospel of grace," without explaining them, and did not proclaim forgiveness of sins through Christ's work.

In the first year of his synod presidency, at the founding of the synod's new Iowa District, he addressed the persistent pressure from outside the synod to join in a heterodox external union. Under the theme "The orthodox unity of the Church," Schwan argued strongly for God-pleasing unity, noting, first, its form is spiritual (inner not external unity), next it springs from a God-given unity of faith (unity is not achieved but found), and finally unity is maintained not by structure but by love. Here again the Gospel was taken for granted, with no explicit proclamation but hiding in expressions like "the one true faith which you profess."[127]

On May 17, 1887, at Trinity Church in St. Louis, Schwan preached for the funeral of the revered Dr. C. F. W. Walther, addressing uncertainty about the future at the loss of this long-time spiritual leader, and urging listeners to trust in God Who does not change.[128] His specific application to the listeners:

> That dear man was God's gift to us. Have we all rightly acknowledged this gift? We admired him. We honored him. But did this honor really always come for the right reason, and did it happen in the right way? Did we honor God when we honored this man? Did we receive God's Word from his mouth precisely as God's Word? Did we not, perhaps many times, render the Word of no account because the mouth through which it came to us was also a human mouth? On the other hand, was not this Word here and there only accepted because it came from his mouth? Did we not at times too little, at other times too much, respect the person? But most important, did we always make good use of the rich gifts, the bright

[126] Ibid., 505.
[127] Ibid., 506 ff.
[128] Ibid., 540.

> light, which through him enlightened us unto our souls' salvation and blessedness?"[129]

Appropriately this sermon memorializing Walther contained a clear Gospel proclamation:

> [God]for the sake of the poor sinner sent His only begotten Son into the world and gave Him up to death. He did this so the Son would redeem those captive to death, through the Gospel, bring life and eternal blessedness, and give life and salvation against the stranglehold of death… This God and no other has taken our dear father to Himself. Can He then forsake us, who humble ourselves before Him, and cry out to Him?"[130]

The end of the century

A quarterly periodical, *The Preachers' Handbook,* appeared in 1900, promising "Sermonik Iiteratur will be presented: sermons and outlins of sermons on the regular gospels and epistels, and ahlso for speshel okkazhens, as: marrijes, funerals, dedikashens and missionary meetings."[131]

The editor commented on issues of the day, such as complaints about "the emancipation of women" and the predominance of mind-destroying novels over books of science and history in the newly-established Carnegie libraries. The preacher was urged to address such issues in the pulpit. With "Sermon Material" based on the words about Pergamos in Revelation, the unnamed preacher[132] inveighs against a society whose talk of morality only "hides vice under paint and powder":

> Political curruption [*sic*], luxury, extravagance, frivolity, sensuality, seifindulgence, contempt of labor, decline of the family, increase of divorces, multiplication of suicide, are characteristics of our age! … Surely, a generation whose religious reading is 'Quo Vadis' or 'The Christian,' whose amusement is 'Sappho' or 'The Lady of the

---

[129] Ibid., 538–39.

[130] Ibid., 540.

[131] *The Preacher's Hand-Book: a Lutheran Quarterly* was edited by Karl Spannuth of Defiance, Ohio, and cost 75 cents a year, about $20 today. Volume 1 Number 1 appeared in August of 1900 as *The Preecher's Hand-Book Kums For Tims A Yeer*. It employed the simplified spelling later promoted by Andrew Carnegie and Theodore Roosevelt. Volume 1 Number 2 reverted to traditional spelling.

[132] Probably the editor.

> Camelias,' has no need of being told what the doctrine of Balaam, or the doctrine of the Nicolaitans is.[133]

And what of attitudes toward the church?

> The admonitions of the church are only too often resented as an unwarranted interference in men's private affairs…. The binding key of excommunication is hidden away to rust as some antiquated piece of church furniture. The avaricious idolater and fornicator is permitted to stay unrebuked in his sin and yet pose as a member of Christ's holy body.[134]

What then is the answer? Repentance, yes, but unmentioned is a clear role for the Gospel. A series of brief sermon outlines for Lent follow the same pattern. With titles like "False Prophets Selling Christ," "The Soldier Selling Christ," "Ambition of Disciples," and "The Politician Selling Christ," the preacher was urged to elaborate on how the sins of Jesus' times are like the sins of today, with the only hint of Gospel coming in brief phrases like "From these sins Christ desired to make us free," and "Christ has come to redeem and free us from [this sin]."[135]

Henry Sieck[136]

Sieck provides for this study a positive tone at the century's end, his sermons revealing a plain preacher of common themes supporting simple explications. Concerned that people caught up in the holiday miss the real meaning of Christmas, he explored the angel's proclamation in four parts: 1. A Savior 2. Is Born 3. Unto You 4. This Day. Imagine the explication of each part.[137]

Like others, at times he screened the Gospel—in his Epiphany sermon the Gospel was background; the point: follow the example of

---

[133] Ibid., 132. The Polish writer Henryk Sienkiewicz wrote the novel *Quo Vadis: A Narrative of the Time of Nero* in 1895. Sappho was the acclaimed poetess from the Greek island of Lesbos. Alexander Dumas *fils* wrote *Lady of the Camelias* about his lover in 1848 and later adapted it for the stage; it inspired Verdi's opera *La Traviata*, the Oscar-winning movie *Moulin Rouge*, among others. I don't know to what "The Christian" refers.

[134] Ibid., 134.

[135] Ibid., 171 ff.

[136] (1850–1916) To America at age 4, studied at Fort Wayne and St. Louis, served a half-dozen parishes from 1873 ending up in Milwaukee at the turn of the century.

[137] Henry Sieck. *Sermons on the Gospels of the Ecclesiastical Year, Part First*. Concordia Publishing House, 1902.

the Magi.[138] But he could also make the Gospel strikingly clear. Here he addressed our emotional ambivalence over the crucifixion of Jesus: should we mourn or rejoice?

> The first effect will be extreme sorrow, sorrow for your sins which have caused the innocent suffering and painful death of your divine Savior. You will be moved to smite your breast and to say, Oh, what have I done? I have nailed the Son of God to the cross! My sin it was which made Him suffer and die. And the second effect of Jesus' suffering and death is that you will glorify God, as did the centurion. You will praise God and His wonderful grace and mercy, the great love wherewith He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to die that we might live. You will feel assured now, since Jesus died for you, that your sins are all wiped out, and that the penalty is fully paid for all your transgressions.[139]

Sieck's sermons are direct and edifying. On this Gospel proclamation, we end the survey of some 19th century Lutheran preachers.[140]

Conclusion

Given the limitations mentioned above, I cannot generalize from these sermons about the entire century of Lutheran preaching. But two impressions emerged.

First, despite tumultuous events none of the sermons made reference to current political issues. Especially the mid-west preachers focused on spiritual struggles and God's response to them, salvation through Jesus Christ.

Second, clear Gospel preaching was more often found in the preaching of the Midwest. Elsewhere, too often the message seemed to be, "Stay with the church, honor the Word, stay with the church, don't

---

[138] Ibid., 58.

[139] Ibid., 161.

[140] Although the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod did not congeal into its present form until the next century, I feel a gap in this study is the absence of preachers from those synods, "Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan and Other States," that federated in 1892 and formed the "Joint Synod" in 1917. However, sermons from those sources in that era are not easily found. We are told that August Pieper (1857–1946) "became a popular preacher for congregations' festivals. Conferences and district conventions of his church body frequently asked for his intense, emotional, moving presentations on a Bible text or topic." But that takes us into the next century. Tom Jeske, "Wanderer's Rest: a Biography of August Pieper," unpublished conference paper delivered in Omaha, Nebraska, April 2013, 4, in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary essay collection.

get drawn into the secular world, stay with the church." Too seldom, in those sermons, appeared the words "Your sins are forgiven."

Here is a lesson about preaching from this study: We can urge people to attend to the Word, without telling them the chief message of the Word. We can urge people to the Sacrament, without telling them what happens there. We can urge support of missions, without relating the mission message. We can acclaim doctrinal purity, without explaining the essence of that doctrine. We can encourage faith, but fail to mention the substance of that faith, the forgiveness of sins that we have by grace through the work of Jesus Christ.

In short, we can preach about the Gospel without preaching the Gospel.

In the 19th century, amidst turbulence of growth both in church and nation, God in His mercy raised up powerful Lutheran preachers to proclaim sin and grace, who saved many and established Lutheranism's significance in American culture. Simply to travel in imagination into the studies, pulpits and pews of that day and witness the Spirit's power, encourages us today in a period of churchly decline.

God entrusted His sacred and saving Truth to be conveyed in jars of clay. May the Holy Spirit, despite our weaknesses, continue to preserve and spread that Truth to powerful effect through the challenging but humble task of preaching. LSQ

Appendix A: Sermons Examined

1832

George B. Miller, The Prodigal Son, *Lutheran Preacher,* vol. 1 no. 1, 9–15.

David F. Schaeffer, The Nature and Duties of the Gospel Ministry, *Lutheran Preacher*, vol. 1 no.1, 3–8.

1833

Ernest L. Hazelius, The Gospel Offers Salvation to All Men, *Lutheran Preacher*, vol. 1 no. 2, 17–24.

George A. Lintner, [find assurance in your own experience], *Lutheran Preacher*, vol. 1 no. 3, 33–40.

1834

Christian F. L. Endress, The Dignified Station to Which We Are Exalted by the Work of Redemption, *Lutheran Preacher*, vol. 2 no. 3, 33–40.

1835

J. G. Schmucker, Religion the Only Source of True and Lasting Pleasure, *Lutheran Preacher*, vol. 2 no.11, 161–69.

1837

Christian F. L. Endress, The Nature of Christian Faith, *Lutheran Pulpit, and Monthly Religious Magazine,* August 1837, 169–77.
C. P. Krauth, On Missions, *Lutheran Pulpit, and Monthly Religious Magazine,* June 1837, 121– 34. [Charles Philip Krauth]

Augustus Wackerhagen, Synodical Discourse, *Lutheran Pulpit, and Monthly Religious Magazine,* November 1837, 241–47.

1838

A. E. Campbell, The Gospel Designed to Establish the Law, *Lutheran Pulpit, and Monthly Religious Magazine,* vol. 2 no. 11, 245–53.

L. Eichelberger, Justification by Faith, *Lutheran Pulpit, and Monthly Religious Magazine,* vol. 2 no. 7, 149–57.

1841

Frederich C. D. Wyneken, Let There Be No Divisions Among You, in Matthew C. Harrison, *At Home in the House of My Fathers: Presidential Sermons, Essays, Letters, and Addresses from the Missouri Synod's Great Era of Unity and Growth*. Concordia Pub. House, 2011, 345–58.

1854

Charles Porterfield Krauth, The Burning of Old Lutheran Church, https://www.lutheranlibrary.org/pdf/247tc-krauth-burning-of-the-old-lutheran-church.pdf

1855

Frederich C. D. Wyneken, Maintain Unity, in Harrison, 376–88.

1857

Charles Porterfield Krauth, *The Altar on the Threshing-Floor, A Discourse Delivered In The First English Ev. Lutheran Church, Pittsburgh, PA on Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 26, 1857*. W. S. Haven, Corner of Market and Second Streets, 1857.

1868

Frederich C. D. Wyneken, Sermon for Consolation and Encouragement, in Harrison, 428–36.

1872

C. F. W. Walther, On Pure Doctrine for the Salvation of Souls: Opening Sermon for the Synodical Conference Preached by C. F. W Walther Before the First Official Meeting of the Synodical Conference Held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, July 10–16, 1872, in Harrison, 193–201.

1873

U. V. Koren, The significance of Christ's Miracles for Us, in U. V. Koren and Mark DeGarmeaux, *U. V. Koren's Works*, vol. 1, Mankato, Minnesota: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 2013, 342–6.

1874

C. F. W. Walther, Regarding Absolution, in Harrison, 202–10.

U. V. Koren, Jesus the Helper, in Koren and DeGarmeaux, 393–407.

1876

U. V. Koren, The Kingdom of God, in Koren and DeGarmeaux, 76–82.

1877

U. V. Koren, God's invitation, in Koren and DeGarmeaux, 277–93.

Heinrich C. Schwan, Raise the Banners, in Harrison, 497–505.

1879

Heinrich C. Schwan, On Church Fellowship and Unity, in Harrison, 506–13.

1881

U. V. Koren, The comfort we get from Christ's ascension, in Koren and DeGarmeaux, 223–38

1887

U. V. Koren, In the ship with Jesus, in Koren and DeGarmeaux, 96–110.

Heinrich C. Schwan, At Walther's funeral, in Harrison, 536–40.

1888

U. V. Koren, Comfort from Jesus' miracles, in Koren and DeGarmeaux, 146–68.

U. V. Koren, Holy Spirit (Pentecost), in Koren and DeGarmeaux, 246–65.

U. V. Koren, The procession of the Savior, in Koren and DeGarmeaux, 17–33.

U. V. Koren, Danger and rescue, in Koren and DeGarmeaux, 434–53.

1890

U. V. Koren, Simeon and Anna as models, in Koren and DeGarmeaux, 56–60.

1893

U. V. Koren, Expecting Jesus' Return, in Koren and DeGarmeaux, 34–39.

1894

U. V. Koren, Lepers, in Koren and DeGarmeaux, 352–63.

1897

Heinrich C. Schwan, Jubilee Mission sermon for the 50th Anniversary of Synod, in Harrison, 555–62.

1899

U. V. Koren, Joseph & Mary return from Egypt, in Koren and DeGarmeaux, 69–75.

U. V. Koren unknown date, New Years Day, in Koren and DeGarmeaux, 62–68.

Henry Sieck unknown date, in Henry Sieck, *Sermons on the Gospels of the Ecclesiastical Year, Part First*. Concordia Publishing House, 1902.

The Angel's Message: Unto You Is Born This Day A Savior, 27–32.

Epiphany, 54–60.

The Death of Jesus, 157–161.

The Fact and the Meaning of Christ's Resurrection, 162–69.

C. F. W. Walther unknown date, in C. F. W. Walther, *Gospel Sermons*, vol. 1, tr. Donald E. Heck, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 2013.

Significance of the Incarnation, 37–46.

The victorious battle of Christians with God, 167–75.

Nothing calls to men so urgently, "Be reconciled to God," as the death of His own Son, 219–25.

The great comfort lying in Jesus Christ's resurrection, 227–35.

Appendix B: Walther's Note to Krauth

Donum mihi gratissimum accepi, sermonem Tuum: ' The Altar on the Threshing-floor,' in ecclesia Tua die gratiarum habitum; et gratias quam maximas tibi ago. Donatio enim honorificum non solum benevolentiae tuae erga me documentum est, sed opus ipsum tum idearum copia tum elocutionis vigore et splendore magnam vim in meam animam exercuit. Verba verissima eademque gravissima recto tempore pronunciata hic audita et nunc legenda sunt. Arma firmissima contra errores et vitia nostri aevi, nostrae nationis gessisti fortissime; imprimis contra egoismum, illum daemonem, qui regnum divinum devastare maxime conatus est, et haud exiguam partem agri divini et seminis puri adeo devastavit. Ubi τό Ego, studium sui ipsius, ardor propri lucri, propriae voluptatis causa, praevalet, quasi sceptrum tenet et omnia negotia gubernat; ibi fugit caritas, sensusque christianus et Salvator noster ipse flere coactus est; imo deest omnis justitia, virtus, dikaiosunh, quae placet Deo. Sed morbos non solum conspicuos nobis fecisti sed remedia quoque contra eos—et quidem rem acu—detegisti. Attamen solamen lugentibus! Dominus pater noster in coelis qui est per Jesum Christum nostra firma arx, recto tempore mittit fideles, peritos ac strenue certantes ministros in vineam suam! Ignoscas, quaeso, mihi Latina lingua utenti et veniam des mori Germanorum eruditorum hominum. Vale faveque.

Pittsburgiae, Jan. 11, A.D. 1858.

[My free translation:]

As a most welcome gift I have received your sermon, "The altar on the threshing floor," preached in your church on Thanksgiving Day, and I am most grateful to you. For the manuscript gift is not only an act of kindness to me, but your work prompted an abundance of thoughts with lively expression and a hearty splendor in my own mind. Your very sound and serious message was spoken, heard, and now read, at just the right time. You wielded valiantly the most powerful weapon against the errors and vices of our time and of our nation; first of all against selfishness, that devil, who is trying so hard to destroy the Kingdom of God, and in fact has destroyed no small part of the divine field and the pure seed. When the self, self-absorbance, zeal for money and one's own pleasure hold sway as a normal condition and governing practice, then love disappears along with all Christian sensibility, and our Savior himself is forced to weep; in fact all justice is lacking, virtue and equity—all those things that are acceptable to God. But not only have you made evident the illness, but you have applied the remedy for it as well—the very cure. O what comfort for the afflicted! Our Father in Heaven, who through Jesus Christ is our steadfast focal point, at the right time sends faithful, able, and stoutly contending workers into his vineyard! Pardon, please, my use of Latin, and give me leave to die as one of the learned Germans.

Goodbye and be well!

In Pittsburg, January 11, 1858.

Works Consulted

Andreas, A. T. *Map of Winneshiek County, State of Iowa*. Andreas Atlas Co. Chicago, mnpals-blc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=lunaRUMSEY~8~1~22124~720024&context=PC&vid=01MNPALS_BLC:BLC&lang=en&search_scope=MyInst_and_CI&adaptor=Primo%20Central&tab=Everything&query=any,contains,Winneshiek%20County%20Iowa%20map&offset=0.

Bailey, Edwin C. *Past And Present Of Winneshiek County Iowa: A Record of Settlement, Organization, Progress and Achievement*. Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company , 1913. Online at https://web.archive.org/web/20041213085621/http://www.usgennet.org/usa/topic/historical/winneshiek/titlepage.htm

Baglyos, Paul A. "Walther, Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm (1811–1887), Lutheran Clergyman." *American National Biography Online*, 2000, doi:10.1093/anb/9780198606697.article.0801608.

Bird, Frederic M., Lutheran Hymnology, *Evangelical Quarterly Review*, January 1865, no. 61.

Bitzer, Lloyd, "The Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric,* 1 (1968), 1–15.

Brenner, John M., "Doctrinal Challenges And Language Change," in Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary files.

Brigance, William N. *A History and Criticism of American Public Address*. Vol. 1. New York, NY: Russell & Russell, 1971.

Christianson, John Robert. "Koren, Ulrik Vilhelm." *The Biographical Dictionary of Iowa.* University of Iowa Press.

Drevlow, Arthur H., John M. Drickamer, and Glenn E. Reichwald. *C.F.W. Walther, the American Luther: Essays in Commemoration of the 100th Anniversary of Carl Walther's Death*. Walther Press, 1987.

Eggold, Henry J. *Walther the Preacher.* Unpublished Th.D..Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1962.

Eichelberg, L., ed., *The Evangelical Lutheran Preacher and Pastoral Messenger*, Winchester, Pennsylvania, 1833 and 1834.

Graebner, Th. *The Expository Preacher, A System of Inductive Homiletics*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri, 1920.

——. *Inductive Homiletics: A Manual for Classroom and Preacher's Desk*. Parts III and IV. *Literary Elements of the Sermon*. St. Louis, MO, Concordia Publishing House, 1919.

——. *The Pastor as Student and Literary Worker*. 2nd ed. St. Louis, MO, Concordia Publishing House, 1925.

Granquist, Mark Alan. *Lutherans in America: a New History*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015.

Greene, George E. *History of Old Vincennes and Knox County Indiana*, Chicago, 1911.

Harrison, Matthew C. *At Home in the House of My Fathers: Presidential Sermons, Essays, Letters, and Addresses from the Missouri Synod's Great Era of Unity and Growth*. St. Louis, MO, Concordia Publishing House, 2011.

Holland, Dewitte, ed. *Preaching in American History*. Speech Communication Association, 1971.

Holland, DeWitte. *Sermons in American History: Selected Issues in the American Pulpit 1630–1967*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Pr., 1971.

Jeske, Tom. "Wanderer's Rest: a Biography of August Pieper," unpublished conference paper delivered in Omaha, Nebraska, April 2013, in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary essay collection.

Koren, Elisabeth, and David Theodore Nelson. *The Diary of Elisabeth Koren, 1853–1855*. Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum, 2006.

Koren, U. V., and Mark E. DeGarmeaux. *U.V. Koren's Works*. Vol. 1. Mankato, MN, Lutheran Synod Book Company, 2013.

Koren, U. V., "Cliches, Sophistry, and Pompous Platitudes: an Admonition," in U. V. Koren and Mark E. DeGarmeaux. *U.V. Koren's Works*. Vol. 3. Mankato, MN, Lutheran Synod Book Company, 2013, 92–122.

Krauth, Charles P. *A Discourse Suggested by the Burning of the Old Lutheran Church, on the Night of September 27th, 1854, Delivered in the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Winchester, Va., the Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity, 1854*. Winchester: Printed at the Republican Office, 1855. Available at https://www.lutheranlibrary.org/pdf/247tc-krauth-burning-of-the-old-lutheran-church.pdf.

Krauth, Charles P. *The Altar on the Threshing-Floor, A Discourse Delivered in the First English Ev. Lutheran Church, Pittsburgh, PA on Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 26, 1857*. W. S. Haven, Corner of Market and Second Streets, 1847.

Lee, Elizabeth Briant, "Coughlin and Propaganda Analysis," *Humanity and Society*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1987), 25–35.

Lukomski, John P. *The Heart of Lutheran Pentecost Preaching: A Comparison of Luther, Walther, and Spener*. Unpublished STM Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1987.

Neve, J. L., John Martin Drickamer, and Charles George Fry. *A History of Lutheranism in America, 1619–1930*. Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1979.

Orvick, George M. "The Legacy of Ulrik Vilhelm Koren," The 36th Annual Reformation Lectures: The Legacy of the Norwegian Synod, 2003.

Pershbacher, Gerald, and John Martin. *C.F.W. Walther: Hero of Faith*. St. Louis, MO, Concordia Publishing House, 2011.

Preus, Herman A. *Ulrik Vilhelm Koren: a Biography*. Mankato, Mn.: Bethany Lutheran Seminary, 1950.

Preus, Rolf D. "The Legacy of Herman Amberg Preus," The 36th Annual Reformation Lectures: The Legacy of the Norwegian Synod, 2003.

Rehmer, Rudolf F. "The Origins of Lutheranism in the Fort Wayne Area 1829–1847." *Old Fort News*, Spring 1967. http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/RehmerOriginsofLutheranisminthe%20FortWayneArea.pdf.

Saleska, Edward John. "Friederich Conrad Dietrich Wyneken," unpublished STM Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1946.

Shiffman, Harold. "Language Loyalty in the German-American Church: the Case of an Over-Confident Minority." Accessed March 22, 2019. https://www.sas.upenn.edu/~haroldfs/540/handouts/gachurch/biggac.html.

Sieck, Henry. *Sermons on the Gospels of the Ecclesiastical Year, Part First*. St. Louis, MO, Concordia Publishing House, 1902.

Smith, Charles A., ed., *The Lutheran Pulpit and Monthly Religious Magazine,* 1837 and 1838.

Smith, Lewis W. "Milestones in Walther's Life." *Concordia Theological Monthly,* 32, no. 10 (October 1961), 664.

Spaeth, Adolph. *Charles Porterfield Krauth*. New York, The Christian Literature Company, 1898. Online at https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.ah5wsp;view=1up;seq=15

Spannuth, Karl, ed., *The Preacher's Hand-Book: a Lutheran Quarterly,* Defiance, OH, 1900–1901.

Suelflow, August Robert. *Servant of the Word: the Life and Ministry of C.F.W. Walther*. St. Louis, MO, Concordia Publishing House, 2001.

Teigen, Erling T., "The Legacy of Jakob Aall Ottesen," The 36th Annual Reformation Lectures: The Legacy of the Norwegian Synod, 2003.

Wall, Joseph Frazier. *Iowa: a Bicentennial History*. New York: Norton, 1978.

Walther, C. F. W., and W. H. T. Dau. *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel: Thirty-Nine Evening Lectures*. St. Louis, MO, Concordia Publishing House, n.d.

Walther, C. F. W. *Gospel Sermons*, vol. 1. Trans. Donald E. Heck, St. Louis, MO, Concordia Publishing House, 2013.

Webber, David Jay, "Charles Porterfield Krauth: The American Chemnitz," 37th Annual Reformation Lectures. Online at http://www.angelfire.com/ny4/djw/krauthchemnitz.pdf

Webber, F. R. "Walther in the Pulpit." *Concordia Theological Monthly,* 32, no. 10 (Oct. 1961), 621–626. Available at https://media.ctsfw.edu/Issue/Details/662?PeriodicalId=4

Wentz, Abdel Ross. *A Basic History of Lutheranism in America*. Philadelphia, 1964. Online at https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.32106015647131;view=1up;seq=11

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Ben Nickodemus, research assistant at the Concordia Historical Institute in St. Louis, for locating many relevant materials.

Thanks also to Prof. Mark DeGarmeaux, Bethany Lutheran College, for background on the Koren sermons.

Preaching Today

Paul O. Wendland
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary
Mequon, Wisconsin

LSQ Vol. 60, No. 1 (March 2020)

"*You are old," said the youth, "And your jaws are too weak*
For anything tougher than suet;
Yet you finished the goose, with the bones and the beak—
Pray, how did you manage to do it?"

"In my youth," said his father, "I took to the law,
And argued each case with my wife;
And the muscular strength which it gave to my jaw,
Has lasted the rest of my life."

Alice in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll

WHY THE ORGANIZERS OF THIS EVENT selected an old man to speak to you on preaching today, I do not know. I even asked if maybe they had called the wrong guy by mistake. They assured me they had not. Anyway, it seems more than a little ironic, so in that sense, I suppose, it's a perfectly postmodern thing to do. What I mean is, I wouldn't blame you if you were thinking, "What does he know about preaching in its current state? Preaching today?! He should entitle it, 'Preaching yesterday,' or 'Preaching for boomers' as he trots out all his tired old use-to-bes"!

Furthermore, it is dangerous to ask an old man to speak. Old guys have opinions, and they're not afraid to use them. They've lost their social filters, you see. The bad news is, then, and I'm talking to you seminarians especially, you may well disagree with some of what I have to

say. Maybe even a lot. You can chalk it up to another truism I've always believed and which now I see coming true in myself: when you get old, you get weird. What happens is, to use my mother's Anglo Saxon, "We get bees in our bonnets." Usually just one. It buzzes around in our heads and becomes the organizing principle of the universe, so far as we're concerned. Preaching to me is that bee.

The good news is, though old men are dangerous, they're also innocuous. I mean, really, we may express our opinions, but in the end who cares? We'll be well into our dotage by the time you hit your preaching stride! So viewed in the vaster scheme of things, I mean no harm. Bear with me even though my ideas may seem redolent with the smell of patchouli and orange shag carpets, and sound like a Bee Gees reunion tour.

One last disclaimer: as someone who is primarily a pew sitter these days, I'm not polishing that piece of real estate like some censorious Cato, waiting and watching for the preacher to mess up. If the church is a "mouth house"[1] from the preacher's perspective, it's an "ear house" from the point of view of the congregant. And that means my job on Sunday is to listen, a calling that I take very seriously. I believe that the man preaching is God's voice and as such deserves my careful attention, not my thin-lipped criticism.

Finally, for a Lutheran pastor today, it all comes down to preaching. Does he watch himself and his doctrine closely? You'll hear it in his preaching! Does he care about his people? Does he know where they live mentally, emotionally, and spiritually? You'll hear it in his preaching! Does he rightly handle the word of truth? Are his hermeneutical principles up to snuff? It's all there in his preaching! Does he tremble at the Word of God? Does he see himself as its servant, not its master? Has his text struck him personally with its terrors and consoled him with its promises? Do we sense that the sermon is an answer to his earnest prayers, both for himself and for us? You'll hear it in his preaching. As a trainer of pastors, I know—and my students do, too—it all comes down to preaching. None of us doubts the importance of preaching today. We want to get it right.

To do that we first, I believe, need to survey the current scene. Is preaching in crisis, as some believe? We should listen to those voices and at least hear why they are concerned. Then there is the vital question of audience. Here we have to look not only at the dwindling faithful in our congregations, but also at the broader landscape of North America.

[1] Luther's expression.

We are in midstream of a massive societal change, and it's having a profound impact on everyone the preacher sees before him on a Sunday morning. A look at the current scene would not be complete without a brief glance at the various types of Christian preaching we hear today.

In the second portion of the paper I would like to spend some time in outlining a theology of Lutheran preaching. If we don't know why we're doing what we're doing, we're apt to embrace every new style and theory that may come along, or to cling to old and outmoded forms without really considering their current wisdom and utility. We can consider it an attempt to define a Lutheran identity in preaching. What is it that makes Lutheran preaching distinctly and uniquely Lutheran?

Finally, I want to conclude with a section entitled, "A prayer for our preachers," which is—as the section title suggests—what I earnestly ask for God to accomplish through and in our men as they stand up to speak his Word. Such a basic task. Such a daunting task. It all comes down to preaching, in the end. Such an activity certainly merits our prayer.

An Overview of the General Scene

Crisis?

Many men who write about preaching today feel the whole enterprise is in crisis. Tim Keller, for example, warns against preaching a text without preaching Jesus, the Savior of sinners.[2] Albert Mohler notes Christ-less sermons and a host of other problems. Both he and Keller believe that good ol' expository preaching[3] has given way to faddish series dealing solely with current topics. Even worse, Mohler feels, preaching has lost its place at the beating heart of worship, having been sidelined by musical entertainment. "The Bible is nearly silent,"[4] he mourns. He cites a lovely little bon mot he attributes to Michael Green, "This is the age of the sermonette, and sermonettes make Christianettes."[5] Much of this is due, Mohler believes, to the postmodern turn away from expository, textual preaching to the felt needs of the audience. In similar

[2] Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*. Penguin Books, 2015, 48; 56–57.

[3] Which they might define as preaching book by book through the Scriptures. Lutherans who love their Propers might find this definition inadequate. Yet where their definition and our definition of expository preaching converge is the central idea that preaching begins with a biblical text and has its goal in setting forth the chief ideas of that text.

[4] Albert R. Mohler and John MacArthur, *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World*. Moody Publishers, 2019, 37–38.

[5] As quoted in Mohler and MacArther, 38.

vein, John MacArthur lists the following as contributing to the "weakening of preaching": 1. A loss of confidence in the power of the word; 2. Infatuation with technology; 3. Embarrassment before the biblical text; 4. Emptying of biblical content; 5. Focus on felt needs; 6. Absence of the gospel.[6] In a recent issue of *First Things*, Hans Boersma declares that (post)modern preachers suffer from a "Fear of the Word."[7] He explains:

> Our insecurities are different from the dread that took hold of Isaiah. In fact, they are its mirror opposite. Isaiah was terrified because God came too close. Isaiah knew that "man shall not see [God] and live" (Exod. 33:20). Today we fear that God is too far off. We are afraid to speak for him not because he is immanent, but because we feel he is remote.[8]

He goes on to decry what he sees as the current preacherly inability to find Christ in Scripture because interpreters feel hobbled by a barren historicism. This allows them to think only of what the biblical writers intended as a message for their own contemporaries, not of what God intended in the fullness of time. This in turn leads them to treat the text with cool detachment, as an object to be observed and analyzed, rather than joyfully to proclaim it from faith to faith.

"*O Tempora! O Mores*!" we lament. But are things really that bad among us? I would opine that there are two ditches we might want to avoid. The one is believing that all the demons of visible Christendom have come to possess our little houses as well, having found them garnished and bare. I just don't think that's the case. I don't doubt that Christian doctrine among the evangelicals has suffered the loss of a great deal of clarity in the past generation, and that these men are offering a healthy corrective for their churches. But I don't think we are afflicted with all the same problems to the same degree. I am primarily a consumer of sermons by calling these past fifteen years, and I generally hear textually based, law/gospel, Christocentric preaching wherever I go. The exceptions prove the rule. For this grace, we ought to thank God from the bottom of our hearts! On the other hand, it would be the height of arrogance and pride to believe that these trends have made absolutely no impact on us, as if we were somehow invulnerable to the

[6] Mohler and MacArthur, 16–21 (abbreviated)

[7] Hans Boersma. "Fear Of The Word." *First Things*, no. 295 (September 2019): 25–30.

[8] Boersma, 26.

spirits of our age. We dare not succumb to the kind of Phariseeism that can no longer "watch ourselves, we also may be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). So then, if I point out some dangers that I detect amongst us, it is with this spirit: I do not believe that everything everywhere is in crisis. Still, there remain portions of our homiletical promised land from which we have not yet fully dispossessed the nations. They can be snares to us still.

Audience(s)

It is the gift to be simple. An equal gift to state the obvious: any speaker must consider his audience before he opens his mouth. Preachers are not exempted from this standard rule. "Anyone who speaks in a(n unintelligible) tongue edifies himself, but the one who prophecies edifies the church" (1 Corinthians 14:4). But what is the "typical" audience to which our sermons should be aimed? One difficulty posed for a preacher nowadays is that the one thing certain about the newly emerging "typical" audience is that it is untypical—and devilishly difficult to categorize. Consider for example the difficulty posed in carrying out encouragement in our WLS homiletics textbook, *Preach the Gospel:*

> A sermon brings the two together, people and God, their needs and his answer… Gospel preaching … has both a missionary and a pastoral purpose. The sermon speaks both to unbelievers and believers… [Nevertheless] its *primary* purpose is pastoral… It does not address people as though they were godless unbelievers… [Yet] it will clearly present the way of salvation for the benefit of anyone who does not yet know and confess Christ as Savior and Lord.[9]

This is pretty standard advice and has been for a long time. The worship service is the *missa fidelium*, and as such is intended for the faithful, primarily. "Oh, yes," *PTG* adds, "and could you put a dollop of missionary evangelizing in as well!"

Not so easy. In fact, I believe that the question of audience is one of the key issues requiring further discussion among us, if for no other reason than it is becoming harder to bridge the gap between missionary and pastor in the pulpit. Preachers can no longer count on basic biblical literacy even among the faithful. And as for the interested visitor, a basic Judeo-Christian worldview may be almost entirely absent. It's not simply that society has lost the basic Christian vocabulary of sin and

[9] Joel Gerlach, and Richard D. Balge. *Preach the Gospel*. Milwaukee, Wis: Northwestern Pub House, 1982, 1 and 4.

grace.[10] Common standards of morality—or even the notion of such a standard—seem to be lost somewhere in a postmodern fog. We may be speaking in the tongues of men and of angels, but coming across as resounding gongs or clanging cymbals.

One place to start of course is by expending effort in understanding our audience(s). But here again, we run immediately into difficulties. The target is constantly moving. The congregation of farmers and blue-collar workers in the eighties I preached to were quite different in many ways to the middle managers and professionals I preached to in the nineties. They were different, in turn, from the Gen X-ers, Gen Y-ers, and Gen Z-ers I have been instructing since 1994! And this despite the fact that these folks, whatever their age and wherever they lived, all mostly came from good WELS/ELS stock. We haven't even begun to speak about building bridges to unbelievers.

I've read some suggestions about dealing with this issue, which I will share later. But first I want to highlight it as something that preachers must consider, and then point out the obvious once again: any preacher must consider his audience before he opens his mouth. In that one sentence, there lies a lifetime of study—not greater than the study of the Word, but still important.

In that study, we might compare ourselves to an anthropologist discovering an unknown culture. At first contact, no one can hand him a leather-bound textbook on the worldview, doctrinal beliefs, and customary behaviors, say, of the Plateau Valley Tonga in Central Africa. Neither has the authoritative dogmatics been written on the worldview of late-modernism. Such a book would hardly be possible, anyway, since our society (as noted above) comprises not one audience, but many. The preacher must first gain his people's trust. He must observe, listen, and ask. And if, later, someone does produce such a book detailing specific features of this postmodern, metamodern, mixed-up world, there is always a need to exercise care in reading it. It can never cover everything. And not every clan in the tribes we encounter will have exactly the same beliefs. There are always plenty of variations, besides cautionary tales aplenty to warn us against stereotyping. And any bookish observations grow dated with time. A book may serve as a place to start, but it cannot replace the imperative of continually observing, listening, and asking.

[10] For more on the so-called "nones" (the rising generation that is largely indifferent to organized Christianity), see James Emery White, *The Rise of the Nones: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated*. Baker Books, 2014.

Saying this is really to state nothing new. Preaching experts of every generation have all made the same point. Craddock speaks of "two focuses" in interpretation and of the need to interpret the audience/congregation as well as the text.[11] Keller speaks about preaching to the culture and of reaching the (late) modern mind.[12] *Preach the Gospel* simply says, "Timely preaching never scratches people where they don't itch."[13] The only difference, perhaps, is the urgent need for an on-going interpretation of one's audience because of the volatility of culture and the velocity of change. Had you told me, for example, when I started my ministry that gay marriage would become the nation's norm or that transgenderism would be defined as simply a matter of personal choice, I would never have believed you. Even fifteen years ago, it would have been hard to credit.

Exposition and Analysis of Certain Current Forms

When I first came to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, I taught homiletics. Then an administrative post intervened and I was unable to teach the course for fifteen years. Now, once again I'm back at it with first year students. Those years tell a story all their own. When I started in 2001, the "theme and parts" methodology was queen of the homiletical forms. It was difficult to master for all the typical reasons: students had trouble organizing their thoughts. They immediately leaped from the text into application. Their writing was, on occasion, appalling for college graduates. And yet no one questioned the tried and true. I remember stating the three rules of style and format almost like a mantra: 1. Tell me what you'll tell me; 2. Tell me; 3. Tell me what you've told me. Deductive reasoning held sway. Homilies were damned with faint praise. Inductive sermons were simply damned.[14]

Things are different now. People loathe "Aristotelian logic"[15] with all the passion of a Luther wanting to clean up a Wittenberg curriculum. Theme and parts these days are most notable for their absence. I can't really remember the last time I went into a church and saw them printed

[11] Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010, 84–98.

[12] Keller, *Preaching*, 121–156.

[13] Gerlach and Balge, 11.

[14] "Sermons are not constructed like an Agatha Christie story… Unlike the writer of mystery, the preacher's purpose is not to lead his hearers through a maze, baffled and bewildered by what is going on and about how it will all turn out in the end—if it ever comes," Gerlach and Balge, 39.

[15] Truth is, in speaking so, they are being most unfair to Aristotle. In his logic and rhetoric, he is far more subtle than most postmoderns are aware. He is no stranger to inductive as well as deductive forms.

out, bold and sassy, in a bulletin. Perhaps an overly rigorous emphasis on them during seminary days has led to such a backlash. Inductive reasoning is now all the rage. Methinks, at times, we do protest too much.

But there is even a greater backlash. Can 'preaching' still work at all? The word itself reeks of pontificating authorities discoursing at length to others with a condescending air. The whole idea of an expert purveying 'the Truth' has an outmoded modernist sensibility to it. We are all guides now, not sages. Fellow travelers as we grope through unknown lands, not expert explorers. The only thing we all know is how much we don't know. Besides, we all have the attention spans of gerbils.[16] In our ADD world, instruction only happens by accident through distraction as we surf the internet, gaze at our smartphones, and float from one disconnected bit of information to another. Incoherence is the new coherence.

A bit over the top? No doubt. But you take my point. Truth isn't what it used to be, or so they say. This led some preaching experts, like Fred Craddock, to advocate preaching "as one without authority." Dr. Craddock pointed out that, since people generally held authoritative types in disregard, perhaps preachers need to preach without it. By this he meant starting with the listeners, not the text; and for preaching to be inductive, rather than deductive.[17] While he himself has modified and softened his views (see his book *Preaching* referenced above), he has had a profound influence on the forms and style of present-day speakers, especially as they seek to reach Millennials.

Before we get into a closer look at some of those forms, however, I cannot help but wonder aloud if authority and truth are as outmoded as some might think. A person can speak authoritatively without coming across as a know it all. And is listening to someone speak for twenty minutes on something he knows a lot about really so unattractive? Must it always seem condescending? If so, how do we account for the popularity of TED talks?[18]

In any case, as we survey the current scene, what do we see? Through the power of the internet, I was able to listen to a sampling of sermons

[16] With a doff of the cap to Daniel Deutschlander, my former colleague.

[17] For more, see Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority: Fourth Edition Revised and with New Sermons*. Revised edition. St. Louis, Mo: Chalice Press, 2001.

[18] A nonprofit that sprang from a conference in 1984, where speakers in the field of Technology, Entertainment, and Design all gathered. Now it spreads ideas through "short, powerful, talks (18 minutes or less)." See TED.com. Accessed September 29, 2019. https://www.ted.com/about/our-organization.

by such representative worthies as Andy Stanley and Tim Keller.[19] I also listened to various notable and not so notable preachers from our own circles. The following analysis is entirely lacking in any scientific rigor, and completely opinionated. But I warned you about that at the outset. Roughly speaking, in form they can be classified as follows:

1) those who preach "standard," pericopic, textual, expositional, thematic/propositional sermons;
2) those who preach expository sermons that form a series in which an entire book of Scripture is proclaimed, usually chapter by chapter;
3) those who preach a topical series that is very much based on a biblical text;
4) those who preach a topical series that is less closely associated with a single text and in which the text is more a source of principles to be learned and lived rather than a source of law and gospel.

Let us look a little more closely at each.

The "Standard" Type

Although we are all familiar with this form, it is difficult to define easily without a string of adjectives. Yet it is a standard among us and has been for a long time. It is *pericopic*, meaning that it has been selected from one of the three readings appointed to be read for a particular Sunday of the church year. It is *textual*, that is, it is based squarely on one of those texts which it aims to exposit. The exposition is *thematic* or *propositional* because the preacher focuses on the central thought of the text, preaching law and gospel on the basis of it. Needless to say, this is the type of sermon I hear most frequently in our circles. It may or may not have distinctly articulated parts that divide the theme, but it definitely exposits a single, propositional statement.

The advantages of this type of preaching are many. It is clearly textual, and by harnessing himself to the church year's set of appointed readings, the preacher is more likely to preach the whole counsel of God year in and year out. After all, the *Christus pro nobis* and *Christus in nobis* cycle of the church year has stood the test of centuries. He is also less

[19] Here I would like to refer you to an excellent article in the latest *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly.* Written by a young preacher, Jonathan Bauer, it analyzes in much greater detail the preaching styles of Stanley and Keller: "Bringing Christ into the World of the Scream: Communicating the Gospel to the Products of a Post-Christian World." *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 116, no. 3 (Summer 2019): 207–36.

likely to preach according to his own predilections or depend too heavily on his own ability to assess the current needs of his flock. He takes the texts and their thoughts as they come up in the course of the year.

Furthermore, the form does not have to become a straitjacket. As mentioned, not all sermons of this type further subdivide the theme into parts. They can be inductive as well as deductive. And finally, when there is a need for a certain topic to be addressed in the congregation (such as Luther's famous "Eight Sermons Preached at Wittenberg"[20]) the preacher not feel himself so bound by the form that he cannot break the rules on occasion. The same freedom is there for a man to preach through a book, or perhaps to construct a series on the great narratives of the Old or New Testament. Finally, it is extremely advantageous, in a highly mobile society, to have a "standard" form that people can recognize as they move from place to place. Call it "branding" if you want: it is a distinctly WELS/ELS brand.

To be honest, however, there are also disadvantages. It can appear to lack relevance to those in our pews who are unfamiliar with either Scripture, or the church year, or both. The inquirer may fail to discern the overall purpose in having three readings or how they are connected. It may all seem to him rather random. Over the years the form can become a kind of template dedicated to observing essentially the same pattern in exposition and application Sunday after Sunday. There grows a deadening sameness in how texts are dealt with. People know exactly when the preacher moves from part one to part two, or from law to gospel. There is no mystery, no sense of progression or excitement. Folks have been on this road so many times before that both the preacher and his congregation are on autopilot.

While the following disadvantages are not (obviously) intrinsic to the form, I have nevertheless heard them primarily in those who use the form, or perhaps better said, used it without sufficient meditation and preparation. The preaching of Christ becomes a cliché, the punchline in a good news/bad news joke. The law is perfunctory (or even worse) scolds rather than kills. It never seems to penetrate to the heart

[20] See http://www.theologie.uzh.ch/predigten/archiv-6/eight-sermons-wittenberg.pdf, Accessed September 30th, 2019. I also note with pleasure my good friend Pastor Timothy Buelow's essay on those same sermons (aka "Invocavit sermons") "Luther's Invocavit Sermons: The Wittenberg Professor's Pastoral Perspective in Preaching" https://www.academia.edu/34792404/Luthers_Invocavit_Sermons_The_Wittenberg_Professors_Pastoral_Perspective_in_Preaching_Evangelical_Lutheran_Synod_General_Pastoral_Conference. Accessed October 14, 2019. They are well worth study and reading.

of things. The sermon often lacks contemporary relevance in the way it attempts to convict or console us. It seems to be answering humanity's basic questions in the same forms in which they might have been couched in the sixteenth century. Finally, sermons seem to be focused on the second use of the law and God's pardoning grace almost to the exclusion of the third use of the law and God's empowering grace.[21]

Bottom line, if we still want this standard type to be the predominate form among us, we must admit that there is ample room for improvement in how we use it.

Book by book expository preaching

Favored by men like Keller and Mohler, this form also compels the preacher to put himself under the discipline of a series of texts. Once he has chosen the book, the yoke of the Scripture is upon him. His goal now is to construct a series of expository sermons that follow the book's line of thought. A variation of this approach would be to select a series of texts with a common form, like the Penitential Psalms, the Parables of Jesus, or "Great Old Testament Narratives." This kind of discipline, coupled as it is with a commitment to start with the text rather than with the contemporary world (in finding one's themes, that is), retains some of the advantages of the pericopic form. It has the further advantage of allowing the preacher to explore a book's themes more deeply and so to enrich his people with better understanding of a book's place in Scripture's overarching story. The form itself has a kind of a built-in "what's going to happen next" feel about it. Finally, given the common lament over biblical illiteracy, this style may be a way to address the problem.

But there are also disadvantages. It seems to me it takes no little skill to master a biblical book's line of thought so thoroughly that one can retain a fresh approach Sunday after Sunday in expositing its various themes. How does a person differentiate one portion of the book from the next? Aye there's the rub! Furthermore, if one is preaching an Old Testament book like Genesis, an unskilled preacher may have difficulty proclaiming Christ on the basis of his text without recourse to excessive allegorizing. To summarize an entire chapter and preach its *Herzpunkt* seems to require hermeneutical and homiletical abilities of the higher order. Finally, it seems likely that, if this becomes his standard approach,

[21] I would never argue against the thought that the 2nd use of the law along with the forgiveness of sins needs to predominate in a preacher's communication. What I'm talking about here is a near dearth of preaching encouragements to holy living.

a preacher is going to have a more difficult time of it proclaiming the whole counsel of God.

Topical expository preaching

This style stands as a kind of halfway house between expository preaching and purely topical preaching. Its practitioners usually start with some current issue, theme, or series of themes. Then they come up with a series of biblical texts chosen to address the issues or questions raised by those themes. Though they have begun their homiletical task with a consideration of the needs of their audience, they want the answer to those needs to come from a suitable portion of God's Word. I heard an outstanding example of this kind of preaching from Tim Keller. His "current needs" question was how to deal with dark times. As his answer, he masterfully walked his listeners through Psalm 88. Christ the Savior was clearly proclaimed.[22] I was personally edified. Were there things wanting in it? Of course! I did not hear a clear announcement of the unconditional gospel based upon our Savior's vicarious suffering for the sins of all. But I did not expect that from a Presbyterian.

Since I consider this to be a halfway house, I will reserve a discussion of its disadvantages until we look at the next style with which it shares one key feature: it marks the turn from sourcing one's themes in the biblical text to finding them in the needs of the contemporary audience.

Topical preaching

In a way, the title is unfair. In omitting the word "expository," it seems to say, "This type is thoroughly unbiblical from the outset." This is something, however, I do not wish to say. Luther's "Eight Sermons" mentioned earlier would fit under my definition of this type. The difference lies not so much in whether the form is based upon the Scriptures or not, but where lies the starting point of the sermon or sermon series. The answer is, with the contemporary audience and its particular needs. It differs from the previous type in that it makes no bones about this, and the preacher feels no particular burden of constructing his answer from a single text. He can use as many as he likes to answer the question of the day.

The advantage of this form is obvious. It is relevant or seems to be so. It begins with the people you are preaching to and seeks to

[22] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulmaUtbayGY. Accessed October 2, 2019.

answer a current question or a prominent need they have. A preacher looking for sermon helps can often find ready-made series on the web, complete with great graphical resources and riveting themes. It seems almost ideally suited for a society that is increasingly indifferent towards Christianity, believes the Bible to be irrelevant, and lack any depth of knowledge in it.

The disadvantages are equally obvious. In a pursuit of relevancy, Scripture's truth can be left playing second or third fiddle. The theme and structure of the series are not necessarily distillations of what the Bible has to say to the world, untethered as they are from a specific text. Its ideas are rather derived from two main sources. The first is the experiences and concerns of the audience. The second is the preacher's own wisdom in discerning and speaking biblically to those concerns.

I believe any preacher who embarks on this course has to ask himself a question as he stands before God's throne: how sure am I that I am correctly perceiving the *genuine* needs of my people, week in and week out? Will the whole counsel of God be preached? The answer to these questions has little to do, really, with the feedback one gets from the listeners. I would assume that people will be attracted by the shininess of contemporary relevance. It has everything to do with the fact that a person's presenting problem or need is often not his deepest problem. In biblical terms, a contemporary concern may only be a surface symptom of a far deeper malady: our world's estrangement and enmity to the good God who made us.

A second point and one that is closely related to it, there is a distinct temptation to define (and answer) problems in the way society has taught them to, rather than in the way Scripture unfolds them before us. While every preacher of every type of sermon must address that gap in understanding (after all, no one by nature comes into church saying, "I crave the unconditional gospel of the forgiveness of sins won for all by my Savior Jesus!"), topical preaching can easily lend itself to resting content with contemporary, therapeutic answers (with a little biblical seasoning) to present day problems.

A final caution is in place. If we are seeking to reach the unchurched especially, we must have a care as to what may happen when they move away from us and seek another church. It's no secret that this kind of preaching is standard fare for evangelical and community churches. If the WELS/ELS "brand" is pericopic, the metamessage of this form is, "Northpoint Community Church" or "Church of the Crossroads

Ministries." Immature Christians are likely to favor form over substance as they decide where to attend church when and if they leave us.

A related type…the "News You Can Use" Form

I hesitate to label this as a type all its own because, really, it can be found almost in any of the above forms. I have found it most commonly occurring in those who favor "topical preaching," but I'm not sure if this is a consequence of the form, or the fact that evangelicals love to "principalize" Scripture because of their faulty hermeneutic and their attitude towards the motivating power of the law. You can learn "Ten principles of godly leadership taught in Nehemiah" or "The fifteen laws of powerful praying as portrayed in Acts" and take them home with you. I like to call it "the news you can use" approach.

While I have not really found it in any kind of crass way in our circles, I have noticed indications of a 'cut to the chase' mentality with an excessive emphasis on golden tips for a happy life. I agree with many in the observation that preaching Christian guidance for holy living is more important than ever in our era. But this is not the answer. In it, I can sometimes detect an alien tone that appears to me to be affected by this "news you can use" approach. What I mean is, the law is used as if it could advance our motivation and joy in sanctification rather than leaving that office to the gospel. This, I think we can all agree, is a problem.

A brief concluding word…

We could have discussed many other popular styles here—inductive, deductive, those reflecting the text's own rhetoric and genre—but it seems more appropriate to me to talk about them below when we are looking at the Lutheran *logos* in preaching. For now I simply want to say that, despite all its disadvantages, my preference remains decidedly in favor of the standard style. I pray that this is not just the "old wine" preference that Jesus warns us about (Luke 5:39).

As a young boy growing up in Zambia, I remember staring at a beautiful scroll-like wall hanging of the church year that was in my father's office. The seasons and Sundays were depicted in a circular fashion as spokes radiating from the hub of Christ. The four rivers of Eden flowed from the center, and it was bounded on the outside by the great golden circle of eternity. I would puzzle over the words, only some of which I could recognize (Quasimodogeniti?) I could remember, too,

how it had once been displayed prominently in my father's study in Benton Harbor, Michigan. Same wall hanging, vastly different place.

You can perhaps see why the church year stirs in me fond memories of being at home wherever I am, whether I am in Lusaka, or Mwembezhi, or Hong Kong, or Mankato. It reminds me of that river "whose streams make glad the City of God" (Psalm 46). Though chaos and disorder may prevail as creation dissolves, the earth melts, and the seas leap free from their set places, that city knows no fear because God is in her midst. It lives by a transcendent hope and hears the gentle ticking of a different clock. I needed to be reminded of that as my own life was being thrown into disorder. I suddenly found myself living in an alien culture with customs I did not understand. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but God's Word … never" that calendar seemed to say. Am I so out of touch to believe that people today might be blessed by that same assurance?[23]

The fact is, having lived for many years in a cross-cultural setting, and having observed a Lutheran church grow from nearly nothing until it now flourishes under African skies, I can see no cultural reason whatsoever for jettisoning the lectionary, the liturgy, or the church year as excess traditional baggage. I remember words from one of the basic instruction manuals of the Lutheran Church of Central Africa, "The Lutheran Church is a *liturgical* church." We were teaching this in the spirit of a Sasse who remarked that it was not "romanticism or false conservatism [that led Lutherans] to cling tenaciously to the old forms of worship."[24] It was rather a recognition that the liturgy was a distillation of the gospel that had everywhere, always, been believed by all. It was an expression of the fact that Lutherans believed they belonged to the same visible church as Athanasius, Augustine, Tertullian, Aquinas, and Bernard of Clairvaux.[25] It never was intended as a rigid insistence for lock-step uniformity (which, of course, the confessions speak plainly against), but as a distinct preference. The truth is, the Zambian and Malawian churches developed the church's liturgical songs in their own unique ways for their own unique settings. They were "contextualized" as a missiologist might say. Yet they were easily recognizable as songs of the liturgy by visitors from the West. In similar fashion, preaching the church year posed no insurmountable cultural barriers. In Lutheran

[23] I am indebted to Pastor Bauer's "Bringing Christ" article for this basic thought. See his "secular times" and "higher times" discussion on pages 216ff.

[24] Hermann Sasse, *Here We Stand: Nature and Character of the Lutheran Faith*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1938, 103.

[25] Sasse, 101.

congregations in Matero, you will hear the same appointed readings read and proclaimed as you will in Milwaukee.

Towards Defining a Lutheran Identity in Preaching

Quite frankly, this is where I really wanted to go with this essay and I'm sorry it took so long to get here. I will use the ancient rhetorical categories *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos* to organize the discussion.

Lutheran Ethos

This has to do with the speaker's character and how he comes across to his listeners. A man has to ask himself before he steps up into the pulpit,[26] "Just who am I and what am I about?" He's not up there to swap recipes for chipotle dressing. He's not engaging in trivialities, but in matters which touch the deepest wellsprings of human nature. Nor is he there merely to give a religious talk, as if he were a spiritual guru.

There are two interrelated truths that shape a Lutheran pastor's ethos. The first is the conviction that preaching is God speaking (*Deus loquens*). The second inevitably follows: the preacher is God's voice (*vox Dei*). Here we are merely recognizing the power of the one who said, "All authority… has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:18–19). In his own inimitable way, Luther remarks, "The mouth of Paul, the apostles, and the preachers is called the mouth of God…. The Word is the mouth of God."[27] This is no isolated saying, an incautious one-off. Consider these words from his sermon on John 4:

> Would to God that we could gradually train our hearts to believe that the preacher's words are God's Word and that the man addressing us is a scholar and a king. As a matter of fact, it is not an angel or a hundred thousand angels but the Divine Majesty Himself that is preaching there. To be sure, I do not hear this with my ears or see it with my eyes; all I hear is the voice of the preacher, or of my brother or father, and I behold only a man before me. But I view the picture correctly if I add that the voice and words of father or pastor are not his own words and doctrine but those of our Lord and God.[28]

---

[26] Or ambo, or into the aisle, or sitting on a chair with a mike on the stage—though one might want to consider carefully what his metamessage is in abandoning the pulpit.

[27] *WA* 34/2:405.19–25.

[28] *LW* 22:526.

These claims may seem outrageous and arrogant until we consider the alternatives. If the preacher is only a human voice, offering human insights into human problems, why does he bother to preach in a church at all? Why should anyone listen? He might be better off dedicating himself to psychotherapy. Or if the preacher is only a human voice giving his best insights as to what the Scriptures *may* be saying, and how they *might* apply today, what earthly good is he? There's no rescue here from the postmodern fog. No clear light pointing us to freedom from the darkness of relativism. Who will rescue us from this misery of uncertainty? One man's insight is as good as another's! In the end the only comfort comes from human contact, one person telling stories to another in an attempt to ease their mutual loneliness. But the darkness remains. There's no transcendence, nor possibility of transcendence. As Luther put it:

> And what is it that preachers do, to this very day? Do they interpret and expound the Scriptures? Yet if the Scripture they expound is uncertain, who can assure us that their exposition is certain? Another new exposition? And who will expound the exposition? At this rate we shall go on forever. In short, if Scripture is obscure or ambiguous, what point was there in God's giving it to us? Are we not obscure and ambiguous enough without having our obscurity, ambiguity, and darkness augmented for us from heaven?[29]

Rather than arrogance, it is a false humility that declares that God has not spoken to us in his Word, or that God has not spoken in a clear enough way that we can, in turn, believe teach, and confess what he says.

But there are other reasons as well why this is not an arrogant claim. If someone has been called by God through the Church to preach the Word to a particular congregation, he recognizes that God has made him a servant of that Word. As a gospel messenger, his earnest desire in Christ is to be entirely subservient to the text, seeking always to *under*stand it, never to *over*stand it. His fervent prayer to the Holy Spirit is that he may surrender his thoughts, his emotions, and his will to the Word. Faith is not proud. It says, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening!" (1 Samuel 3:10). Hope is not arrogant. It is filled with an awestruck sense of accountability for every word it utters, knowing that they resound before God's heavenly throne (Matthew 12:36).

Finally, this does not mean that the preacher has to come across as a know-it-all. This is a temptation, of course. There is the

[29] *LW* 33:93.

intellectual pride that comes with the ability to "fathom all mysteries" (1 Corinthians 13:2). We are tempted to rejoice in the fact that we know and the facts that we know rather than boast in the Lord. This can lead us to speak down to people, as if we were on high while they were down below. One who sees himself, however, as a mere voice and as a servant of the Word cannot allow himself to act this way. His faith will not permit it. He is only a conduit for the voice of God, speaking God thoughts after him. His heart, his mind, his words lie open before God's penetrating gaze. Of this the preacher is deeply conscious above all. So in the end, only one who grasps that he is a servant of the Word can truly say, "We do not stand against the people, untouched by their temptations or struggles. We stand with the people, as one of them, under the Word."[30]

If loss of authority, fear of the Word, and the remoteness of God are the ills of late modernity, recapturing the Lutheran *ethos* is certainly part of the cure.

Lutheran Logos

In rhetoric, logos refers to the content of what one has to say. It is the central issue of which one speaks, the facts associated with it, and the logical flow of the discourse itself (how one point leads to the next).

Centered in the Radical Gospel

For Lutherans, the content of our preaching is not up for debate: *nihil nisi Christus praedicatur!*[31] The unconditional gospel has been called the *Existenzberechtigung* of the Lutheran Church.[32] Our confessions speak of justification as "the most important topic of Christian teaching … which is especially useful for the clear, correct understanding of the entire Holy Scriptures."[33] Put another way, it's what the Bible is all about.[34] Life through faith in forgiveness is God's last Word to a sinful and suffering humanity (see Hebrews 1:1–2).

---

[30] Paul Scott Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart: New Understandings in Preaching*. Abingdon Press, 1988.

[31] A quote attributed to Martin Luther by Fred Meuser in *Luther the Preacher*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1983, 16.

[32] By my father as he spoke and wrote about our Lutheran Identity as a world mission church. I always hear his voice saying it in German. English meaning: reason for one's existence.

[33] Ap IV.2 in Kolb and Wengert, 121 (footnote 49 giving Justus Jonas' German translation).

[34] An adaptation of a Luther quote. Speaking of justification by faith, he said, "*Qui non intelligit res, non potest ex verbis sensum elicere*—if you don't know what

In that rather dense paragraph above, it may have seemed as if I were defining many different terms—radical gospel, Christ, unconditional gospel, forgiveness, and justification. In fact, all these different expressions are referring to the same thing: the good news that Jesus Christ died for the sins of all people, a truth that individuals make their own by simply trusting that it is so. As Melanchthon goes on to unfold the many aspects of the truth of justification in the Apology IV, he begins with a profound and pointed discussion regarding the distinction between law and gospel. Quite simply, Lutheran Christian preaching is law/gospel preaching.

Both are needed throughout the life of a Christian. At his true life's inception, the Christian must first be killed by the law before he can be raised to life by the gospel. Once reborn, the believer in his life of sanctification begins to love the law. He has internalized it as the loving will of his loving Father, and so no longer sees it as simply an alien will bearing down on him from the outside (a will he cannot satisfy). As a Christian with two natures, he welcomes the law's instruction to distinguish more clearly false obedience from true. But since he remains to the end of his days *simul iustus et peccator*,[35] he never grows beyond his daily need to be cut to the quick with the law's accusations and threats. And even in the most winsome "third use of the law" preaching, the Christian will always hear the law accusing and condemning him, because *lex semper accusat*.[36]

What quickens him with life's glad breath, however, is the gospel and only the gospel. It comes to him without condition. He does not prepare himself for it by his own spiritual exercises. He does not maintain himself in grace by his own efforts. Indeed, he cannot. The gospel and only the gospel is God's mighty creative power for saving people. It speaks of a Savior who offered to God in our place the unbroken life of love every human being owes his Maker. It speaks of a Redeemer who received in our place the sentence of death deserved by every sinner. He did not love the lovely. He loved us all to make us lovely. He did not die for the pretty good, for those who mostly have their act together and just need a little boost toward glory. He died for the ungodly, the rebel world of humankind in full scale revolt against their Maker. The gospel is all a matter of "Done!" not "Do!" This is the article on which the Church

a book is about, you can't make sense of the words." As quoted in Franzmann, "Seven Theses on Reformation Hermeneutics." http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/Franzmann7ThesesRefHermeneutics.pdf. Accessed October 5, 2019.

[35] "Righteous and a sinner at the same time."

[36] Ap IV 38 in Kolb and Wengert, 126

stands and falls. When we speak of the pure gospel, we mean a gift that is truly χάριτι (prompted by God's favor alone), δωρεὰν (prompted by no merit or quality in human beings), and διὰ πίστεως (received by faith alone, which is itself God's gift).

Proclaimed by Preaching the Text

If the preacher is God's voice and feels the weighty responsibility of speaking aloud God's thoughts after him, and if he knows that the central message of all the Scriptures is law and gospel, then he will want to preach the texts of Scripture. PREACH … THE … TEXT are the three great verities of the Lutheran logos. A faithful Lutheran preacher hews to the line of the Word of God. He remains a faithful listener even when he opens his mouth, and he is initially suspicious of bright creative thoughts that well up from within, checking first to make sure that they emanate from the text and are not his own imposition upon it:

> If a thought comes to you, no matter if it seems so beautiful and holy that you imagine it to be downright angelic, then take a good look at it, compare it with God's Word and see if it is grounded in Scripture, and whether God has commanded or said or ordered it or not.[37]

Luther's commitment to the biblical text caused a change in the whole manner of preaching in the churches of the Reformation. In his classic study, Fred Meuser writes:

> Before Luther's time there was preaching in abundance. But most sermons were rather highly structured addresses that developed some subject chosen by the preacher: a theological question, a particular virtue or sin, a problem of the Christian life…. Preachers marshaled philosophical arguments to prove their case, citing the fathers as authorities, with points and sub-points. [38]

Meuser goes on to associate Luther with the advent of a completely new form of preaching: the expository sermon (*die schriftauslegende Predigt*). Since this is the heart of the matter, I will quote him at length:

> Listeners are to hear God speaking in his saving power and presence in the sermon. The aim of the sermon is therefore to help hearers understand the *text*, not just a religious truth. Its goal is that

[37] *WA* 33:275.
[38] Meuser, 47.

> God may speak a gracious word through a text so that the people may be given faith or be strengthened in faith by the Holy Spirit. Its method is to take a given segment of Scripture, find the key thought within it, and make that unmistakably clear. The text is to control the sermon. When the sermon is over, the people are to remember the text in its primary message much more than the sermon. The sermon is to follow the flow of the text, the language of the dynamic of the text, and not impose its own direction or dynamic from without.[39]

This commitment to three key rules of preaching (1. PREACH; 2. THE; 3. TEXT) is vital if we wish to retain the power of Reformation preaching among us today. On the other hand, if we sometimes detect a lack of power in some of our preaching, its cause may be traceable in part to a failure to keep the implied promise that every pastor makes to his audience when he stands before them. Here is that promise made explicit, "There is a Scriptural text here on the basis of which I am going to proclaim the Word of God to you."

Maintaining freshness and variety

"But," I hear someone say, "this is just an argument for the same ol' same ol'! Didn't you admit already that there can be a 'deadening sameness' to this kind of preaching?" Of course, and I would go even further: it's a sin to make the gospel boring. Because it is not boring. Jesus infuriated, mystified, uplifted, inspired, encouraged, and challenged his hearers. He did not bore them.

Now, granted, I cannot make the unwilling willing. I cannot make people believe. Only God can. And if people have hardened their hearts, or are afflicted with the "horror of the Same Old Thing,"[40] what else can the sower say but, "O what of that and what of that!"[41] But if I as a preacher have been less than faithful in my study of the text, and have given less than my best in allowing the Spirit's voice to ring out in all of its "prodigal variety,"[42] if I have allowed myself to rely on tired old formulas and threadbare templates, then that's on me.

---

[39] Meuser, 46.

[40] C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters,* "The horror of the Same Old Thing is one of the most valuable passions we have produced in the human heartan endless source of heresies in religion, folly in counsel, infidelity in marriage, and inconstancy in friendship."

[41] "Preach You the Word," #544, verse 4 in *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*. Milwaukee Northwestern Publishing House, 1993.

[42] Franzmann, "Seven Theses," Thesis V.

In law preaching, this is most commonly seen if the preacher barely lays a glove on me, rather than knocking me down for the count. My true malady is left undiagnosed. "Sins" are catalogued mercilessly and snipped away at more than sufficiently, while the poisonous root of sin still lies deep within me, chuckling in his little cellar. The preacher never plunges deeper beneath the surface of the text by asking the "why" questions: "Why did Jesus say to his disciples, 'You give them something to eat?' Was he simply giving them a test he knew they would fail? Did they lack sufficient information of Jesus' power and compassion? Hadn't they seen him raise the dead, heal at a distance? What was their problem? Why *exactly* were they so obtuse?" Or we talk about sin without threatening its consequences, "Those who live this way will die!" We think sometimes we can take or leave sin, when the truth is, sin takes us and destroys the new life within us. The sad truth is, listening to some law preaching can often leave one feeling like he has been stoned to death with popcorn. We humor the preacher, allowing him to have his little say when we know full well that when he gets through this little bit, he's going to turn around and forgive us.

And if the law (of which we have some familiarity by nature) can become perfunctory and formulaic, how much more the gospel (of which, by nature, we know nothing, and which sounds like foolishness)! How much more deadly and deadening to faith when it does! We will speak a little later about making use of the "prodigal variety" of biblical forms in preaching. Here, I would simply like to briefly mention the many ways that the Scriptures—and our confessions—proclaim the content of the unconditional gospel. Jacob Preus gives some good advice in *Just Words*. He first draws the analogy of putting a beautiful seven course meal into a blender and then serving it up for one's guests. Who would do that? Then he writes,

> Of course, no one would ever think of doing such a thing. Yet in a way, that's what we do with the Gospel when we blend together all the beautiful words, the vivid metaphors, and proclaim them in a flat, bland, runny way. No wonder people tire of hearing the "same old thing" over and over again.[43]

He then makes a helpful distinction between the *metaphor* of justification in the Scriptures and the *doctrine* of justification. The two are not the same thing. Justification is a picture from the court room. God

[43] Jacob A. O. Preus, *Just Words*, Concordia Publishing House. Kindle Edition, location 441.

is the judge and the guilty sinner is in the dock. God declares the guilty sinner, "Not guilty." To say it is a metaphor is not to say that what it depicts isn't real:

> I do not mean, as some theologians do, that Christ's incarnation and saving ministry are metaphorical. Metaphor applies to language, not historical events. The Gospel, in its use of words, is metaphorical… All language about God, that is, theological language, is of necessity analogical. While it is truly descriptive of God and relates how He truly is, it does not relate how He fully is. Finite human language, while able to convey true statements about the infinite God, cannot convey Him fully. The orthodox theologians used to speak about theological language as analogical, that is, related to analogy.[44]

The *doctrine* of justification consists of all the Scriptures have to say about God's radical rescue mission of a whole world of lost sinners, and all the different ways (*metaphors*) they use to say it. As he explains:

> In terms of language, justification is *one* of the words. In terms of doctrine, it contains *all* the words—all the ideas—within itself and cannot be reduced merely to one or two words. The legal, or forensic, language is essential. That language articulates something about the Gospel that is both biblical and necessary. Any conception of the Gospel that ignores or eliminates the legal imagery is flawed, perhaps fatally.… Nevertheless, when we say that God justifies the guilty, we have not said all there is to say about salvation. Each Gospel word, phrase, and idea is necessary to the fullness of the biblical doctrine of justification. Every Gospel word contributes something distinctive, something unique, which, if it were not present, would make the doctrine less than whole, less than fully what the Lord revealed.[45]

One of the advantages of teaching the book of Romans as I have for the past fifteen years is that I get to see the beautiful way Paul intertwines forensic justification talk with reconciliation language, redemption language, and sacrificial language. In other places he simply speaks about the forgiveness of sins, of iniquity being covered, and of the non-imputation (reckoning) of sin. The essential doctrinal point is the same. The pictures are different. Applying Preus' point to Romans,

[44] Preus, location 464.
[45] Preus, location 249

we dare not flatten out all of Paul's vocabulary as if he only and always used the picture of a courtroom in speaking of justification. If this is true when it comes to Romans, isn't it even more true when we consider the vast tracts of Scripture that lie before us week in and week out? It really is a shame to see the way so much of a text's rich metaphorical material gets consigned to the preacher's cutting floor. It would be an even worse shame were I to suppose it had never been noticed in the first place. Instead, the sermon is filled with the preacher's own precious illustrations and various ruminations about the vagaries of life. Reflect and recapture the rich variety of ways our God speaks of how he rescued us. We lose the richness and the power of the Scriptures if we don't.

Totus in illis

But our attention to the language of each text ought lead us to consider more than the richness of its word pictures. Observe the sweep of thought in Romans 1–8. How Paul signals his themes in his opening, indicting all—Gentile and Jew—as completely lacking in righteousness. Notice the lapidary language of Romans 3:21–31. It's as if he's chiseling his definitions out of granite! Paul reclaims the true telling of the story of Abraham in chapter 4, and with it an evangelical understanding of the Old Testament. Romans 5, a hinge chapter, celebrates the life of grace at its beginning, and closes with the massive and summative comparison between Adam and Christ. All the while Paul's forceful logic of faith helps us grasp the "how much more" of grace. Romans 6, 7, and 8 exhort us to hold on for dear life to our newly won freedom from powers that had previously determined our existence: Sin, Law, and Death. Chapter 8 concludes with one of the most powerful symphonies of grace ever set to human words! We'll require the broad, boundless, sky of heaven to sing its song properly: We more than conquer! Nothing can separate!

Or what about beauty of the psalms, each one a polished diamond of thought? Attend carefully to Psalm 46, and watch as it depicts the chaos in creation and the disorder among men and nations. Yet there, right there, in the middle of all this terror and destruction, we see "a river whose streams make glad the city of God, God is within her, she will not fall!" Then there's Psalm 23. Everybody knows Psalm 23. What is Psalm 23 "about"? "Our Good Shepherd, of course!" But have we ever observed the alternating language of movement and rest, movement and rest as its various images unfold? "Makes me lie down (rest) … leads me beside quiet waters (movement), in paths of righteousness (movement),

through the valley of deep shadow (movement) … sets before me a feast (rest) … goodness and mercy shall follow me (movement) … and I will dwell (rest)." No doubt we've all detected the shift from the objective "third person" language of faith ("He is my shepherd") to the more urgent "second person" language of praise and prayer ("You are with me").

The parables confront, comfort, and discombobulate. Thinking that life consists in the abundance of possessions seems so "normal." And it carries its own logic with it. How can we find fault with a man who has a windfall of a great harvest and then makes plans to deal with it? It's what anyone would do! Till God himself shows up in the parable (something he never does) and says, "You fool!" Or to illustrate God's sure justice, Jesus chooses a worst-case scenario judge to compare with Almighty God! If we can believe that even this, the worst of all judges—"who neither fears God nor cares about people"—might actually do the right thing just to be rid of the woman, "how much more God" will bring speedy help to his oppressed believers. Then just when we think he's done, Jesus, as it were, reverses the perspective entirely, "You are tempted in times of oppression and persecution to say, 'God, how long!' 'God it's not fair!' 'God, you're not keeping faith with us!' That's not the real issue. The real issue is: when I come back, will any faithful be there to greet me?"

I'm trying to illustrate that a homiletical study of our text includes allowing ourselves to be blessed by the form of the text itself—its genre, whether epistle, psalm, narrative, wisdom literature or apocalyptic. We need only be alive to the way each form makes its case for grace.

The title of this section comes from an ancient poem. Horace[46] was once walking the Sacred Way in Rome, totally absorbed (*totus in illis*) with trifles (nugae). Then he was buttonholed by a boring social climber who interrupted his pleasant reverie. Needless to say, he resented being torn away from his musings. Now if his broad genius could find captivating pleasure in a consideration of trifles, how much more we, when we make ready to preach the living Word of the living God! We will want to dedicate ourselves to each text, living it, breathing it, reflecting on it, never thinking that we know enough about it. We want to so totally absorb it and be absorbed by it (*totus in illis*) that it comes sweating out of our pores. Now let us spend a little time on one particular form, the narrative.

[46] *Satires* 1.9.1–2.

Apologetics and Inductive Forms

We have previously mentioned the issue of audience. Without attempting to capture their essence in a single definition, we are safe in saying the rising generation is growing more and more indifferent and/or hostile to the notion of Christianity.[47] A basic Judeo-Christian worldview is more or less absent. What's more, our own people, as we have already observed, are losing a familiar knowledge of things biblical. How does this affect the Lutheran *logos*?

Well as I've said, I don't think the answer is to preach topical series. But I do think that if I were back in the "real world" ministry, I would spend a whole lot more time preaching the basic narratives of the bible, whenever they came up in an Old Testament or New Testament pericope. Literary theorists have long recognized that there is a relationship between the universal, and the particular.[48] Biblical interpreters understand that one way to the universal is *through* the particular. We are steeped in doctrine and know that Scripture must be its own interpreter, with clear passages shedding light on those less clear. That gives us confidence when we interpret narratives. As long as we have our feet planted firmly within the circle of Scripture, we know we will handle narrative in a way that reflects the Author's own divine intentions.

The advantages of preaching on narratives are many, it seems to me. It rehearses the basic Bible stories that our people only half remember from Sunday school. That in and of itself is sufficient to recommend them to us. But narratives also serve an apologetic and missionary purpose. Because preaching on Bible stories will almost of necessity be more inductive rather than deductive,[49] they don't necessarily hit the searcher or unbeliever over the head with a baldly stated doctrinal proposition at the outset: "Hear now, believe this!" Everyone likes and listens to a story. It's only as the sermon develops that the understanding

[47] I am not restricting this to the gospel message. People today may not even have heard the gospel expounded in any serious way beyond jokes and sound bites. I have in mind here more the general moral consensus of society. Based upon the ten commandments and natural law, it is well on its way towards disappearing entirely. There is no predisposition to listen seriously to the claims of Christianity, moral or otherwise. For much more on this read, "A Paradigm for 21st Century Lutheran Preachers," there, Pastor Phillip Sievert describes Millennials as a "Skeptical" a "Secular" and a "Storied" generation. (Essay delivered at WLS' *Symposium on Preaching*, September 22–23, 2014. https://essays.wls.wels.net/handle/123456789/3728. Accessed October 11, 2019).

[48] "Poetry tends to express universals, and history particulars," Aristotle (1996), Poetics, trans. Malcolm Heath, London: Penguin, 16.

[49] Note: they should still be thematic/propositional.

grows. False paths can be explored and then rejected as the preacher pursues possible options in interpretation.[50] The Spirit works on the heart just as he did on David's heart when Nathan told him the story of the poor man's ewe lamb. Now just so that there is no misunderstanding: the propositional point has to be clear. Killing law still has to be proclaimed. Resurrecting gospel joyfully celebrated. But these points can be developed more naturally, over time, as the narrative develops.

What I'm talking about here is understanding the biblical narratives as holy history, or *Heilsgeschichte.* With the Chronicler of old, we see history as the outworking of the kingdom of God. As David exclaimed at one of the high points of that book, "Yours, LORD, is the kingdom!" (1 Chronicles 29:11). There, "the kingdom" cannot be a reference to heaven or even to a piece of earthly real estate like the holy land. Rather, it is a reference to a dynamic, a process that works in, with, and under all that was and is and is to come. It means "God's royal rule" and refers to the working out of God's gracious, saving purpose in all that happens to gather his elect to himself. Thus, every Old Testament lesson in Bible history points to Christ, not simply in prophecy and type, but as evidence of how the God who promises actually enacts his Word both in judgment and mercy in the lives of his people.

> The history that runs from Deuteronomy through 2 Kings is a somber one; it is a history in which the God of relentless judgment upon the sins of His people leads the history of His people to so radical an upshot (the fall of Israel, the fall of Judah, the end of Jerusalem, the end of the temple, Judah's king living on the tolerance of the king of Babylon) that one scholar sees in it merely the message of "definitive and conclusive" judgment. The sum of Israel's history apparently equals zero. And yet a closer, more attentive look discloses that the message of this history is Gospel after all; this God of judgment is—*mirabile dictu*—a God to whom His rebel and apostate people may call and must call; there is still possible, as in the days of the Judges, a [repentant] cry to God [to have pity on his chosen people]. Repentance (the work of the Lord Himself, who will "circumcise the hearts" of His children, Deut. 30:6) can still open up a new epoch in a history that is, by rights, finished.[51]

At the core of God's beating heart is his purposeful plan (yes, history is going somewhere) to bring Christ into the world. All God's promises

[50] Note: this inductive style can be followed in non-narrative texts as well.

[51] Franzmann, 6–7.

find their answering "yes" in him, and apart from him God will have no mercy on people who so resolutely and repeatedly turn their backs on him. The point is: this biblical manner of interpretation finds the spiritual meaning in the history itself. It has no need to find allegories in texts in order to find Christ. I must confess that the practice—both old and new—of imposing allegories on texts often appears to me to be an attempt to evade the historical details of the account, as if there were insufficiently spiritual.

With this approach of keeping God's purposeful reign firmly in mind, we can also maintain a firewall against those dispiriting and moralizing interpretations of the Old Testament where the preacher principalizes everything to death. We've already heard about those who "Learn Leadership from Nehemiah, how he went to God in prayer, he was bold, he was faithful, he worked hard etc. etc." It's enough to make the Patmos Prophet weep anew as he observes the scroll with two sides resealed (Revelation 5:4)! How much better to make God the hero rather than Nehemiah, and see how, in Nehemiah, God meant to preserve a people for himself as a cradle for Christ, and this at a very perilous time when his chosen were ready to cave into the world around them!

Aiding us in a narrative approach to the Old and New Testaments is the self-discipline of trying to put ourselves in the place of someone unfamiliar with the biblical account and to hear it as if we have never heard it before. If we do, it seems to me a whole host of questions come to mind. The text invariably makes demands on us that cause us to scratch our heads. To return to the example I mentioned earlier: in thinking about the feeding of the 5000, I wondered why Jesus said to his disciples in Matthew's account, "You give them something to eat!" Was this really a fair test? If as a professor I suddenly gave my students an exam on material they had never had a chance to prepare, wouldn't they (rightly) complain? Had Jesus revealed himself sufficiently to these men so as to allow them to pass the test? And before I preach the law on the basis of those words, I might well let my hearers ponder that question, along with all the other times we wonder in life whether God is really being fair. Or consider another well-known text: the raising of Lazarus. John explicitly points out that Jesus, after hearing his friend Lazarus was sick, stayed for two more days where he was. What am I to make of that?

Such reflections allow us to ask those questions inductively as we preach, and to pursue them, as far as the text will allow. In the case of

Lazarus, I don't believe the question is ever answered[52]—at least, not in a way that satisfies human reason. It remains a mystery. And that is rather the point: there are so many times when I do not understand God's ways or why he does what he does in the world. But I don't leave the text there in a fog of unknowing. I confess there are many things about this account that I do not understand. Still there are some "false roads" I *can* exclude. Jesus did not delay because he lacked the power to do something. The raising of Lazarus proves that much. Nor was due to a lack of love on Jesus' part. The false path of explaining it by Jesus' indifference is closed off. Again and again the text emphasizes the greatness of Jesus' compassionate heart. It was the same love that would lead him to the cross to end death once and for all. He *is* the resurrection and the life.

Standing with the various people in the stories is also a great help. In the raising of Lazarus, I was emphasizing questions that might well have gone through the disciples' minds. What if I put myself in the place of a Mary or a Martha? The Syrophoenician Woman? The rich fool?[53] When I consider all these perspectives as I explore a narrative, I'm more in a position to answer Mark Twain's dilemma,[54] "It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand." If I can walk with the listener down various trails, false though they may be, I may be able to slip underneath his defenses and engage his attention long enough for him to give the gospel a hearing.[55]

It is precisely in this way that we can engage not only the believing in our audience, but the unbelieving. We have no need to speak to them directly as Keller or Stanley do, "I realize it may be hard for a non-believer to follow me on this point, but…" We need not apologize for having a conversation with our people. Let those who are non-members,

---

[52] Unless you consider "the glory of God" (John 11:40) a sufficient answer that resolves all difficulties for the reader.

[53] Why does God call him a fool? It seems like he was just doing what any normal person would do under the circumstances.

[54] At least, the quotation that follows is widely attributed to Mark Twain, though no one seems able to locate it anywhere in his writings. Suffice it to say that it sure sounds like something that agnostic would have said. What's cited is from www.brainyquote.com. https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/mark_twain_153875. Accessed October 6 2019.

[55] "Well then, who can grasp it will grasp it. We can bring it no further than to ring it into peoples' ears. God must bear it further into their hearts" *Festival Sermons of Martin Luther*, Joel R. Basely, trans. Dearborn: Mark V Publications, 2005, 82.

as Dr. Mark Paustian suggests "overhear" what we have to say.[56] Indirect communication has a power all its own. This is a power we all have experienced, in fact, every time we study the Scriptures. Most of it was addressed in the first instance to someone else. We are overhearing God speak to his prophets, to ancient Israel, or to the Romans. We are listening in as the psalmists pour out their hearts to their God.[57]

We have more to say about engaging our listeners emotions, but we will explore that in the next section when we talk about the Lutheran *pathos*. For now let us summarize the Lutheran *logos* as the prodigal variety of the unconditional gospel. To express this in postmodern times, I believe inductive or narrative forms[58] are particularly well-suited.

Lutheran pathos

Pathos is an appeal to one's emotions. Here, I suppose, it is easy to become a little queasy. We are drowning in emotions these days. For many, they serve as the guiding light of conscience. "But that's the way I feel!" is the argument that trumps all others. The highest praise for a movie is heard when the moviegoer says to a mike shoved in his face, "Oh I really loved it! It was so emotional!" Never mind what precisely those emotions were: fear, love, joy, sorrow, compassion, horror. We're just thrilled he found the performance emotional. We resolve to go, confident we'll find it emotional too.

At the same time, we cannot allow the obvious emotionalism of our present-day force us into a foolish attempt to scrub all emotion from our preaching. We note the obvious appeals to emotion in the outward form of the Scriptures, for one thing. A narrative (and the Bible is mostly narrative) appeals not only to the intellect, and the will, but also to the emotions. It is a truism that where there is drama, there is also pathos. That alone is sufficient warrant for a proper use of emotions. Along with this we have the ancient Greek and Roman rhetoricians encouraging us to "docere, delectare, movere": to teach, to enthrall, and to shape the will. Furthermore, our dogmaticians declare that the Word works not magically, but supernaturally and "psychologically" (not in the modern sense of psychology, but in a more biblical-natural sense of "operating upon

[56] See his doctoral thesis, *The Beauty with the Veil,* June 2016. Available at https://www.wls.wels.net/rmdevser_wls/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/CE.Paustian-dissertation.pdf, Accessed October 12, 2019.

[57] For more, see Paustian, 55. Also Bauer, 233ff

[58] Finally, *varietas semper delectat*—variety is always attractive. Any form can fall out of fashion. Any form can become a template. Any form can become so standardized as to become boring and predictable.

the soul"). The soul includes our emotions.[59] When we consider Luther as a preacher, we cannot help but notice his powerful ability to unite head and heart, even when we are only reading his sermons. Finally, we know personally the power of the law to produce *terrores conscientiae*, and the power of the gospel to produce joy-filled confidence.

Logos, ethos, and pathos do not work independently of one another in making their impact upon listeners felt. They rather work together, and their operations at times overlap. A preacher can be ever so logical in his reasons, but the audience will find those reasons less than persuasive if he simply reads the text of his sermon without looking up.[60] The proclaimer may have wept and wept as he wrote his message, but if he fails to make eye contact, his audience won't shed a tear. We cannot expect a dispassionate recitation to convey much passion to anyone. There really is no match for immediacy of a free delivery, with the preacher maintaining eye contact at all times, speaking in the moment as the thoughts[61] flow, emphasizing what he says with facial expressions, voice, and body. Compare that with what we're doing now! Even with the best will and the most lively reading I can manage, this "lecture" would probably have had much more emotional punch if I could have memorized it and freely delivered it. In oral speech, our listeners have had their ears tuned by the professionals they hear on the media, uttering inanities of vapor. We preachers really owe it to our people to preach the living and eternally enduring Word in a lively way with a free and living delivery.

Pathos, logos, and ethos also combine as we reflect on not only the content, but the manner in which we preach law and gospel

The Law Undiluted

It's easy to succumb to the "I don't wanna be judgmental" Spiritus Mundi and offer our people therapy for all their many woes instead of preaching hard-hitting law. Truth be told, some of this may arise from a pastoral heart that has simply lost its focus: we love our flock, and when they are wounded, we bleed. But we are not thinking clearly or feeling rightly. God's wrath is real and if we don't warn people about the impending disaster of his judgment, we are showing the same kind of compassion as a man who refuses to turn on the tornado siren because

[59] See Seminary Dogmatics Notes, Volume II, "Faith 2a"The Means of Grace, IV 1b.

[60] Bobbing up and down like some strange bird is not much better.

[61] Freely memorized from a written manuscript.

he doesn't want to upset anyone unduly. If we truly love our people, we simply must preach the law undiluted, God's judgment before God's mercy. We think here of Jesus, who from the depths of his broken heart said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate." (Luke 13:34–35).

So it need not be pulpit pounding, from on high hollering (which might instead sound rather more like angry rants for having not gotten my way at the last board meeting), nor Westboro Baptist type denunciations,[62] but as one sinner to another both beneath the bright gaze of God: "Woe is me! I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips! We are in the presence the Almighty. If he keeps a record of our sin, we cannot stand! Where can we go? What can we do?"

God harbors against sin a wrath as great as the fear that is due him (Psalm 90:11), a Being who is infinitely holy, infinitely mighty, eternal and everlasting. Now, if anyone on earth could have laid claim to knowing the strength of God's fury, that one surely would have been Moses. He had seen its power when the mountain was covered with smoke and the Lord had descended on it in fire. He had experienced God's judgment both in the same general way that we all do as we feel our bodies aging and in personal ways when he had failed to honor God as God. He had heard the words, "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God," not rattled off as some dry recitation in confirmation class, but thundered down the mountain in the voice of the Almighty himself!

But even he had to admit, "I don't know the depth of your anger against my sin, O Lord! I cannot grasp it, because it's something that goes beyond my powers of understanding." God hates sin. If I feel outrage at someone who treats me unjustly, what do those deserve who shake their puny fists against the Holy One of Israel? If we preachers don't tremble at our jealous God's fierce justice, our listeners won't either. Many in our world rage against injustice—often some social offense that is not clearly connected to any coherent moral code. The fact is: we all hear our tribal war drums beating, summoning us to war. Those who oppose us are not just wrong, but evil. It's time to preach about what real justice is. It's time not to just preach *about* the threat, but in God's name, make it!

[62] See the article on this particular church at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westboro_Baptist_Church. Accessed October 11, 2019.

The Gospel Unconditioned

I am always conscious when I preach that we live in a world of woe. Maybe people don't know the ultimate reason for their pain, their sadness, their frustration, their anxiety, their hopelessness, their loneliness, and their sense of dislocation. But they feel it. They know there's a problem. After we, through preaching the law, have led people to despair in the face of looming death, and to shudder before God's fierce justice, it's time to preach the gospel—without condition or demand. Here I have noticed in my reading of Luther two ways in particular of planting that gospel home. They speak to the weary and burdened of every age. The first I call "for you"; the second, "yes… but."

The gospel is objectively true for all, "*wann ich fuehl es oder fuehl es nicht*." But that does not mean we simply talk about it in coldly objective terms, as if we were describing some beautiful galaxy many millions of light years away. Luther does more than talk *about* the gospel. He drives it home with a "for you!" "Religion is in the pronouns," he once remarked. By this he meant that the gospel's intrinsic nature demands that it be proclaimed as a gift, as a promise, and as an offer made "to you."

Listen to how he explicates the gospel message of the angel to the shepherds at the Nativity: "[The angel] does not simply say: 'Christ is born,' but: 'for you is he born.' Again, he does not say: 'I announce a joy,' but: 'to you do I announce a great joy.' Again, this joy will not remain in Christ, but is for all people."[63] Consider how Luther contrasts this kind of preaching with a mere recitation of the objective facts—whether of the events of Christ's life or of God's great glory—with no care or concern about "planting them home":

> Pay attention to how the Spirit speaks these things…. For he expresses not just the content but also puts it to us. For many preach Christ, but in such a way that they do not understand or articulate the use and benefit [of the message] …. For it is not a Christian sermon if you preach only of the events in Christ's life, nor is it if you preach the glory of God … [rather it is a Christian sermon] if you teach the story of Christ in such a way that makes it useful for us believers for our righteousness and salvation, so … we may know that all things in Christ are ours.

[63] *LW* 52:15.

Quite simply, without the joyful "for you" quality, a Christian sermon ceases to be Christian.

Luther's second 'strategy' for preaching the gospel I call, "yes… but." Here Luther's well-known "Theology of the Cross" intersects with our theology of proclamation. It's an understanding he learned from many places in Scripture. The most compelling is found in Romans 4 (clearly influential on Luther's thought). There Paul illustrates how faith "worked" in the life of Father Abraham. There we see the conflict between mere human hopes, based upon what we see and experience with our senses, and godly hope, based upon God's Word of promise alone. There we see Father Abraham facing facts, yet being given the heart to believe that life will arise from just that place where no life exists, even more: where Death, the great negation of life, holds sway. Yet he believes, because God has spoken!

"We preach Christ, and him crucified!" says Paul, inviting us to find God in a place where, logically, he cannot be. God reveals himself under the form of opposites (*sub contrario*). He kills to make alive. He triumphs through shame. He empowers through weakness. He hides himself under the human voice of preaching to reveal himself to men.

Exploring this "contrast between appearance and reality"[64] offers a tremendous opportunity to the proclaimer. On the one hand, he doesn't have to sugarcoat the hard reality of human existence. "A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is."[65] We don't, for example, have to 'let's pretend' games with the power of sin. With the scalpel of God's Word, we can expose sin in all of its loathsome reality. We can acknowledge that God justly condemns us not only for what we do, but also for what we are. That man is at his worst when he claims to be his best, because right there the worst of all works—human pride—infects his religiosity. We can face the facts of death, human disaster, and all the immense suffering of the human race without flinching, without trying to cover it over with platitudes or plastic smiles. We can weep with those who weep, mourn with those who mourn, and say, "Yes, it really does seem sometimes as if God is gone, and is not coming back."

Yes … but: the Word we preach "gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that never were" (Romans 4:17). That is to say, the Word does not simply describe other possibilities, it creates them. The Word also gives us new eyes to see, and the power to walk by faith and not by

[64] Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518,* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 31.

[65] *LW* 31:40 (Thesis 21).

sight (2 Corinthians 4, 5). Far from being chirpy Pollyannas, Christians are the most realistic people on earth. We can frankly face the darkness within, yet say, "Jesus, I'll be your sin; but you'll be my righteousness. I'll be your death; but you'll be my life." We can also gaze with unblinking eyes at the horror of a world gone wrong, at our sufferings in life, and yet affirm that the grace of God in Christ Jesus is greater than all the horror and the suffering, and in fact uses the horror and the suffering to work good for his own. "Yes … but":

> He who is in the kingdom of grace is of a different heart, regardless of what sins he feels, what sins the devil invents, whether the devil undoes his good works, or God's judgment frightens or threatens him. This heart will still declare that these are certainly terrible, dark clouds; but God's grace prevails and rules over us. The heaven of grace is mightier than the clouds of sin. Believers are well aware of God's judgment, of sin, death, and the devil, and are even terrified by them. But it also says that they have courage, and that grace is above all and retains the upper hand and dominion[66]

This godly pathos is the Spirit's fire burning within us.

Comfort on Our Pilgrim Way

There is one more use of narrative I have learned from brother Martin that fits properly into a discussion of Lutheran pathos. Luther recounts biblical stories in ways that enthrall and move the soul. True, he sees them in their larger context as all part of God's big story of bringing his own to glory. But he also sees them, each in its own right, as depictions of our common experience as sinner-saints. Their struggles are our struggles. Their triumphs of grace are no different than our own. Luther invites his hearers to read themselves into the story, and to participate in its conflicts as the action unfolds. In his vivid retelling of the stories of Abraham, Hagar, Rebekah, Jacob, David, and Jonah, Luther was able to engage text and listener in a way that enabled his hearers to experience the story. For him, the so-called "great ugly ditch"[67] between him and the ancients did not exist. Nor should it for us.

Luther knew from Scripture and from hard experience that our battle against the powers and principalities is not merely an external

[66] *LW* 14:28.

[67] Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's phrase. He was a German rationalist of the 18th century. For a biography, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gotthold_Ephraim_Lessing. Accessed October 12, 2019.

one, but extends to the flesh/spirit struggle inside our own hearts. The depiction of the *simul iustus et peccator* state of the Christian in Romans 7 provided Luther with sufficient biblical warrant for "filling in the narrative gaps" (as modern literary critics put it) in the historical accounts of the Old Testament saints. Consider, for example, Luther's interpretation of Genesis 22:

> This is the meaning of the words "Abraham rose early in the morning." He did not argue about the outcome, but these were his thoughts: "I am sure that something better will happen than I am now seeing—not through my strength or that of my people but through the power of the command of God. Therefore I shall obey the Lord, who is giving me the command and is calling me."[68]

And when Isaac asks his father where the sacrificial offering might be, Luther comments:

> At this point there is surely profound emotion, and there is powerful pathos… Isaac, the victim, addresses his father and stirs up his natural love, as though he were saying: "You are my father." And the father says in turn: "You are my son." These words penetrated into and upset the heart of the father.[69]

Luther then generalizes the law/gospel significance of the account for his audience:

> Abraham and Isaac were convinced that this entire action was sport and not death. Anyone readily believes that for God indeed death is sport; but if I am to maintain the same conviction for myself and in the case of my body—that death is not death—no physician, no philosopher, and no lawyer will ever convince me of this. For who … can reconcile these statements: Death is not death; it is life? Moses himself asserts the opposite. For if you listen to the Law, it will tell you: In the midst of life we are in death…The Gospel, however, and faith invert this hymn and sing thus: "In the midst of death we are in life." … the Gospel teaches that in death itself there is life, something which is unknown to and impossible for the Law and reason.[70]

---

[68] *LW* 4:107.
[69] *LW* 4:111–112.
[70] *LW* 4:116.

This is proclamation that tugs at the heart. We hear what Abraham is thinking as he rises up early, hoping against hope. We feel the wrenching pain in the core of Abraham's being as Isaac, the innocent, asks the question, "Where is the lamb?" We are drawn into the story, engaged in everyman's struggle with the hard, cold fact of our own mortality, facing it down, and saying, "Death is not death, but life." Far more than preaching sanctification in terms of *what to do*, Luther tells us *how to be* as sinner saints, walking the stony path through sufferings to glory.

What I Pray For

Preaching is hard work. It's heart work. It fills the soul with boundless joy and satisfaction. It leaves the spirit flat and depressed. It does all those things and more. We are participating in Christ's death and resurrection every Sunday, dying together with our people as we hear the law. Rising with them as we hear the gospel we preach to others. In one sense, I know, my work is done every time I say, "Amen!" for the day and go on home. I don't ask for the forgiveness of sins because I am fully convinced that I have preached God's Word and not my own. But in another sense, I know the work is never done. I am conscious of all the places where I might have been clearer, where my structure could have been cleaner, and where I might have done more or been better prepared. I hear a paper like this ringing in my own ears and I wonder if I dare ever get into a pulpit again. Satan magnifies my numerous faults to block the sunshine of God's grace.

That is why my earnest prayer for gospel preachers is: dear God, fill us up with the gospel, that from the abundance of our hearts, our lips may speak. Help us engage with every text in all its depth and sweetness. Teach us to give ourselves to it so completely that we are absorbed by it utterly: shaken by its profundity, in awe of its beauty, comforted by its encouragements. Train us by cross, meditation, and prayer that we may be embodiments of the grace we preach. Give us genuine compassion for our hearers and a heart for the harvest.

Concluding words

At the end of his life Luther scribbled some words on a piece of paper, a paper later found at his bedside. Were they seed thoughts for a sermon? Was he working on ideas for a lecture? We do not know. Yet for a man on the edge of eternity, who had lived, breathed, translated and proclaimed the Scriptures for over thirty years, the words seem fitting:

> Nobody can understand Vergil in his *Bucolics* and *Georgics* unless he has first been a shepherd or a farmer for five years. Nobody understands Cicero in his letters unless he has been engaged in public affairs of some consequence for twenty years. Let nobody suppose that he has tasted the Holy Scriptures sufficiently unless he has ruled over the churches with the prophets for a hundred years. There is something wonderful, first, about John the Baptist; second, about Christ; third, about the apostles. 'Lay not your hand on this divine Aeneid, but bow before it, adore its every trace.' We are beggars. This is true.[71]

A fitting coda for a reformer. A fitting motto for a preacher. LSQ

[71] *LW* 54.476.

Private Absolution and the Confessional Seal

Doctrine Committee
Evangelical Lutheran Synod

LSQ Vol. 60, No. 1 (March 2020)

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT OUR LORD JESUS directed Christians to announce the forgiveness of sins or absolution to all people. This is the proclamation of the Gospel (Mark 16:15). On Easter night He said to His disciples, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:21–23). This is the wonderful comforting word, "Son be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you" (Matthew 9:2). Here Jesus tells believers to forgive and not forgive sins. Earlier He stated, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 18:18). He commanded men to speak His forgiveness in His place (John 20:23; Luke 10:16). There are no directives given as to how the rite of absolution is to be conducted. It simply states that the church is to forgive the sins of the penitent sinner, and retain the sins of the impenitent as long as they do not repent.

While all Christians have the right and responsibility to announce forgiveness in the name of Christ, the public use of absolution is the responsibility of the public ministry. Pastors are stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1).

> Christians also use the keys publicly or officially when scripturally qualified individuals, who have been called by Christ through the

> church, forgive, and retain sins on behalf of Christ and His church (Romans 10:14–17, Acts 14:23, Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, 67).[1]

In the early church when an individual committed a grievous sin such as adultery, murder, or denying the faith, there were questions about whether that person could be restored. Correctly, the fathers taught that these sins could be forgiven. When such a person was sorry for his sin and desired to be reinstated in the church, he was given absolution and asked to do certain acts of repentance that showed that he was sorry for his sin and trusted in the Savior. Slowly the idea arose in the popular mind that these acts of penitence in some way helped the individual complete his salvation, and not that he was saved totally by Christ's work on the cross. Together with this, the idea arose that all mortal sins must be confessed to a priest in order for them to be forgiven. This remained the predominant doctrine of the confession and absolution throughout the Middle Ages.

In the Reformation, Luther rejected the idea that works of penance in any way helped in obtaining the forgiveness of sins. Also he contested the idea that auricular confession was necessary for one's sins to be forgiven. These Roman conceptions of confession and absolution caused pangs of conscience and made absolution uncertain. Rather, absolution was to be a comfort to the Christian, assuring him that he was indeed forgiven. It is a real impartation of Christ's forgiveness obtained for all. Thus, Luther in his *Small Catechism* says confession consists of two parts: "One, that we confess our sins; the other, that we receive absolution or forgiveness from the pastor or confessor as from God Himself, and in no way doubt, but firmly believe that our sins are thereby forgiven before God in heaven." No third part of penance was required, namely, works of satisfaction. In accord with Scripture, Luther taught that absolution is not a work of man, but God's free impartation of forgiveness.

The Lutheran Confessions speak of the value of private absolution:

> It is taught among us that private confession should be retained and not allowed to fall into disuse. However in confession it is not necessary to enumerate all trespasses and sins, for this is impossible. Psalm 19:12, "Who can discern his errors?"[2]

---

[1] "The Public Ministry of the Word," *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod) 2005: 68.

[2] AC XI 1–2 (Tappert, *Book of Concord*, 34).

> Since absolution or the power of the keys, which was instituted by Christ in the Gospel, is a consolation and help against sin and a bad conscience, confession and absolution should by no means be allowed to fall into disuse in the church, especially for the sake of timid consciences and for the sake of untrained young people who need to be examined and instructed in Christian doctrine.[3]

The early Lutherans continued to practice private absolution. Before receiving Communion people would come to their pastor and confess their sins individually. If there were any particular sins that were bothering them, these sins were also confessed. Thereupon, the minister would lay his hands on them and pronounce the forgiveness. This rite usually occurred in the chancel of the church, outside of a normal worship service. In the German language, it was called the *Beichtstuhl.* At the same time, there were churches that had public absolution in their divine service.[4] Private confession and absolution was practiced among Lutherans in a fairly uniform way.[5]

---

[3] SA III VIII 1 (Tappert, *Book of Concord*, 312).

[4] Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 257–259. C. F. W. Walther, *American-Lutheran Pastoral Theology*, trans. Christian C. Tiews (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 187.

[5] The minister, vested in cassock, surplice, and violet stole, sat in a confessional chair at the communion rail or the rood screen. Thus, confessions were made in the open church and yet in a place which afforded the necessary privacy to the individual making his confession. There is a notice of the dedication of such a confessional chair in Neuseidlitz (Erzgebirge) as late as 1719, two hundred years after the Reformation. It is worthy of note that in the Roman Church confessional booths were additions subsequent to the Council of Trent. They were introduced in northern Italy by Charles Borromeo, Archbishop of Milan (who died in 1584), and were prescribed by the First and Fourth Councils of Milan (1565 and 1576). Up to that time moveable seats had been used and the confessions had been held in the open church in the choir (the entrance to the chancel) or at the choir screen.

Time was especially set aside for confession on Wednesdays and Fridays, the two station days, and on Saturdays after vespers. The individual making his confession would come up to the confessional chair and kneel, and then both the penitent and the minister would use a prescribed rite of confession and absolution. The formula most generally used was Luther's "Brief Form of Confession" provided in the Small Catechism:

The penitent says: Dear confessor, I ask you please to hear my confession and to pronounce forgiveness in order to fulfill God's will.

I, a poor sinner, plead guilty before God of all sins. In particular I confess before you that … I am sorry for all of this and I ask for grace. I want to do better.

[Let the penitent confess whatever else he has done against God's commandments and his own position.]

When our forefathers came to America, they encouraged the use of private absolution but did not make it a dogmatic necessity. Private absolution can be very beneficial in our midst. Here forgiveness is offered to the poor lost sinner individually. At times it is hard to experience the intended confidence and security of forgiveness, but when the Word of God's grace is spoken to us personally by another it is a powerful assurance of forgiveness.[6] However, private absolution should not become a legalistic demand in our midst. We do not want our congregation members to feel coerced to use private absolution.[7] Nor

Then the confessor shall say: God be merciful to you and strengthen your faith. Amen.

Furthermore: Do you believe that my forgiveness is God's forgiveness?

Yes, dear confessor.

Then let him say: Let it be done for you as you believe. And I, by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, forgive you your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Go in peace.

[A confessor will know additional passages with which to comfort and to strengthen the faith of those who have great burdens of conscience or are sorrowful and distressed.] (P. H. D. Lang, "Private Confession and Absolution in the Lutheran Church: A Doctrinal, Historical, and Critical Study," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 56:4 [October, 1992]: 249–250.)

This form of private confession was still common at the time of Paul Gerhardt. It was at this point that the Great Elector tried to do away with private confession in the Prussian lands. The Great Elector was influenced by those who accused the Lutherans of having four dumb idols: the font, the altar, the pulpit, and the confessional (F. Stoeffler, *German Pietism During The Eighteenth Century* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973], 180). Paul Gerhardt, an orthodox Lutheran pastor, tried to preserve private absolution in Berlin. He was followed in the St. Nikolaus Church by a Pastor Schade who preached against private confession, calling it the *Beichtstuhl Höllenpfuhl*, i.e., the confessional stool is the bottomless pit of hell (H. Schmid, *Die Geschichte des Pietismus* [Nördlingen: C. H. Beck, 1863], 262). Private confession slowly fell into disuse.

[6] Rather than demanding private absolution in the congregations in a legalistic way, men like Dr. C. F. W. Walther emphasized its blessings for the Christian. Walther explains the great benefits of private absolution in his sermon on the Gospel pericope for the nineteenth Sunday after Trinity. He uses this illustration: The citizens of a city rebelled against their king. They were defeated and had to flee. First, all of them were condemned to death, but later the king issued a decree granting full pardon. Trusting this general pardon, the majority returned. But suppose that the ringleaders had committed several murders. Might they not think, "Perhaps we are not included in this pardon?" Then would it not be especially consoling if they received a separate pardon, one drawn up especially for them showing that the pardon was theirs? Likewise it is of special comfort for a Christian who is burdened by his sins to hear not only the general word, "All believing sinners, be of good cheer," but also the specific declaration, "You (du, thou) be of good cheer, your sins are indeed forgiven" (C. F. W. Walther, *Evangelien Postille* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1870], 320).

[7] Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, 184.

should they be made to think they are less than confessional Lutherans if they do not regularly confess privately to the pastor. Rather, Lutheran congregations should desire to use also this form of absolution because of the comfort of forgiveness there offered. In the explanation of the fifth chief part of the *Small Catechism*, we have always invited people to use private absolution. Confessional Lutherans would agree with Luther's statement concerning private confession in his *Formula Missae*, "Now concerning private confession before communion, I still think as I have held heretofore, namely, that it neither is necessary nor should be demanded. Nevertheless, it is useful and should not be despised."[8]

In the practice of private absolution, the privacy of the confession must be maintained (Matthew 18:15; Proverbs 11:13). Sins that are confessed to the pastor are to remain in confidence. He will not share the information with his wife, family members, or congregational members.[9] "Since the pastor acts in Christ's stead when he absolves a sinner (Luke 10:16; 2 Corinthians 2:10), he acts in Christ's stead also when he hears a confession. He may therefore not reveal what Christ Himself does not reveal" (Isaiah 43:25; Jeremiah 31:34).[10] Even according to most state laws the pastor is not allowed to reveal such privileged information without the consent of the person who confessed.

As questions are arising concerning the privacy of absolution, here are summary points concerning private absolution:

1. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod practices and encourages private absolution, which is a function of the public ministry.
2. Historically, confessional Lutherans have maintained the confessional seal (*sigillum confessionis*), that is, the private

---

[8] LW 53:34.

[9] Armin W. Schuetze and Irwin J. Habeck, *The Shepherd under Christ* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1989), 91. Richard H. Warneck, *Pastoral Ministry: Theology and Practice* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2018), 207.

[10] John H. C. Fritz, *Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House: 1932), 136; Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, 194.

Mueller and Kraus' *Pastoral Theology* states concerning confidentiality:

> To the extent that speaking the absolution is being the voice of God, so hearing the confession is being the ears of God. To the confessional prayer of Psalm 51, to "wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin … [to] create in me a clean heart," the absolution responds with Ps. 103:12, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he [God] removed our transgressions from us." Therefore, under no circumstances should a pastor reveal anything told him in confession by a penitent. (Norbert H. Mueller and George Kraus, *Pastoral Theology* [Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1990], 122.)

nature of confessions. This is supported by Scripture and the Confessions.

3. A distinction should be made between the confession in private absolution, which is to be held in strict confidence, and other conversations and discussions with a pastor.
4. While civil law should be respected as it relates to confidential communications to a pastor, it does not determine or dictate a pastor's decision as to whether and to what extent a conversation is to be revealed.

General guidelines concerning confidential communication in a parish:

1. A confession made by an individual seeking absolution for a particular sin must not be revealed, even if the act was criminal and even if the law may compel its disclosure.
2. A private conversation made outside the context of private absolution by a person, who recognizes the sinfulness of the conduct communicated and who is not likely to put others in danger by repeating, is not to be revealed.
3. Where an exchange with a pastor is intended to be confidential, it should not be disclosed merely because the penitent shared the discussion in the presence of a third person.
4. Where information is offered (whether inside or outside the context of a confession) indicating an intended and/or imminent harmful act, such that the person's or someone else's safety would be jeopardized if steps were not taken to hinder the individual, a pastor must inform the "penitent": that what and how the information was revealed is not considered by the pastor as a sincere confession of sin; that no absolution would be granted; and that the pastor must exercise his judgment in protecting the interests of those in danger.
5. When a sin is confessed, which is commonly associated with addictive ill/criminal behavior, special pastoral counsel will likely need to be provided to prepare for future temptations. This means that the fruits of repentance will include a willingness to seek appropriate help.
6. In such a case (cf. 5), if all efforts to persuade a person (who has recently been involved in addictive ill/criminal behavior) to confess to the proper authorities prove fruitless, the pastor may question the sincerity of the individual. In the event that a pastor feels that he must report the information for the safety

> of others, he should inform the individual of his intention to do so. The pastor must protect the interests of those in danger.[11]

Certainly situations may arise that are difficult to place within these guidelines. In such circumstances a pastor should seek the counsel of his fellow pastors and above all seek to discern God's will through prayerful examination of Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions and the writings of the fathers and teachers of the church. LSQ

[11] Fecht (1636–1716) explains: "'Those sins which, if they remain concealed, involved the destruction of either an entire community or several [people] should not be kept secret, since a community should be the object of greater concern than an individual. In this all theologians agree unanimously. However, one should proceed as considerately in such a disclosure as the holiness of the seal of confession demands. The persons must be protected as long and as far as possible' ([*Instruct. Past.*], p. 152)" (Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, 196; see also the L. Hartmann quote on page 197).

Sermon on 1 John 1:8–2:2

Shawn D. Stafford
Hartland and Manchester Lutheran Churches
Hartland and Manchester, Minnesota

LSQ Vol. 60, No. 1 (March 2020)

Text: *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. (1 John 1:8–2:2)*

HAVE YOU EVER HURT A FRIEND? WRONGED them in some way? Maybe you hurt them by saying something bad about them behind their back, only to have them find out about it. Or maybe by your carelessness, you damaged or destroyed something they owned.

When we hurt a friend, usually we try to avoid them. We may avoid going to certain places if we know that they will be there. If we see them in the store, we'll turn away and quickly move to another aisle, hoping they don't see us. But when finally, despite our best efforts, we find ourselves face to face with them, we probably experience some very awkward moments.

What do we say to them? If they know what we did, we certainly can't act as if nothing happened. So in the end, there's really only one thing we can do: Clear the air. And so we confess to them, and ask for their forgiveness. And inevitably, it feels like a great weight has been lifted from our chest.

This morning, when we walked into chapel, we came face to face with that friend: the greatest Friend we'll ever know, our Lord and Savior. Unfortunately, we have wronged this greatest Friend we have. We know it. And He knows it. When we come to chapel or church, we come into the presence of the holy God. But we have sinned against this God. So what do we do? How can we worship Him, knowing we have offended Him? The answer: we confess our sins to Him. As part of nearly every worship service, the confession and absolution allows us **to get sin off our chest**, and **receive forgiveness in our heart**.

I. Just in case any of us are thinking we have nothing to confess, our text torpedoes that idea right away: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1:8).

Such self-deception is common and can take several forms. Many deny the guilt of sin by giving it a new name, or attributing it to psychological or social causes. Sometimes it is called "low self-esteem," a "momentary lapse of judgment," or "a valid life-style choice." We become dulled to certain sins as they become more open and common in our society. "Everybody's doing it."

Or a believer might delude themselves into thinking they are on the road to perfection, and so nothing we do rises to level of "sin" anymore. This error is taught in the old song, "Spirit in the Sky": "I've never been a sinner/ I've never sinned/ I've got a friend in Jesus." Another form of self-deception is to compare ourselves to others and think, "At least I'm not as bad as some people." When we hear sins mentioned in a sermon, we are quick to point the finger of blame at others but certainly not ourselves.

In these ways, we not only deceive ourselves, but "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him [God] a liar, and His word is not in us" (1:10). When we come before God thinking we have nothing to confess, we are calling God "a liar" and are plugging our ears and closing our minds to His Word. We are like the child whose parent confronts them with a broken toy, evidence of their destructive behavior, and the child covers his ears and shouts, "Don't tell me that!"

To not talk about our sins is to deny the obvious. It's like ignoring the proverbial elephant in the room: everyone knows it's there, but no one wants to talk about it. We know we've sinned against God, and God knows we've sinned against Him. This leaves a barrier between us and God. Listen to what happened to King David when he ignored his sin and didn't talk about it: "When I kept silent, my bones wasted

away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer" (Psalm 32:3–4).

In confession, we **get sin off our chest**. We not only admit the sins that we do—that "we have sinned against [God] by thought, word, and deed"—but the sinners we are, "that we are by nature sinful and unclean." When we say these words, our minds fill in the blanks with some specific things we have or haven't done during the past week; things of which we are ashamed; things which trouble us and weigh heavily on us. When we confess our sins, we are clearing the air with the Friend whom we have offended. We are getting something heavy off our chest. But the greatest, most comforting part of confession and absolution isn't that we merely get sin off our chest; no, the best part is **receiving forgiveness in our heart**.

II. What a wonderful promise is found in our text: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1:8). After we confess our sin, we then get to hear the most amazing, comforting words imaginable: "I forgive you all your sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

God forgives our sins, not because our sins are no big deal, nor because He is, as many imagine, a kindly, long white bearded grandfatherly type, who just sort of winks at us when we sin, and says, "Oh, it's okay. Don't worry about it." No, sin is a big deal. Sin is a slap in the face for the holy God who created us. Because of our sins, we "justly deserve [God's] temporal and eternal punishment" (ELH, p. 60).

So why does God forgive us our sins? Why doesn't He punish us, as we deserve? The answer is, because His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, was punished in our place. Two thousand years ago, Jesus took our sins on Himself, the ones we committed yesterday, the ones we committed this morning. He took those sins all the way to the cross. And there He died. And when He died, our sins died right along with him. Our sins are gone. "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." (2:2). Because of Christ's perfect life and death, God says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far have [I] removed your transgressions from [you]" (Psalm 103:12). When we hear the wonderful news of our forgiveness, we truly can breathe a sigh of relief. The air has been cleared. Sin is off our chest. Forgiveness is in our heart. Our best and dearest Friend, the one whom

we have hurt by our sins, has forgiven us. Now we can get on with our worship, and now we can get on with our friendship.

How wonderful it is, then, to be able to come to God's house, to stand as sinners before the holy God, to confess our sins, to get them off our chest, and to then hear once more the most amazing, wonderful news: "Almighty God, our heavenly Father, has had mercy upon us, and has given His only Son to die for us, and for His sake forgives us all our sins." We're forgiven. Completely. With no strings attached. LSQ

Homily on Romans 15:1–6

Jerome T. Gernander
Bethany Lutheran Church
Princeton, Minnesota

LSQ Vol. 60, No. 1 (March 2020)

Prayer: Blessed Lord, You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them that, by patience and comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Text: *We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me." For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 15:1–6)*

"I HOPE I'LL BE SAVED." THAT IFFY WAY THAT humans use the word hope isn't ever the way God uses it, in Scripture. That's the Good News for us today. We take such things as "I hope mommy and daddy get me that for my birthday" and "I hope I get a raise" or "I hope the transmission doesn't go out," and bring that way of thinking about temporal things into the things of eternity, so that faith and salvation become an iffy thing. We even may act like

it's presumptuous or arrogant to be so certain, that it's humble to say, "I hope God forgives me," or "I hope I'll make it to heaven." But it isn't.

Lest we think this is just something we preachers need to fix in the people we're preaching to, that they think this way but we don't, just examine for a moment how iffy we can get about God's promises.

When it comes to this tricky word hope: Do you lose hope? Do you go into a deep dark hole of worry or discouragement concerning the church you serve? Do you think the church might fail because of you? Do you ever "go through the motions," sometimes from being depleted, when you're flat emotionally and the Gospel bounces off you, and you preach a gospel that is for others but not for you? Do you fear you're a lost cause and you won't make it in the end?

Because it does happen that a pastor will lose the very hope that he's preaching to others. We're so close to the holy things, the gifts that God gives, and we can think of them as things we're just dispensing. When the devil severely attacks the pastor and his family, the pastor in his pain and suffering can respond to the gospel of forgiveness, the gospel of Christ spoken to him even by his wife, by saying "I just don't believe it." He can say: "It's for everyone else; it's not for me." He can fear that his family members will end up in heaven without him. He knows his own sinful, weak, untrusting heart.

Pastors need hope. This is a great confession to make, and it's all that will save you some days, to confess that you lack hope. That you are operating without hope, that you feel hopeless. The word for this is despair.

It's hard to confess this. It even causes its own special brand of despair. You despair of despairing. You think this shouldn't happen to you, of all people in your congregation. You're the pastor! So you're quick to condemn yourself. "The people I serve," you tell yourself, "are depending on me to bring hope. I'm supposed to be the bearer of hope, the bringer of hope. If I lack hope, what kind of pastor am I?" You feel like you're a faker. You carry such a burden at such times. But hope won't be found through pressuring yourself or by carrying the burden of the Law yourself or by summoning up your willpower. Now you are blasphemously doing Christ's work for Him, insisting on carrying your burden, failing to rely on Him and trust in Him above all, including yourself.

The hope we're looking for is a gift of the Gospel. We pastors need to be reintroduced to what hope actually is. St. Paul says that "whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction" (15:4). Each day

that I struggle to have hope, I must relearn what my hope as a Christian is, what it's founded upon, and how to cling to that hope. The Christian hope isn't just a New Testament concept. The Old Testament Scriptures, all the things that at St. Paul's time were "written in the past," especially the Psalms, speak of this hope: "Now what do I wait for? My hope is in you" (Psalm 39:7). "For You are my hope, O Lord God; You are my trust" (Psalm 71:5).

Hope isn't a subjective thing that changes moment to moment. *Hope* is an objective certainty, as we say at the graveside when we commit the body into the ground "in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection." St. Paul said we are not to grieve as those "who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). So hope isn't *un*sure; it's a certainty. It's what you believe in or cling to. Your hope is the object of your faith. Often it's directed to the future but at the least it concerns something you can't see or feel. "Hope that is seen is not hope" (Romans 8:24).

This means what you cling to, what you trust in and rely upon. It is the opposite of being hope*less*. It is a firm, certain hope.

Where do you get this? For it all falls apart if it's just a wish, if it just comes from your unflagging optimism. The devil attacks hope. So he'll make sure that any optimism you have is made to flag. This is true if your hope is founded on the wrong thing. The devil has a thousand ways to destroy your hope, and when he does so it reveals that you're building your hope on the wrong foundation. So if your hope is tied up at all in your abilities, the praise you receive from others, perceived success, or if it's good things in your family life, or the outward health of your congregation, the support you receive, etc., then the devil will certainly use that, take from you and persuade you that you lack hope because you lack these things you're depending on for hope.

It's good to confess that. St. Paul's words condemn us when he says that we can have hope only "through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures" (15:4). We must confess our unwillingness to receive hope as a gift from the Scriptures. As pastors we often come at Scripture to glean and to take and not to receive. We think we have nothing to learn. But this is what we don't see: that when we absent ourselves from the hearing or reading of Scripture—which happens even when we read the Bible only professionally or as something already known—we make ourselves vulnerable to hopelessness.

But now look at it the other way around. This feeling of hopelessness is there to drive us to the Scriptures, not to keep us away! Once again we see that God undermines Satan's work and turns evil into good. The

Devil creates hopelessness; God uses it to make you thirst for what He has to give you in the fountain of living water, in the Scriptures. So this statement before us actually can be read as a promise, a Gospel statement: "we, through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures, *will* have hope!" (15:4).

This is God's promise to you, brothers. Because there is only one source of such hope: Jesus. When you open the Scriptures you will see Jesus, your Savior. What you need is for Jesus to come to you, and He does come, in a personal way, right to you, not only as true God but also as true Man. Isn't this wonderful? But where does He come to you this way? In the Scriptures, actually; in His Word.

What does He give? Here St. Paul says there are two things chiefly: patience and comfort. I expect him to say comfort, but first he says patience.

In saying patience first, God is directing His apostle to point you to your trials, your crosses, your difficulties, your fears and worries, whatever tempts you to lose hope. There's a lot of that in these gray and latter days. You are tempted to give up. To give up hope.

If you then seek inspiration or validation or encouragement outside of God's Word, if you're going to find your identity in peripheral things or in the support of others, if you're going to look out in the world for hope, you will only be disappointed and you are doomed to give up and despair.

But now Jesus comes to you in His Word. He is patience in the flesh. You hear that "for the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross. … For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls" (Hebrews 12:2–3). The *fact* is, despite what you carry, He *did* carry your burden. He took it, and takes it, from you. His patience never flagged. He also is patient with you. He gives you His patience as a gift. He gives it to you by speaking His Word, by coming to you in His Word and powerfully speaking patience *into* you.

Then comes *comfort*. This is a beautiful word and a beautiful gift. My understanding of the Hebrew form of this word, as we know it in Isaiah 40:1—"Comfort ye, comfort ye My people"—is that He "causes you to breathe again," it's like having a great weight bearing down on your chest, the weight of your sins, and He removes it so you can breathe again. We know this word in the New Testament as *consolation,* that He consoles the sorrowing person. It can also mean *encourage* or *exhort.*

What does He give to comfort you? That He forgives your sins. He gives you the blood that cleanses you and makes you fit, worthy, without fault and lacking nothing in God's sight. He is your hope. You are not the bringer of hope. He is!—to you first, and through you to all whom you serve. Your hope "is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and [His] righteousness" that He gives to you.

His blood cleanses your conscience, it says in Hebrews 9:14. But the verse goes on to say that His blood cleanses "your conscience for you to serve the living God." He encourages you to do whatever is before you with a cheerful, glad heart, not held back by a bad conscience but going at it untroubled, knowing all you do is good in God's sight, made right by Him.

Jesus comes in His Word to give you patience and comfort. He is defeating hopelessness all the time, as you spend time with Him—rather He spending time with you—in His Word. Here He gives you the gift of hope. LSQ

Book Review

LSQ Vol. 60, No. 1 (March 2020)

Book Review: Purposeful Grieving

Purposeful Grieving: *Embracing God's Plan in the Midst of Loss*. By Stacy E. Hoehl, Ph.D. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2019. 135 pp. $12.99. ISBN 978-0-8100-3006-0

Purpose

The loss of a loved one brings new struggles into a person's life. Dealing with extreme grief and sorrow has the potential to send people into a tailspin as they struggle with their emotions, with God, and with those around them who aren't grieving. The book approaches this difficult time in life with support and encouragement. All people grieve differently and on their own time frame. This book aims to allow people to grieve on their schedule but at the same time provides a structure to the grieving process so people can grow closer to God along this journey.

Content

This is a book of devotions for each day over the course of eight weeks. Each week really brings a new focus and builds off the growth and challenges from the previous devotions. Every daily devotion has the same pattern (except the final devotion):

1) A devotion thought in line with the psalm verse of the week. The author also brings in appropriate scriptures or hymn verses to further cement the point of the devotion.
2) A prayer tied to the subject matter of the devotion.
3) Reflection: The author challenges the reader to answer a few, sometimes tough, questions about their own experiences in this grieving process.
4) Release: The reader is challenged to do some action. This is meant to be a growth opportunity where

they can put their faith into action. Sometimes these challenges are private. Sometimes the reader is challenged to do something with others.

Uses

I found this book of devotions to be a wonderful tool in the grieving process that could be given to someone to work through on their own, or I could see an application in grief counseling where a pastor or friend works through the material with the person grieving. One thing I should note: the author—and rightfully so—is writing under the assumption that the reader is grieving the loss of a believer. While the references to seeing a loved one again in heaven are a great comfort for believers, obviously if the deceased had rejected the faith then those references could bring further struggles. That being said, there is still much in this book that will help guide the grieving process toward God rather than slipping away.

Week 1: The author introduces Psalm 13 as our guide through the journey of the grieving process. The main focus this week is from Psalm 13:1, "How long, Lord?" This week challenges the reader to identify and struggle with all those difficult questions which burden us after the loss of a loved one. Quickly, the reader realizes they are not alone in their feelings, and God has not abandoned them.

Week 2: This week uses Psalm 13:2, "How long must I wrestle," to draw attention to the inner battle that many face after a loss. One moment is good, the next is right back down in sadness. How long will this continue? During the week, the reader is encouraged not to get lost in this pattern or to lose hope. Continue to rely on God and use the ups and downs of grieving to grow.

Week 3: This week focuses on a desire for answers from God, looking at Psalm 13:3: "Look on me and answer, Lord my God." It was at this point in my reading of these devotions that I started to desire more reminders of my loved one's home in heaven. Heaven is exactly where the author started to direct the reader's attention. This week takes a deep look at how King David struggled with the sickness and death of his child (46–54). As David was relieved that suffering ended and life in heaven began when a believer dies, the reader is reminded to look for that same comfort.

Week 4: This week focuses on the need for patience in our grieving, looking at Psalm 13:3: "Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death." The author does a good job of connecting a physical workout to the grieving process. The struggles and pains are eventually followed by joy and reward. The author points to Naomi's struggle with grief which eventually led to great joy as Ruth married Boaz and connected Naomi to the family line of King David and the Savior.

Week 5: This week encourages the reader to not feel defeated by grief but instead be confident to talk about your loss. The week's verse is Psalm 13:4: "My enemy will say, 'I have overcome him,' and my foes will rejoice when I fall." The author guides the grieving reader through

the difficult social changes that come with a death. Suddenly the death can become the label for the person, e.g., a widow (76). The author guides the reader through a process of planning and rehearsing a short answer for those who ask about the death, making it easier for the person to feel more comfortable socially again.

Week 6: Psalm 13:5a: "I trust in your unfailing love." The author draws the reader's attention to the feeling of losing control that death can often bring. This loss of control can result in some bitterness toward God. This week is all about remembering God's unending care and concern for us. Steps are taken to let go of the bitterness or desire for more control and remember to put full trust in God, even when hurting and grieving.

Week 7: Following the pattern of Psalm 13, the author begins to reflect on the journey over the past six weeks that may have been filled with struggle and questioning God's plans. This week looks at Psalm 13:5, "My heart rejoices in your salvation," to change the focus from the struggle to the victory we have in Jesus. This week really guides the reader to note the progress and growth they are making in the grieving process.

Week 8: The final week of devotions challenges the reader to see the love and care that God has provided throughout life, even in the midst of loss. Looking at Psalm 13:6, "I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me," the author draws attention to what God has provided to help the healing process. The reader is reminded that even a difficult loss has the good purpose of bringing them closer to God (128).

Final Thoughts

I really enjoyed the opportunity to read through this devotional book. I feel like the combination of the devotion and prayer followed by the challenge for action is what makes this book truly special. First, put today's focus on God. Then don't let the emotions bottle up and hide, but work through them in a healthy way. The author really spoke from genuine experience and tries to speak to people no matter where they are at in their own grief. The author was always supportive, often acknowledging that the reader may not be progressing quite as fast in their own grieving. Each devotion contained very clear Law and Gospel and there was never a question about who was creating the growth in us. God was always front and center as the devotions flowed from understanding the past, to rejoicing in the future in heaven.

– James R. Kassera
Divine Mercy Lutheran Church,
Hudson Oaks, Texas

Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary
6 Browns Court
Mankato MN 56001

PRINTED MATTER