

# LOGIA

A JOURNAL OF LUTHERAN THEOLOGY



## MARRIAGE & SEXUALITY

EASTERTIDE 1997

VOLUME VI, NUMBER 2

## εἴ τις λαλεῖ, ὡς λόγια Θεοῦ

**LOGIA** is a journal of Lutheran theology. As such it publishes articles on exegetical, historical, systematic, and liturgical theology that promote the orthodox theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. We cling to God's divinely instituted marks of the church: the gospel, preached purely in all its articles, and the sacraments, administered according to Christ's institution. This name expresses what this journal wants to be. In Greek, ΛΟΓΙΑ functions either as an adjective meaning "eloquent," "learned," or "cultured," or as a plural noun meaning "divine revelations," "words," or "messages." The word is found in 1 Peter 4:11, Acts 7:38, and Romans 3:2. Its compound forms include ὁμολογία (confession), ἀπολογία (defense), and ἀναλογία (right relationship). Each of these concepts and all of them together express the purpose and method of this journal. LOGIA considers itself a *free conference in print* and is committed to providing an independent theological forum normed by the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. At the heart of our journal we want our readers to find a love for the sacred Scriptures as the very Word of God, not merely as rule and norm, but especially as Spirit, truth, and life which reveals Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life—Jesus Christ our Lord. Therefore, we confess the church, without apology and without rancor, only with a sincere and fervent love for the precious Bride of Christ, the holy Christian church, "the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God," as Martin Luther says in the Large Catechism (LC II, 42). We are animated by the conviction that the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession represents the true expression of the church which we confess as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

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**THE COVER ART** features a woodcut illustration from the *Deutsch Catechismus* (Wittenberg: George Rhaw, 1530.)

Each of the Commandments, the Articles, and the Petitions, as well as Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Confession in this edition of the German Catechism are illustrated with woodcuts. The woodcut on this issue's cover is the illustration used for the First Article of the Apostles' Creed. It showcases the author of marriage and sexuality, God the Father, creating Eve from the rib of Adam.

From the Walter A. Maier Rare Book Collection of Concordia Seminary Library, St. Louis.

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### FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS

AC [CA]	Augsburg Confession
AE	<i>Luther's Works</i> , American Edition
Ap	Apology of the Augsburg Confession
BSLK	<i>Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche</i>
Ep	Epitome of the Formula of Concord
FC	Formula of Concord
LC	Large Catechism
LW	<i>Lutheran Worship</i>
SA	Smalcald Articles
SBH	<i>Service Book and Hymnal</i>
SC	Small Catechism
SD	Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord
Tappert	<i>The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church</i> . Trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
TLH	<i>The Lutheran Hymnal</i>
Tr	Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope
Triglotta	<i>Concordia Triglotta</i>
WA	<i>Luthers Werke</i> , Weimarer Ausgabe [Weimar Edition]

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# The Venture of Marriage

GILBERT MEILAENDER



## I.

**I**N “THIS NATION OF TEMPORARY ARRANGEMENTS,” as John Updike described our country in one of his short stories, the marriage vow becomes hard to understand. People still regularly make that vow. Often, of course, we may wonder what they think they are doing, and almost as often, I suspect, they may be radically uncertain who or what actually authorizes them to make such a promise. Perhaps they should be uncertain in a society marked, as ours is, by easy divorce, by denial that divorce is destructive in the lives of children, by boys who become fathers without ever having had one as a living presence in their lives, by wedding services so focused on the wedding party that the One whose faithfulness the marriage vow imitates is obscured or forgotten. Nevertheless, however baffling it may seem, people still regularly make that vow, and it is one of the few times in their life when they may seek out the church. What wisdom, if any, can we offer the world about marriage?

There is, I suppose, no single answer to that question, but there is a central answer—one that must be spoken, whatever else is said or done. For the church proclaims the God who in his Son “was not Yes and No,” but in whom “it is always Yes,” in whom “all the promises of God find their Yes.” Because we live by the faithfulness of this Son, we, in turn, must work at learning to be faithful ourselves—learning, as St. Paul says, to “utter the Amen through him, to the glory of God” (2 Cor 1:19–20). When we hear from this God a word of command, “You shall not commit adultery,” we must struggle to hear in that command his own commitment and promise to us. It will prove true of us as God has promised: we shall not commit adultery. He will make of us people who can say “Amen” to his command.

If the church has anything to say to the world about marriage, it must, therefore, involve at its heart the good of faithfulness. That good I want to explore here. Ultimately I will ask most particularly what wisdom Lutherans may have to offer about marriage, but I do not intend to begin there. We can ask, first, what we know of faithfulness as those who, along with Jews, have inherited as ours the Hebrew Scriptures and the Creator they proclaim. Having done that, I will ask what Lutherans in particular might add to this discussion, and we will ponder the difficulties of upholding the norm of faithfulness within a theology that reckons seriously with sin and deals evangelically with sinners.

The crucified and risen Lord, the one who as faithful and true witness is God’s “Amen” to us, is the uncreated principle of all creation, the one through whom the Father addresses and orders the creation (Rev 3:14). The faithfulness that he so paradigmatically embodies will not, therefore, be entirely alien to those created in his image. It is a faithfulness available to all, at least in some measure. In order to understand it properly, however, we cannot begin simply with the language of faithfulness, as if we could deduce an ethic of marriage from the gospel narrowly construed. “Faithful to what?” we must ask—faithful to what intent and structure for human life? And so, I begin with what the Augsburg Confession describes simply as “God’s order and command” (AC xxvii, 18). If we do not begin there, we will, I predict, find sooner or later that we have nothing definitive to say about marriage, although we may be eloquent in our condemnation of sexual exploitation and our praise of committed relationships.

Marriage is, Luther says in his Large Catechism, “the first of all institutions.” The Creator has made us as man and woman, as a sexually differentiated species, in order that we may “be true to each other, be fruitful, beget children, and bring them up to the glory of God” (LC I, 207). In these few words Luther summarizes two of the purposes of marriage, and if we understand these purposes, we understand why faithfulness is the cardinal good of marriage.

God fashions this “first of all institutions” in order that a man and woman may learn to be true to each other. It is “not good” that the man should be alone (Gn 2:18)—not good that he should have no other to serve, no other from whom he can learn who he is, no other who even by resisting his plans and projects can call him out of himself into a bond of love. Through marriage, that is, God brings us into relation with one who is different from us but who also reflects back to us something of the truth of our own nature. Two people—sharing a common nature, yet as different as their genitalia are different—are drawn out of themselves in order that they may learn something of what it means to serve and love the good of another.

A man and woman brought into this institution do not only learn to be true to each other; by the blessing of God they may also beget and rear children. The God who calls them out of their isolation into a union of mutual love ordains that their union should also turn outward in order that human life may be sustained and friendship increased. Embodying the oneness of husband and wife, the child is the sign of God’s continued “Yes” to his creation and of his eagerness to use us as covenant partners in sustaining that creation.

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GILBERT MEILAENDER holds the Board of Directors Chair in Theological Ethics at Valparaiso University.



To reflect upon these two purposes of marriage is to remind ourselves of the importance of faithfulness. In promising to be true to each other and committing themselves to mutual care, a man and woman have created in each other a set of needs and expectations that cut very deeply into their identity. They have made themselves naked and vulnerable, handed themselves over in trust and confidence. How, then, could faithfulness be anything other than a central good of marriage? To break the vow is not simply to break a promise; it takes on the character of betrayal.

When we reflect upon the procreative purpose of marriage, we reach a similar conclusion. We should not need sociological research to make us fear for children who suffer from divorce, although the research is available.<sup>1</sup> For if a child embodies the union of a man and woman who sever that union, the child's sense of self must surely be affected. Parents are needed not simply to beget children, but, as Luther put it, "to support and bring them up to the glory of God." And even those who have no such theological context within which to set their understanding of parenthood may come to understand how difficult it is for children who themselves have suffered the divorce of their parents to give their love faithfully and receive the love of a spouse with trust.

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***To break the vow is not simply to break a promise; it takes on the character of betrayal.***

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If, therefore, the "love of one sex for another is truly a divine ordinance," as the Apology of the Augsburg Confession says it is (Ap xxiii, 7), this ordinance institutionalizes a call to faithful love between husband and wife. Through the bond of marriage God calls us out of our "aloneness" so that we may love and be loved by one who is not just another self; God sustains human life and blesses self-giving love through the gift of children; and God begins to train us in the meaning of fidelity, which we might even think of as the ultimate *telos* of marriage. That God uses marriage to make of us the people he wants was an idea not at all alien to Luther, as Paul Althaus notes: "God even uses the problems which he lays upon married people to help them mortify the old man; and through these problems, they learn the difficult art of patiently subjecting themselves to God's will."<sup>2</sup>

Is such faithfulness really good, or even possible, for us? Indeed, we might be tempted to imagine that it is profoundly *unnatural* for creatures who live in time and experience constant change. But that would be to forget our created nature, to overlook what Reinhold Niebuhr rightly termed "the basic paradox of human existence: man's involvement in finiteness *and* his transcendence over it."<sup>3</sup> We are, that is, not only finite beings, ridden by time, but we also have, to some degree, the capacity to ride time, to give shape and coherence to our lives—all this by the ordinance of God. The institutionalization of faithfulness within marriage should not, therefore, be understood as unnatural. On the contrary, however opposed it may seem to our inclinations at

any given moment, marriage offers not the destruction but the perfection of our love. To make temporality and change alone the law of our being negates an essential element of our created nature: the capacity for fidelity within time. To give the last word to temporality and change is to think of the marriage vow only as a way of resisting time.

But the vow is not only that. Rather, it is also and primarily a way "of embracing time (giving love a history by giving it a future)."<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Eugene Borowitz, reflecting the strong Jewish sense of covenant fidelity *within* history, once suggested that we might help ourselves to understand this by considering a choice between two extreme options:

In one case we will find love, rich and moving, but never great enough to result in marriage. Thus, while such affairs last months or even years, each inevitably ends, and the lovers go their separate ways. The other possibility is of a life spent in a marriage but one not initiated because of love. The couple has very genuine regard for one another, but it cannot be said to rise to that level of empathy and passion we call love. Yet knowing themselves to be unlikely to have a much richer emotional experience or to have a better partner with whom to spend their lives, they marry. Would you prefer a life of love that never comes to marriage over a life of marriage that knows regard but not love? The choice is, of course, odious. . . . Yet, seen from the perspective of time and of a whole life, if there must be a choice, then being married, even only in deep friendship, seems to me far more personally significant than being in love from time to time.<sup>5</sup>

Borowitz sees clearly the human significance—the importance—of fidelity, and the fulfillment it offers us. When the God who is faithful to his promises came to live among us, he came, St. John says, "to his own" (Jn 1:11). His faithfulness cannot, therefore, be entirely alien to the capacities of our own nature. As the Son of God did, we can embrace time in our promises and learn to be faithful there. We can give our love a history by giving it a future.

Of course, St. John also writes that when God's Son came to his own, his own people did not receive him. Our attention is directed thereby to the fact of sin, the great destroyer of faithfulness within the covenant of marriage. Surely, therefore, we cannot simply say that our created nature is capable of faithfulness over time. Must we not also grant that our *corrupted* nature is often incapable of such faithfulness? I do not want to ignore the destructive effects of sin any more than Moses ignored the hardness of the human heart, and I will eventually make my way toward considering what we should say about divorce. But if we assume immediately that a realistic assessment of the effects of sin encourages us to take more seriously the possibility of divorce, we miss the third purpose served by the institution of marriage—a purpose that loomed very large in the minds of many of the Fathers, and very large indeed in the mind of Luther.

Marriage unites a man and woman in a union of love. That unitive purpose is, by God's grace, ordered also toward a procreative good—the begetting and rearing of children. But now we must add a third purpose: the institution of marriage exists to restrain sin. Modern Christians are always careful to insist that

sexual impulses are not evil or sinful in themselves. True enough. Indeed, even in the sixteenth century the Lutheran Confessions could distinguish between the “natural love” of one sex for the other that “is truly a divine ordinance,” and the corruption of “sinful lust” (Ap xxiii, 7). We should not ignore, however, what is obvious in human history: that the disordered sexual appetites of sinful human beings are often wayward, that they bring fragility, vulnerability, and chaos into the most intimate of human relationships. We should not apologize for suggesting that when the institution of marriage directs and channels those anarchic impulses toward faithful service of one other person in his or her bodily need, when God restrains sin in that way, human well-being is served. God begins to teach us the meaning of faithful love by offering marriage as a place of healing.

Notice what this suggests. Reckoning soberly with the fact of sinfulness, our first impulse ought not be to contemplate the possibility—or necessity—of divorce. It may come to that, but we should not think first of that. We should think first that the bond of marriage is the healing gift of God, intended to restrain and cure those sinful impulses by commanding faithfulness. Marriage cannot be such a place of healing unless we permit the vow to discipline and control our desires. Lovers, of course, promise that they will be faithful to each other, discerning however dimly what is truly natural and good for human life. Their affections give rise to a promise of fidelity. But in a deeper sense, it must often be the requirement of fidelity that shapes and governs our affections. That institutional requirement is liberating. It sets us free from the wayward desires of the moment to keep the promise we once made from the very heart of our being. It frees us to be what we are truly meant to be—faithful lovers—even if at the moment that is not what we want to be. The institution of marriage serves not only a unitive and a procreative purpose, but also this healing purpose. As such it should be good news for all of us when we are driven by chaotic impulses within, or when we fear to make ourselves vulnerable before the loved one.

## II.

I have tried to begin where, it seems to me, the Augsburg Confession begins. It does not, of course, treat marriage directly, taking up the topic only incidentally in order to discuss sacerdotal marriage and monastic vows. But when it does touch on the subject of marriage, it begins not with anything that might be regarded as idiosyncratically Lutheran but with an understanding of God’s creation, order, and command—which urge, drive, and direct most of us toward the bond of marriage (see AC xxvii, 18–21). We are likely to be misled, I think, if, instead of letting ourselves be drawn back to the biblical witness to marriage as God’s ordinance, we try to derive more directly an understanding of marriage from notions of human well-being that float free of that order. A brief illustration of how this can happen may be helpful here.

In his short and often insightful “contemporary commentary” on the Augsburg Confession, George Forell considered what Article xxiii, (“The Marriage of Priests”) might have to teach us more generally about sexual morality.<sup>6</sup> Opposing the church’s rules governing priestly celibacy, Article xxiii, according to Forell’s reading, asks: are these rules making people better or worse? And if the answer is that they are making people worse, we should change the

rules. Forell then applied this approach to questions that were current when he wrote in 1968. He asked, for example, whether a law making it difficult for married couples to divorce results in better marriages—and concluded that it does not. He asked whether laws against homosexuality make people better or worse—and concluded that they make people worse. Article xxiii, directs us, he suggested, to a very general approach: “We should ask ourselves what kind of laws will help people live more human lives. What kind of laws will build a harmonious and just human society?”

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*Marriage cannot be such a place of healing unless we permit the vow to discipline and control our desires.*

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More than a quarter century later we may be less certain that it is wise or helpful to seek moral wisdom about marriage while being so fearful of God’s order and command. Granting, to be sure, that the law cannot always require everything that moral righteousness demands, we may still wonder whether Forell’s is the best lesson to learn from Article xxiii. Having observed the effects of an almost complete relaxation of barriers to divorce, we may be far from certain that it has made for better marriages. And we may well be convinced that it has been terribly destructive in the lives of children. Having persuaded ourselves that sexual preference is a private matter, we find that the conversation has surprisingly moved on—to pressure for *public* affirmation and ecclesiastical blessing. What kind of laws help people live more human lives? That question turns out to be less than obvious to human reason. What looked like a reasonable answer to a serious Lutheran thinker over a quarter century ago hardly seems compelling today.

Lutherans need not, however, begin where Forell began. We should start where Christians most often have and where, in fact, the Augsburg Confession begins: with God’s creation, order, and command. When we do so, I have suggested, we will see that God uses marriage to accomplish good purposes in our lives—to encourage a man and a woman to serve each other in a union of love, to sustain human life through the gift of children, and to restrain and heal our anarchic sexual impulses. And each of these purposes, in its own way, requires for its realization fidelity to the marriage vow.

There is, however, one truth about marriage to which Lutherans ought to be particularly sensitive, even though it is not a Lutheran insight alone. When the Reformers argued that marriage was (in their terms) a secular rather than ecclesiastical order, they did not, of course, mean that its proper ordering was unrelated to God’s creation and command. They meant that marriage was not a sacrament, that it belonged to the order of creation rather than the order of salvation. It was a secular order, but their understanding of it was not secularized, since they “were far removed from the thought of surrendering marriage to the profane, that is, to an order detached from God.”<sup>7</sup>

If marriage was not to be freed from the moral guidance provided by Scripture, how was it altered when understood as a secu-

lar order? It was no longer subordinated to the monastic life, and it was understood clearly as a religious calling, a place in which one could hear and answer the call of God. In the attack on monastic vows—important at the time, though, I think, no longer a concern in our time and place—marriage was freed to be as heroic a venture as the monastic life had been. Thus Steven Ozment writes that the first generation of Protestant Reformers “literally transferred the accolades Christian tradition had since antiquity heaped on the religious in monasteries and nunneries to marriage and the home.”<sup>8</sup>

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### *Envisioning marriage as such a venture remains a peculiarly Lutheran heritage.*

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That this need not be any private insight of Lutherans is clear from the recently published *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which states:

Both the sacrament of Matrimony and virginity for the Kingdom of God come from the Lord himself. It is he who gives them meaning and grants them the grace which is indispensable for living them out in conformity with his will. Esteem of virginity for the sake of the kingdom and the Christian understanding of marriage are inseparable, and they reinforce each other.<sup>9</sup>

Each way of life is a venture made in response to God’s call. But envisioning marriage as such a venture remains a peculiarly Lutheran heritage, a gift to be offered the world. In his Large Catechism Luther writes that when “husband and wife live together in love and harmony, cherishing each other wholeheartedly and with perfect fidelity,” their example “is one of the chief ways to make chastity attractive and desirable” (LC 1, 219). To take up with audacity the venture of marriage, to ask God to make of us exemplars who keep the marriage vow and regard it as attractive and desirable, is a great service we can offer our society. You will find, I think, that many of our contemporaries who contemplate marriage, even when they take it quite seriously, are inclined to regard the vow as a prediction rather than a commitment. And then, surveying the mess so many of their friends have made of marriage, they wonder how they can possibly predict lifelong fidelity for themselves, and they do not know how to take this vow. At best, they think of the vow as committing them to resist time, rather than to embrace it. We should strive to bear witness to a deeper truth: that God has made us people who, by his grace, can be faithful *through* and *within* time, responding to and seeking to imitate the faithfulness he has shown us in his Son.

This understanding of marriage as an heroic venture is, it seems to me, something that the heirs of the Lutheran Reformation might well take as their special calling in our society. We can repeat what Denis de Rougemont once wrote: “When a young

engaged couple are encouraged to calculate the probabilities in favour of their happiness, they are being distracted from the truly moral problem.”<sup>10</sup> Which problem is that they are being offered in marriage the opportunity to ride time, to give their love a future. If they suppose that they are being asked only to predict the likelihood that their marriage will endure, they miss the call to covenant fidelity, the honor God does them in permitting them to covenant together and thus shape their future.

That truly is an heroic venture, for the covenant is made not only in the face of a constantly changing world, where arrangements always seem temporary, but also in the face of death, which flaunts the pretensions of our commitment. If, nonetheless, we are so bold as to undertake this venture—serving our spouse in a bond of faithful love and thereby making chastity more attractive and desirable—we may need more reassurance even than the knowledge that God has created us as persons who are made for and capable of covenant fidelity. We may need also to know that our promise of marital faithfulness is taken up into Christ’s promise to his church. Thus Althaus writes that, although for Luther marriage was not a sacrament, it gives “a picture of the intimate love of Christ for the church, and we can fully live in it as it was intended to be lived only through the power of the love of Christ.”<sup>11</sup>

### III.

“Love is not love,” Shakespeare writes, “Which alters when it alteration finds.”<sup>12</sup> We know, of course, that this is not obviously true of erotic love, which, for all its power and passion, is notoriously fickle and unstable. The institution of marriage is ordained by God to enable our love to rise to the level of Shakespeare’s insight—to enable us to be faithful. And yet, in our weakness we are sometimes truant from this school of virtue, and sometimes we drop out altogether, only perhaps to want to enroll again at a later date. What should we say about divorce?

Without ever treating the subject in detail, the Lutheran Confessions seem both to assume that divorce is wrong (LC 1, 67) and to assume that the innocent party to a divorce may remarry (Tr, 78). In fact, Steven Ozment has written that the Reformers “endorsed for the first time in Western Christendom genuine divorce and remarriage.”<sup>13</sup> We should, I think, be careful about how we use one of the reasons that weighed heavily in their endorsement. In their attack on the prohibition of sacerdotal marriage, the early Lutherans were struck, rightly enough, by the power of sexual appetite in human life. In emphasizing the permissibility and, even, necessity of marriage they express doubt whether “perpetual chastity lies within human power and ability” (AC xxvii, 28)—except, of course, for those to whom God has given a special gift of continence (Ap xxvii, 51). Insofar as this is simply a reaffirmation of the teaching that marriage serves God’s purpose in restraining sin, it is true and useful. But offered apart from the Reformers’ own firm commitment to the continued force of God’s command, it invites abuse. It invites me to wonder why I should be chaste if I am not married but do not know myself to have any special divine gift of continence. And I can resist that invitation only if I know—in addition to the anarchic power of sexual appetite—that “it is not marriage that the law forbids, but lust, adultery, and promiscuity” (Ap xxiii, 35). No matter how drawn I may be to these sins on

occasion, they are contrary to the command of God and, therefore, not truly in accord with my nature.

This same sense of the power of appetite and “necessity” of marriage played a role in the assumption that the innocent party could remarry. In part, of course, such a judgment was based upon the exception Jesus himself makes in his teaching on divorce as Matthew 19:9 records it. Yet no such exception is stated in Mark 10:11–12 or Luke 16:18. St. Paul’s advice in 1 Corinthians 7, in particular, makes clear that within the canonical writings themselves there is already a casuistry at work, attempting to take seriously (as Jesus had) God’s ordinance in creation while also reckoning (as Moses had) with the brokenness of sinful human life. Likewise, the Lutheran Reformers’ willingness to permit an innocent party to remarry was based not only on Jesus’ saying in Matthew but also on more general theological and ethical reflection. The Reformers took seriously the powerful human impulse toward marriage even among those previously married and now divorced—and so they set marriage as a remedy for sin against a blanket prohibition of remarriage.

If the church is to bear witness to the world about the meaning of marriage, it must continue to struggle with this tension today. In our eagerness to be compassionate and evangelical, we cannot abdicate the prophetic task of witnessing to God’s creation and ordinance. There will be no point in articulating an ideal or norm for marriage if in our practice we constantly disavow that norm. But at the same time, the rigorism of the prophet should not entirely overpower pastoral responsibility to hold out marriage—even for the divorced—as a place of healing and service.

In our attempt to live out this tension faithfully, we will not, I think, be able to argue convincingly that the adultery of one’s spouse constitutes the only permissible ground for divorce and remarriage.<sup>14</sup> Even apart from such betrayal of the covenant, a marriage can die for reasons that are hard to delineate and that result from no one’s unilateral decision. If we should not hastily assume that this has happened in any given marriage, we should also not deny that it does sometimes occur. Or again, a divorced person who *was* in fact responsible for his or her divorce may no longer be able to amend or revive that broken marriage years later. Shall we say that the venture of marriage in which God schools us in the meaning of love is forbidden such a person? I don’t think so. As Oliver O’Donovan has written:

The church has to preach the good news that God provided a fish to swallow the rebellious Jonah, and that the fish spewed him out on dry land, at the right end of the Mediterranean, we may suppose, for a man who was headed for Nineveh. The very task that we have fled can be set before us again.<sup>15</sup>

There was also, however, a certain wisdom—the wisdom of seriousness—in the view that only innocent parties could remarry. Such a view took seriously guilt, the need for repentance and forgiveness, and the church’s prophetic responsibility to witness to God’s will for husbands and wives. In the time and place we inhabit, we owe the world—which includes, of course, the world within our congregations—such seriousness. If we are genuinely evangelical, we ought not give ecclesiastical blessing to the remarriage of divorced persons unless there has been repen-

tance and acceptance of responsibility for the breakdown of the earlier marriage, an earnest attempt to restore that marriage where it may be possible, and amends where they are possible. Moreover, unless the marriage service of previously divorced persons contains some form of confession and forgiveness, we have lost one half of the tension with which the Reformers struggled—and we have abdicated our responsibility to the world.

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*We ought not give ecclesiastical blessing to the remarriage of divorced persons unless there has been repentance.*

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There was a time when the tribunal appointed in the Roman Catholic Church to consider a request for annulment included both a lawyer representing the petitioner *and* a lawyer who was designated as “defender of the bond of marriage.”<sup>16</sup> There is something profound in that recognition of the church’s dual responsibility—to make available marriage as a place of healing and service for the petitioner, and to bear witness to the creation and command of God. Exactly what structural forms this twofold responsibility ought to take among us it is not my task to say, but until we begin to talk about that question we have not taken seriously the witness and wisdom we have to offer the world about what we used to call the holy estate of matrimony.

#### IV.

Perhaps this has seemed too somber. We are, after all, talking about one of the great delights of human life. That does not make it any less serious, of course. Our culture has largely forgotten that when we give ourselves in the body, we give *ourselves*—our very person. And a culture that regards with casualness such giving of the body demonstrates thereby a certain dehumanization. No apology is needed, therefore, if we are serious. I have tried to underscore the vision of marriage we owe our world: it is a place of service—in which we minister to the needs of our spouse. It is a place of fulfillment and satisfaction—in which the spouse ministers to our need. It is a place of service—in which, by God’s blessing, we take up the task of sustaining human life and rearing the generation that will succeed us. It is a place of healing—in which our wayward appetites are disciplined, and we are taught what it means to devote ourselves in love to that one neighbor who is husband or wife. And in, with, and under all of these it is a bold and daring venture—to embrace time and, with God’s help, shape our future, to be as faithful to husband or wife as the Lord has been to his people Israel and as Christ has been to his bride, the church.

Not just to articulate this vision but to seek to live it within and for the world is both our duty and our delight. The delight is found precisely within the duty, as Chad Walsh so nicely expresses in one of his sonnets on eros and agape:



Hitchhikers are justified by faith through grace.  
 They do not work their way but wait their way  
 To the heavenly city. And the race  
 Is not always to the thumbs at dawn of day.  
 Many a thumb, at eventide extended,  
 Outdistances the prudent morning thumb.  
 This, in strict justice, cannot be defended,  
 But drivers deal the law of Kingdom Come.

The camera, my bank account, *Who's Who*  
 List no merits to claim you for my bed.  
 Faith rendezvoused with grace and I with you,  
 And good works followed, just as Luther said.  
 Here at the table, count them one by one:  
 Damaris, Madeline, Sarah, Alison.<sup>17</sup>

Not all of us are called by God to this venture, but many are. Here we serve the neighbor given us, the world is served, and God schools us for eternity. These goods—and these delights—cannot be ours or anyone else's unless our marriages are marked by fidelity. When they are, we can give ourselves gladly and confidently in our bodies, we can give and receive pleasure as God intends, we can marvel as the mystery of a child's person unfolds before us over time—and, together, we can embrace time, finding in our lives a coherence that is divinely fashioned and capable, therefore, of being offered back to God as our own sacrifice of praise. That is as joyous as life gets—and as serious as can be. Chad Walsh, once again, captured the joyful solemnity of human love touched by the fidelity of God in a poem to his wife:

Look at this moment hard so you will know it  
 When you meet it again. It has no clear  
 Artistic corners to mark it off and name it;  
 Yet it is yours; you must be set to claim it  
 How many thousand thousand years from here  
 When God at last will lastingly bestow it.

There is the broken fence I helped you over;  
 This locust tree—notice the blackened crown,  
 And the long rift that lightning left—this field  
 With limestone bones half dressed, revealed  
 Where little gullies eat the flesh; and down  
 The hill the milky way of faint white clover.

Look farther down, the chestnut lot is there.  
 Change is permitted there. The bones of blight  
 Shall be delivered from the foreign death.  
 The spirit is another name for breath,  
 And it shall breathe rough leaves and waves of white  
 Blossoms to break in spray on the blue air.

Between us and the trees of transient black  
 Mark well the little farmhouse and the smoke  
 That rises in a slowly widening wreath;  
 We shall not go to see who lives beneath;  
 Nor shall the ropeswing from the hovering oak  
 Take you from me and bring you laughing back.

All these can wait, but now look well and see  
 Not what I am in dreams or memories,  
 But as I am, remember me and keep  
 The memory through any age of sleep  
 So when you waken with the chestnut trees  
 You will not stand, a stranger, here with me.<sup>18</sup>

That image—of husband and wife embracing time in order to give their covenant a truly lasting future—is the bold and daring vision we have to offer the world. LOGIA

## NOTES

1. See, for example, the following: Judith S. Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, *Second Chances: Men, Women, and Children a Decade After Divorce* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1990); Barbara Defoe Whitehead, "Dan Quayle Was Right," *The Atlantic Monthly* 271 (April 1993); and Daniel Goleman, "75 Years Later, Study Is Still Tracking Geniuses," *The New York Times* (March 7, 1995): B5.
2. Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 88. In *Here I Stand* Roland Bainton entitled the chapter discussing Luther's marriage "The School for Character."
3. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), 1: 175. Emphasis added.
4. Margaret Farley, *Personal Commitments* (NY: Harper Collins, 1986), 40.
5. Eugene B. Borowitz, *Choosing a Sex Ethic: A Jewish Inquiry* (Schocken Books, 1969), 113.
6. George W. Forell, *The Augsburg Confession: A Contemporary Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1968), 92–95.
7. Holsten Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Gene L. Lund (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 291.
8. Steven Ozment, *Protestants: The Birth of a Revolution* (New York: Image Books, 1991), 153. See also Charles Taylor, *The Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 218: "The repudiation of monasticism was a reaffirmation of lay life as a central focus for the fulfillment of God's purpose. Luther marks their break in his own life by ceasing to be such a monk and by marrying a former nun."
9. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Ligouri, MO: Ligouri Publications, 1994), par. 1620.
10. Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1974), 304.
11. Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, 89.
12. William Shakespeare, "Sonnet 116."
13. Ozment, *Protestants*, 162.
14. Nor, in fact, did the Reformers. Ozment (*Protestants*, 163) notes that they generally permitted divorce and remarriage on five grounds: (1) adultery, (2) willful abandonment, (3) chronic impotence, (4) life-threatening hostility, and (5) willful deceit (e.g., about one's state prior to marriage).
15. Oliver O'Donovan, *Marriage and Permanence* (Bramcote, Notts.: Grove Books, 1978), 20.
16. O'Donovan, 19.
17. Chad Walsh, "Twenty-Three Sonnets: Eros and Agape," *Eden Two-Way* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), 48–49.
18. Chad Walsh, "For Eva My Wife," *The Unknowing Dance* (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1964), 1.

# Toward a Confessional Practice of Pre-Marriage Pastoral Care

WILLIAM E. THOMPSON



ONE DOES NOT HAVE TO LOOK LONG or far to recognize that there is a crisis in our society in regard to marriage and the family. Many say that the traditional family will never be what it once was with the wife responsible for the domestic affairs and the husband responsible for earning an income and being spiritual leader. It is clear that the roles for men and women in marriage and the family have indeed changed a great deal as far as our society is concerned. Women now receive a tremendous amount of pressure to work outside the home in order to be “fulfilled.” The responsibilities of wife and mother are played down as unimportant in comparison to the outside interests of women. In many instances husbands have assumed some of the duties that have traditionally been the wife’s, such as cooking and housework. The distinctiveness of being male and female as God has created them are transformed into a societal notion of personhood. The results of these changes have been great on the family as we are told that almost half those who marry will divorce and that there are, consequently, a growing number of single-parent families.

It is into this cultural framework that the church must stand and hold up a scriptural perspective on marriage and the family. While the non-Christian is no less married than the Christian, it is clear that there are many distinctive features to a Christian marriage. Luther writes of these distinctions and the responsibilities that the church has because of them:

We must also do this so as to teach the young people to take this estate seriously, to honor it as a divine creation and command, and not to act disgracefully at weddings . . . for there is no doubt that they [the bride and groom] desired the blessing of God and common prayer, but not tomfoolery or pagan spectacle. This is proved by the rite itself. For whoever desires prayer and blessing from the pastor or bishop indicates thereby—even if he does not express it in so many words—into what peril and need he enters and how greatly he stands in need of the blessing of God and common prayer for the estate which he enters. For everyday we see marriages broken by the devil through adultery, unfaithfulness, discord and all manner of ill (AE 53: 112–113).

The purpose of this article is to offer a concrete form for premarital pastoral care of souls<sup>1</sup> for pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Confession. We will consider the topic in two sections. The first will be the confessional foundation that impacts and shapes our practice, and the second will be the concrete shape of the practice itself.

## CONFESSATIONAL FOUNDATION

It is clear from the Confessions of our church that in every instance of pastoral practice the doctrine of justification must be the central consideration. All that we do must focus on the salvation of lost souls through faith in the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Apology Melancthon writes:

They condemn us both for denying that men receive the forgiveness of sins because of their merits, and for affirming that men receive the forgiveness of sins by faith and by faith in Christ are justified.

In this controversy the main doctrine of Christianity is involved; when it is properly understood, it illumines and magnifies the honor of Christ and brings pious consciences the abundant consolation that they need (Ap IV, 1–2; Tappert, 107).

This centrality of the doctrine of justification is reaffirmed by the confessors in the Formula of Concord, SD, Article III:

In the words of the Apology, this article of justification by faith is “the chief article of the entire Christian doctrine,” without which no poor conscience can have any abiding comfort or rightly understand the riches of the grace of Christ (SD III, 6; Tappert, 540).

The necessity of keeping the doctrine of justification central concretely shapes our pastoral practice. This is seen outwardly in means that God has instituted to work such justifying faith. Thus we are led to a second confessional foundation.

To obtain such justifying faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the gospel (AC V, 1–2; Tappert, 31).

The Lutheran Confessions are very clear that God works and sustains faith only through the gospel and the sacraments. Here

WILLIAM E. THOMPSON is pastor of St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, Liberty Center, Ohio.

we see that the Divine Service where “the gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel” (AC VII, 1) is the central activity of God in the midst of the congregation. In order for this to take place publicly, God has instituted the pastoral office. In this way God has enabled the church, which is unseen by the eye, to become visible through these outward marks (*notae*).

We are not dreaming of some Platonic republic, as has been slanderously alleged, but we teach that the church actually exists, made up of true believers and righteous men scattered throughout the world. And we add its marks, the pure teaching of the gospel and the sacraments (Ap VII & VIII, 20; Tappert, 171).

Justifying faith is intimately and inseparably tied to the outward marks of the church: the pure preaching of the gospel and administration of the sacraments.

Additionally, the Confessions are clear that the sustenance of justifying faith is intimately tied to the gospel and sacraments.

Christ does not stop being the mediator after our renewal. It is an error to suppose that he merely merited “initial grace” and that afterward we please God and merit eternal life by our keeping of the law. . . . If those who are regenerated are supposed later to believe that they will be accepted because they have kept the law, how can our conscience be sure that it pleases God, since we never satisfied the law? Therefore we must always go back to the promise (Ap IV, 162, 164; Tappert, 129).

We see here the reality that in this life the sinful nature is always with us and that therefore we must always be in communion with the means of grace, which Melancthon here calls “going back to the promise.” This connection between the Divine Service (the means of grace) and justifying faith is an essential one for pastoral practice. It highlights the importance of the corporate worship life of the congregation as the focus of

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***Men and women were created distinctively male and female and this reality has precedence over their joint “personhood.”***

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congregational life. This makes the worship rites themselves a highly significant component in the spiritual life of each member. Of course, rites “are in and of themselves no worship of God or even a part of it” (FC SD x, 9). These rites, however, carry the objective promises of God in the gospel and sacraments and as such are not open to the whim of either pastors or laymen. According to the Apology, liturgy is a public service, and as such

“it squares with our position that a minister who consecrates offers the body and blood of the Lord to the people, just as a minister who preaches offers the gospel to the people” (Ap xxiv, 80). The confessions show forth here and in other places (AC xxiv, for one) that Lutheran pastoral practice is grounded in the means of grace, which take concrete form in the liturgies of the church. It is at this level that the doctrine confessed is communicated and lived by God’s people. It is therefore essential for us to ground our pastoral practice at this same level and to pattern it after the worship life of the congregation. It is for this reason that the remainder of this article will be devoted to offering a concrete form for premarital pastoral care that is grounded in the marriage rite, specifically the vows.

### THE SHAPE OF PASTORAL PRACTICE IMPLIED IN THE VOWS

We begin with a few comments regarding the nature of marriage as God has revealed it in the Scriptures. The pertinent passages are Genesis 1:27; 2:24; Matthew 19:3-9; 22:30, and the marriage metaphors, the most prominent being Ephesians 5. For the sake of brevity we will look at the Matthew 19 passage, for it contains the two Genesis passages.

And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no longer twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder (Mt 19:4–6, KJV).

Here we have the clear word of God that men and women were created distinctively male and female and that this reality has precedence over their joint “personhood.” Second, it is clear that God is creating something new when he brings a man and a woman together: they are no longer two but one flesh. Third, it is clear that God intends the marital union to be permanent in this life.

Lutheranism has historically understood the marital institution as belonging to the kingdom of the left hand. In other words, it was given chiefly for order in this world. In fact, we are told in Matthew 22:30 that marriage will not take place in the resurrection. Placing the institution of marriage in the kingdom of the left in no way negates the divine nature of its institution. As Luther maintains, marriage belongs to the natural order of creation and not to the order of redemption through Christ.<sup>2</sup> In fact, all God-given authority in the secular realm flows through marriage. Luther, however, also stresses the spiritual nature of marriage:

A sacrament is a sacred sign of something spiritual, holy, heavenly, and eternal, just as the water of baptism, when the priest pours it over the child, means that the holy divine eternal grace is poured into the soul and body of that child at the same time, and cleanses him from his original sin. . . . In the same way the estate of marriage is a sacrament. It is an outward and spiritual sign of the greatest, holiest, worthiest, and noblest thing that has ever existed or will exist: the union of the divine and human natures in Christ. . . .

Second, [the doctors say] that marriage is a covenant of fidelity. . . .

Third, [the doctors say] that marriage produces offspring, for that is the end and chief purpose of marriage (“A Sermon on the Estate of Marriage,” 1519, AE 44: 10–12).

Here we see that Luther holds marriage highly enough to call it a “sacrament,” which stresses that it is the institution that God has provided so that we might live our lives in faith toward him and in love toward one another. The non-Christian marriage still gives structure for civil righteousness, but it cannot give the structure for spiritual righteousness. It is this God-given structure for living our lives in faith that must be the emphasis of marriage in the church. Once again, the central focus is on justification by grace through faith.

It is the thesis of this article that this emphasis can most beneficially be communicated by structuring premarital pastoral care around the actual rite of marriage so that the couple understands clearly what the church (the couple included) believe about marriage. For the purposes of this article it is assumed that clergy will use the marriage rite as it is found in *Lutheran Worship: Agenda*. The vows in this rite read as follows:

\_\_\_\_\_, will you have this woman to be your wife, to live with her in holy marriage according to the Word of God? Will you love her, comfort her, honor her, and keep her in sickness and health and, forsaking all others, be husband to her as long as you both shall live?

\_\_\_\_\_, will you have this man to be your husband, to live with him in holy marriage according to the Word of God? Will you love him, comfort him, honor him, obey him, and keep him in sickness and in health and forsaking all others, be wife to him as long as you both shall live?

I, \_\_\_\_\_, in the presence of God and these witnesses, take you, \_\_\_\_\_, to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish until death parts us, and I pledge you my faithfulness.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, in the presence of God and these witnesses, take you, \_\_\_\_\_, to be my husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until death parts us, and I pledge you my faithfulness.<sup>3</sup>

First, from the first line of the question of intent we are alerted to the fact that marital life will be in accord with the Word of God. This question makes it imperative that the pastor emphasize the importance that the couple are united in their confession of faith (*fides quae*). This emphasis maintains the identity and integrity of the church and clearly expresses what the church believes regarding marriage. It implies the importance of further catechesis for those couples not united in their confession. This principle ought to be clearly explained to the couple and the congregation, and be consistently followed.

A second item in the pastoral question that is not specifically stated in the vows is the pledge that the wife will obey her husband. This is intimately tied with the order of creation and the marriage metaphor in Ephesians 5. For the sake of clarity I would suggest that this topic be taken up under the explanation of the phrase “to love and to cherish” in the vows.

In the remainder of this essay we will focus on each phrase of the vows and suggest a pattern for premarital pastoral care.

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### *Luther holds marriage highly enough to call it a “sacrament.”*

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First, we have the phrase “in the presence of God and these witnesses.” There is, of course, a legal aspect to this statement, namely, that marriage is a matter of public record. For the church, however, there is great significance in the recognition that we are in the presence of God. Vows to one another are made in the presence of God. Here the pastor can and should reinforce for the couple that just as their marriage is in the presence of God, their lives together are also centered in the presence of God as he feeds them by his word and sacrament in the Divine Service. Further, the connection between the real presence as discussed in catechesis and the real presence as it is lived in the Divine Service should be made. In so doing we are developing a churchly consciousness in the married couple and grounding their marriage in the mysteries of the faith as our Lord expresses them through the liturgy.

Next, we have the phrase “to have and to hold from this day forward.” Here we would discuss the intimate nature of marriage. The sexual bond should be discussed in relation to the “two becoming one flesh.” Reference can be made to 1 Corinthians 7 and other texts. That sexual pleasure is part of God’s good creation and is intended exclusively for marriage should be affirmed here. The issue of procreation as a major purpose for marriage should be discussed, including asking what the couple’s plans are for childbearing. Here the pastor ought to discuss birth control and especially point out the methods that are abortive. It would be beneficial if the pastor knew a pro-life physician to recommend to the couple if they need additional medical information.

Additionally, the couple’s new relationship with their parents can be discussed here. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh” (Gn 2:24). The reality of a new household separate from parents necessitates a new understanding of Christian vocation. How the couple perceives this shift in vocation will have a significant impact on their relationship with both sets of parents.

The next phrase in the vows is “for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health.” Here we see the scope of the fidelity required in marriage and that its basis is not in individual temporal happiness. James T. Burtchaell writes of this phrase:

A marriage that can be dissolved is a marriage of hedged love, just as a religion that can be satisfied by obedience to a set law is a religion of hedged love. Jesus invites men and



women, without contracts or conditions, to make reckless promises to one another. And so, not knowing what lies before them, they promise to be true to one another, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death. Crazy. But no more so than that other oath to love the Lord with their whole heart and soul and strength, and to love one another as he has loved them. . . . A man and woman pledge themselves, not to joy or to peace or to satisfaction, but to fidelity, from which joy and peace and satisfaction are believed to spring.<sup>4</sup>

Burtchaell compares the marital relationship with our relationship to our Lord, pointing out that they are both based on faithfulness. For the Lutheran pastor, it is necessary to go a step further in stressing that while this pledge is “crazy” from the standpoint of worldly logic, it is a pledge that makes the couple intimately dependent on their Lord.

Married people do not live in paradise before the fall into sin; rather, they live in this world, which is characterized by original sin, and “in the midst of demons.” If we attempt to live in marriage solely on the basis of our own strength, therefore, our marriage is always in danger. Our natural selfish feeling is that a marriage which brings only disappointment is a disaster. However, the Christian looks at things differently through the eyes of faith. We may not measure our situation according to our selfish superficial desire for happiness but ought to be concerned with God’s will. Then we will be able to see, even in an unhappy marriage, how God is at work to save us. Through such a marriage God intends to purify us and mature us for his kingdom.<sup>5</sup>

The couple is thus shown the reality of married life in this fallen world, but is shown it through the theology of the cross. It is our Lord’s presence in the Divine Service (word and sacrament) that sustains marital faithfulness, not our own resources. Forgiveness is the foundation of marriage as it is empowered by the forgiveness of our Lord.

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***Marital sexual love is not determined by a selfish desire for pleasure but by the desire to serve the other with one’s own body.***

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At this point it would also be timely for the pastor to ask the couple if they have discussed finances and how they will be handled in the family. This would include the standard of living expectations for each. It is also an appropriate time to discuss biblical stewardship with the couple and how it relates to this section of the vows.

Next we read, “to love and to cherish until death parts us.” We must now enter a discussion of the confusing English word

“love.” It is apparent that what is commonly perceived as marital love by our society is that of the word *eros* in Greek. *Eros* is love that is based on emotional or sexual attachment rather than a commitment to faithful action. It must be pointed out to the couple that it is because of this societal notion of love that we are told that people can fall in love one day and out of love the next day. It is a chief contributor to the high divorce rate. In contrast to this the pastor teaches the biblical nature of marital love. The pastor can certainly affirm the goodness of the emotional love that the couple now feels, but he must also point out the reality that this love will not be consistent in marriage. Hence marital love is characterized by something far greater.

Marital love is characterized by faithfulness. It is “a covenant of fidelity.” The whole basis and essence of marriage is that each gives himself or herself to the other, and they promise to remain faithful to each other and not give themselves to any other. By binding themselves to each other, and surrendering themselves to each other, the way is barred to the body of anyone else, and they content themselves in the marriage bed with their one companion.<sup>6</sup>

Luther goes on to point out that marital sexual love is not determined by a selfish desire for pleasure but by the desire to serve the other with one’s own body. Here we arrive at the notion of love as service to and action for the other. It would be wise at this point to discuss the order of creation and the marriage metaphor in Ephesians 5. The pastor must make clear, especially in our age of secular humanism, the distinctiveness of being male or female and the order that God has set up for the sexes. We must be sure that we are not “fundamentalistic” here, but at the same time hold up the fact that the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. For the benefit of each, the husband is to give himself in service to his wife as Christ gave himself for the church, and the wife is to obey willingly. Thus the headship of the husband is one of giving service, not tyrannical lordship. The submission of the wife is not in the nature of a doormat, but in recognizing that her husband serves her in loving headship. Of course, this ideal cannot be attained consistently because of the fall into sin. The husband can easily lapse into the pattern of powerful authority and the wife into nagging and complaining. It is here that the forgiveness of our Lord must anchor the marriage as the couple together seeks his forgiveness and forgives one another.

Finally, the vow ends with the words “and I pledge to you my faithfulness.” As has already been pointed out, fidelity is the basis of married life. It is here that the pastor can pull together all that has been said and highlight faithfulness of the couple to each other and also to their Lord. The faithful lives of the couple are grounded in the faithfulness of their Lord. “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph 5:21). It is this Lord who has brought them together and has made them his in the waters of baptism. It is this Lord who continues to come to them in the Divine Service to feed them with his gracious gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. The couple has been separated from the world around them by the Lord who has redeemed them and have been made members of his kingdom in this world, the church. It is this reality that forms the basis of their married life together.

CONCLUSION

This context for premarital pastoral care is intended to be a general overview with specific details to be fleshed out by the individual pastor. It has been offered because of a growing tendency for the church to use methods and materials from the social sciences in her handling of marriage. In and of themselves these methods can be very useful. It is the opinion of this writer, however, that the extensive use of these materials without the proper ecclesial connection makes a great statement about the reality of the church's confession and its applicability to our lives. Above all, we cannot give the impression that the church is being directed by the world around us. It is the nature of the church and her confession that it changes the world rather than conforming to it. Edmund Schlink summarizes this reality well:

It might seem obvious to call the Confessions, if not a third mark of the church, at least a mark in a derived sense, since they teach and confess the true marks of the church, the gospel and the sacraments. Nevertheless we must speak guardedly on this matter on the basis of the Confessions themselves. As the norm of the church is the *proclaimed* biblical gospel, and as the church is defined by the *preaching* of the gospel and the *administration* of the sacraments, so the Confessions are not per se, as written documents, a mark of the church, but in *preaching and administration of the sacraments*, as performed according to the Confessions, i.e., in

conformity with the gospel. The church is not to be recognized where the correct Confessions have constitutional validity but are not observed in practice.<sup>7</sup>

Schlink here highlights the necessity that the church's confession must guide her practice for that confession to be reality. For a confessional Lutheran church this practice manifests itself in the lives of her people most clearly in its worship rites. Applied to marriage in the church, this reality is held up most clearly when premarital pastoral care is based on the marriage rite itself, the statement of what the church believes and confesses about marriage. LOGO

NOTES

1. The term "premarital pastoral care" has been chosen as opposed to "pre-marriage counseling" to distinguish the church from the social sciences and to put this ministry in its ecclesial context.
2. Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 89.
3. *Lutheran Worship: Agenda* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), 122.
4. James T. Burtchaell, *For Better, For Worse* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 25–26.
5. Althaus, 93.
6. Althaus, 92.
7. Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), 220.

## The Book of Concord

H.E. Jacobs, editor

First published in 1882 and then revised in 1908, the Jacobs edition of the *Book of Concord* has been a valuable addition to the libraries of confessional Lutherans for generations. Its two volumes contain the Lutheran Confessions (volume I, approx. 670 pages) and documents related to formulating of the confessions, including the Roman Confutation, *Variata* editions of the *Augustana*, Schwabach Articles, and many other materials (volume II, approx. 390 pages).

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# Marriage as Holy Ground

SCOTT BRUZEK



## ECCLESIASTICAL VENDING MACHINES

**I**N A NEARBY PARISH THE PASTOR is discouraged. He complains that when it comes to marriage, pastors are not really considered pastors anymore. Instead, most people think of him as an ecclesiastical vending machine. If they put in the right amount of money—say, \$200 for a Gothic church building, \$75 for an organist, \$50 for a sexton, \$100 for a sermon, and a \$50 deposit in case somebody throws rice instead of bird seed—and then push the right buttons, they expect the perfect wedding to pop out. They assume that marriage within the church is offered as a public service, as if the church is just Las Vegas without the kitsch and the pastor is no more than a justice of the peace. In allowing people to think this way about the church, we have lost the sense of the holy. We have surrendered the joy of Adam and Eve at peace with the Lord in Eden (Gn 2:21–25). We have failed to speak of Moses’ awe in slipping off his sandals and hiding his face before the Lord at the Burning Bush (Ex 3:3–6) or of the disciples’ terror on the Mount of Transfiguration as they fall face down before Jesus with the shining face (Mk 9:6; Mt 17:6).

In other words, we have lost the sense of the church as *otherworldly*. We have forgotten that things happen in the church that happen nowhere else, that words and deeds are said and done in the church that are said and done nowhere else, and that gifts are given and received in the church that are given and received nowhere else. It is within the church that the holy Lord of heaven and earth has chosen to dwell among his people graciously, and by his merciful presence to hallow the space and the time. Certainly the church is in the world, but it is not *of* the world—it is *otherworldly*, it is holy (Jn 15:19; 17:11–19). This is what we confess each week in the creeds: “I believe in one, *holy*, Christian, and apostolic church.”<sup>1</sup>

If we have lost the sense of the holy—the sense of *who* the Lord is: the Holy One; and *what* the Lord does: holy things; and *when* the Lord does them: sacred time; and *where* the Lord does them: sacred space; and *why*: for the saints, the holy ones—even if only in this little corner of the church called matrimony, and the church no longer speaks of holiness, then who will? No one. Others may champion values, character, or virtues. The new book *Integrity*, for example, written by Yale Law School

Professor Stephen Carter, takes up marriage and divorce in this way. Still others may lament our moral poverty. In November of 1995 John J. DiIulio, a professor of politics and public affairs at Princeton University, observed that crime in the United States has been decreasing for the past few years, but he calls this “the lull before the storm.” He warns that there are “forty million kids ten years old or younger” who are about to become teenagers. This is the biggest group of adolescents in a generation, and many of them, says he, are “fatherless, godless, and jobless.”<sup>2</sup> Analyses like these of Carter and DiIulio are quite valuable, and they ought to engage us. They do not, however, speak of holiness. That is not their *Amt.*

To be faithful as a Christian and a pastor is to speak of holy things. Among the holy things done in Christ’s holy church is holy marriage. That is how the liturgy speaks—of *holy* marriage.<sup>3</sup> This thing done at altars each summer Saturday before God and witnesses is something utterly otherworldly and wholly sacred. Marriage is holy ground. Marriage is sacred space.

I am told by a family therapist that most couples who come to him for marriage counseling come for advice. They seek strategies and techniques. They want to know precisely what to do, and so that is how most counseling starts, even though he, as a therapist and pastor, believes he has much more to offer. In the paragraphs that follow, however, the point will not be *what* to do, but *where*. I will not say: Do this, but be sure not to do that; try this, but never try that. Rather, I hope to remind us *where* these things are done, so that once again we might think of marriage as holy ground and speak of marriage as sacred space—like Eden, the Burning Bush, or the Mount of Transfiguration.

This summit, as I understand it, is meant to discourage any diminished understanding of holy marriage—to shake and rattle any thoughts of pastors as ecclesiastical vending machines, of the church as a little Las Vegas, and of matrimony as no more than marks on a page in the county clerk’s office—as it encourages us to rejoice in the full riches of this glorious gift from the Lord.

## A SELF-INFLICTED SCOURGE

All that having been said, we ought to say this: In some ways we pastors have brought this pox upon ourselves.

First, we have brought it upon us by our practice. On the whole, we oblige those who appear before us seeking marriage far too quickly. On February 6, 1996, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that 75 percent of marriages in America today are religious.<sup>4</sup> Really? I ask you: Are 75 percent of the people getting married in

SCOTT BRUZEK is Pastor of Our Savior Lutheran Church in Mokenca, Illinois. This paper was presented for a Marriage Summit of the Concordia Youth and Family Life Institute’s Second Annual Conference on the Family on April 15–16, 1996.

America today religious? On any given weekend, are 75 percent of these people on their way to a church, synagogue, or mosque? I do not think so. Even given the euphemistic appeal to pastoral discretion or freedom, we too easily indulge those who come to the church seeking holy marriage.

With such practice, we not only diminish holy marriage but also teach others to do the same. It is now regularly the case that when two are about to become one, the pastor finds out just *after* the parents, the friends, the wedding coordinator, the florist, the tailor, the band, the caterer, the butcher, the baker, and candlestick maker—the pastor is last to know. But insofar as we are culpable, it is just deserts. By our practice of uniting almost any two persons who appear before us, and thus minimizing the holiness of marriage, we pastors have robbed ourselves of a very important opportunity to be *Seelsorger*, pastors who hear confession, pronounce absolution, offer prayers, and speak the enlivening words of the Lord Jesus Christ. By our practice, we pastors have often robbed ourselves of the chance to be pastors. *Mea culpa*.

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*By our practice, we pastors have often robbed ourselves of the chance to be pastors.*

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Second, we have brought this scourge upon ourselves by our confession. For too long we have left marriage lying in the kingdom of the left hand, the civil kingdom outside the church. Certainly we see marriage as a proper function of the state, enhancing family structure and social order. But when we regard marriage as *merely* secular, considering pastors to be no more than agents of the state and neglecting the *propria* of Christian marriage, then it is small wonder that twice in the last year I have been asked to preside over weddings at Medieval Times, an indoor theme park near Chicago. There the bride comes dressed as a princess, the groom arrives in armor on horseback, guests come in costume, and I suspect that with a party of seventy-five or more the pastor receives a free tonsure. All are present for a very quick Old English “I do” before heading to the banquet hall to rip roasted chickens apart with bare hands and throw the bones at each other, no silverware or napkins required.

In such a scene we have abdicated our responsibilities as pastors because we have not said all that Christ has given us to say, or done all that Christ has given us to do, or given all that Christ has given us to give. We err when we simply let marriage lie in the kingdom of the left hand. *Mea culpa*.

But just to move the ceremony from the banquet hall to the church building does not get it completely right. A more subtle error remains. Even within the church, we err when we speak of marriage first and foremost as *our* work, as something that *we* do. The seeds of this lie in seeing marriage primarily as the public ecclesiastical affirmation of a private vow and the pastor primarily as a witness to this act of two people joining *themselves*

together. This view is hopelessly anthropocentric, focusing on our hearts, our love, our vows, our words, and our works. *Mea maxima culpa*.

Against lapses in practice where pastors unite almost anyone and lapses in confession that speak of marriage as our work come holy words from the Holy One, Jesus Christ. It was he who replied to the Pharisees, “What therefore *God* has joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mt 19:4–6).

#### THE LORD’S WORK: FITTING TOGETHER PERSONS WHO FIT

From Jesus Christ we hear that marriage is God’s act. At the altar the Lord’s words and works unite a man and woman as one.

His gracious words and works on our behalf, of course, are nothing new. They are the history of life and salvation. As Gerhard Von Rad wrote of the Lord’s call to Abraham (Gn 12:1–3), “Yahweh is the subject of the first verb at the beginning of the first statement and thus the subject of the entire subsequent sacred history.”<sup>5</sup> Sacred history is holy history with Yahweh as protagonist, the Actor with a capital A.

While this is nothing new, it often is forgotten. Regrettably, the history of ancient Israel as well as the history of the church can be told as the story of those who have neglected the Lord, his words, and his works. Specifically, in our practice and confession of marriage we have often proceeded as if marriage is ours to do with as we please. This runs hard against Jesus’ words. But with the Lord there is forgiveness, and today is an especially good day to remember that marriage is the Lord’s work. After all, *remembering* is a biblical synonym for *faithfulness*.

When it comes to holy matrimony, precisely what are the faithful to be confessing? Just what is the Lord doing at the altar? A clue lies within the New Testament word for marriage, *γαμέω*. Its root, *γαμ-* or *γεμ-*, means to fit together or to pair.<sup>6</sup> In confounding the Pharisees, Jesus speaks even more graphically of marriage: “What therefore God has joined together [*συνέζευξεν*, which literally means yoked together and more generally means joined together or paired], let not man put asunder” (Mt 19:6).<sup>7</sup> This image of yoking, of a harness that lies across and loops around the necks of two draft animals, is almost lost on us today, but its implications are striking. Marriage is where the Lord himself fits and fastens two persons to each other.

This is one point, therefore, where premarital counseling may begin. When a man and woman come to a pastor in preparation for marriage, private fears are often given voice: Is he the right one for me? Is she my one and only? Are we the perfect match? Will our love hold?

Here the pastor serves best by redirecting them toward the words and works of Jesus Christ. *Why* do those whom the Lord fits together in holy marriage fit each other so well? *Why* do they match? It is because of something in their past. A Christian man and woman match because, before they appear at the altar to be fit to one another, each one already has been fit to Jesus Christ. Before these two come to the altar to be yoked together, each one already has been yoked individually to Jesus Christ. As Christians, each one has already had Jesus’ yoke laid across the shoulders and looped around the neck. Each one had already been encircled by Jesus’ yoke—his meek, mild, humble, trusting, serving, restful,



gentle, loving, light, joyful, gospel yoke. That is how Christ describes his yoke in Matthew 11. This yoke is the gospel. It is the free gift of forgiveness from Jesus Christ that bestows life and salvation (Mt 11:29–30; see also Mt 23:4).

Why do two Christians who stand at the altar fit each other? On their wedding day, at that sacred time and in that sacred place, they fit each other because each one has been fit to Jesus Christ first. Quite simply, they fit each other because each one has been hallowed and saint matches saint.

#### HOW IS THIS DONE?

To explain all of this it is best to start at the start. Jesus began with the Pharisees this way, “Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female?” (Mt 19:4).

From the beginning? Now is the time to speak of Adam, of dust drawn together and enlivened by the whoosh of holy breath: “and man became a living being” (Gn 2:7). Life is a gift! Now is the time to speak of Eve, in whom Adam rejoices. “At last,” he cries, “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gn 2:23). Eve given to Adam and Adam to Eve. Life *together* is a gift! With intellect and wills perfectly yoked to the Lord himself, Adam and Eve perfectly match each other. They fit each other because the Lord made each of them holy.

That holiness, unfortunately, was lost in the Fall as original righteousness gave way to original sin. But the Fall was not the end of the matter. Now is the time to speak of the Second Adam, of the Lord incarnate (1 Cor 15:22, 45; Rom 5:12–19). The Second Adam comes, takes human flesh, fulfills the law, and gives his life for us in death on Calvary, all to hallow us. Thus a prayer attributed to St. Innocent rejoices,

No human being by himself could or can restore what Adam lost. And what would have happened to us if Jesus Christ in his mercy had not redeemed us? What would have happened to the whole human race? God who loves us far more than we love ourselves, in his great mercy sent his Son Jesus Christ to save us.

Jesus Christ comes among us as Second Adam, redeeming us and drawing all sacred history toward its sacred end in Second Eden, in heaven. Holy Jesus, this Second Adam—he gives hope for marriage.

Before going on we must be absolutely clear. Jesus Christ is holy. We are not. Since the Fall, there is absolutely no good or righteous thing in us naturally. And yet he forgives our sins, declaring us holy, counting us righteous, and calling us saints (Eph 1:1). How is it that his holiness—a righteousness so righteous that it is totally alien and external to us—is applied to us? Ephesians 5:25–27 delivers an answer:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water and the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Made holy by water and the word? Now is the time to speak of holy baptism. Holy baptism, after all, is a matter of good and evil, and so a matter of life and death. William Willimon, Dean of the Chapel at Duke University, tells of the baptism of a child in a Central American village. When the child was brought into the church, he was carried to the font in a coffin. Can you imagine such a thing? No pomp, no whirring video cameras, no giddy sponsors, no grinning grandparents, no flashbulbs. He was borne to the water in a coffin as his parents softly wept. It was as if they were bringing their child forward for death.<sup>8</sup> And of course they were, for that is precisely how Paul speaks of baptism in Romans 6. To be baptized is to die with Christ and to die to sin. But that is not the end of the matter. To be baptized is also to live with Christ and in Christ. The baptized have been moved out from a kingdom of sin and death into Jesus’ meek, mild, humble, trusting, serving, restful, gentle, loving, light, joyful, gospel kingdom. Holy baptism—that gives hope for marriage.

And why stop there? Now is the time to speak of holy supper. After all, in the later liturgies of the early Eastern Church, just before the distribution of the Lord’s Supper, the bishop’s voice rang out, “The holy things for the holy ones.”<sup>9</sup> The holy things are the body and the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup> The holy ones are the baptized. The ancient liturgies confessed that the Lord Jesus Christ puts his true body and his true blood upon the tongues of sinners at the holy supper. The liturgy still proclaims this truth: the very same body and blood that two thousand years ago was laid upon the cross is today laid upon our tongues at the altar. It is there not in a way that we can touch or taste or smell or feel or see, but in a way that forgives. These holy things hallow us, binding us to the Lord and to our spouses in divine *koinonia*. Holy things for the holy ones at the holy supper—that too gives hope for marriage.

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***These holy things hallow us, binding us to the Lord and to our spouses in divine koinonia.***

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And is there more? Now is the time to speak of holy absolution. During the Heidelberg Disputation (1518), Martin Luther reminded us that God’s love does not find its object, but instead creates its object. This means that God does not look around this room and love the lovable, but rather the unlovable—the “sinners, evil persons, fools, and weaklings,” as Luther puts it. That is not how our world speaks of attraction, passion, sex, or love, but it is the way the Lord loves us and bids us to love each other. “Sinners are attractive because they are loved,” writes Luther, “they are not loved because they are attractive” (AE 31:57). First comes the undeserved love of God, then the attractiveness follows. His love makes fools, weaklings, and sinners lovable. Think of what a tremendous burden this lifts from my wife. She is free to love me without first spending her time trying to find something lovable

about me. Holy absolution, love for the unlovable—that gives hope for marriage.

What more is there to say? Now is the time to speak of the holy day, and so of *Gottesdienst*, the divine service of the Lord. On Sunday morning the Lord shakes, wakes, and gathers his people in his holy place and there gives out his glorious gifts. The forgiveness he bestows from font and altar sets us squarely upon solid ground, Christ the cornerstone (Eph 2:20), whose mercy reinvigorates us for life together. Knowing this, the Lutheran Confessions say repeatedly that the highest worship of the Lord is not what we do, but receiving his gifts (Ap IV, 60, 49, 154). The holy sabbath, a sacred time when gifts are given on the holy ground between the font and the altar—that gives even more hope for marriage.

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***It takes months or even years to get into marital difficulties, and sometimes it takes months or even years to get out of them.***

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Only after having said all of this is it time to speak of holy marriage. Holy marriage is done by the Holy Trinity, from the life received in the holy sacraments, and within lives forgiven by holy absolution. That is at least one reason why the rubrics in the *Lutheran Worship Agenda* allow holy marriage to be set within the divine service on Sunday morning, just after holy baptism, Holy absolution, and the reading of the holy Gospel and before the holy supper.<sup>11</sup> In holy marriage the Lord is busy fitting two persons together. They fit because the Lord first takes time to forgive them. This is what it means to be evenly yoked—to share the same harness is to share the same gospel, the same holy gifts, the same forgiveness, the same Christ.<sup>12</sup>

#### RETURNING TO REAL LIFE

So what about real life, life outside this chapel as you go home today or tomorrow? Does the church offer any practical answers that cannot be heard anywhere else? Precisely how do these great gifts give hope for marriage? Just how do these holy things breath life into life together?

This is the church's answer. The sad fact is that Adam is not your husband, or Eve is not your wife, and you do not live in paradise. The sad fact is that we live not in original righteousness but with original sin. The implications of that sadness are legion. To sin in marriage is to sin in close quarters. Sometimes it even seems that two persons once so carefully matched at the altar no longer fit. There are sins of omission. One day a man or woman wakes up and just does not feel like being married anymore. "I have fallen out of love with her," he says. "I am no longer attracted to him," says she. Is that not how we speak? There are also sins of commission, when spouses spar and clench like boxers, sometimes verbally, sometimes physically, and after a while one or the other or both drop beaten and exhausted, with no

winners. It is precisely at this point where we become so much like the Pharisees, whose yoke was harsh, heavy, and hard to bear because it was entangled with the law (Mt 23:4; Gal 5:1; Gal 4:8–12). Here too we often come with hard hearts speaking of divorce while Jesus hopes to speak of marriage and soft, forgiving, hopeful hearts.

And so Holy Jesus gives his gifts. When a marriage is troubled, the holy church reminds us who we are (the baptized, the holy ones of the Lord), and where we live (between the font and the altar), and what we said before God and everyone at holy marriage: "I will love you with the selfless love of Christ." "Do you mean it?" "I do." "Forever?" "I do." That is not always easy. But with his words and ways, Jesus teaches us to repent and to forgive, to say: "I was weak, I was evil, I was a fool, I sinned against God, I sinned against you, I am unlovable, I am sorry, this was grievous, please forgive me." And to respond: "I forgive you. It is over. Now we carry on from here." This holds not only for marriages in trouble, but also for the best marriages.

#### JUST A WAVE OF THE HAND?

So is that all there is to it? Troubled marriages are brought to the altar and the font, and the pastor speaks a few words of forgiveness in the name of Jesus, and the misery is over? Is it all so quick and easy as that? Does the church just wave its hand over troubled marriages and then send the troubled on their way as if that is the end of the matter?

Well, yes—and no. Yes! True forgiveness is given and received instantaneously. Christ and my wife say to me, "I forgive you," and indeed I am forgiven, in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ. It is over. And no. One of the most frustrating things in dealing with those in troubled marriages is the assumption that just because they have been forgiven, they can carry on as before. It is one thing to be forgiven, but quite another to be healed. It is one thing to be justified, but quite another to live justified. So said Jesus to the woman caught in adultery, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again" (Jn 8:10–11).

Here, I think, there is an analogy to death. Christians rejoice not only in life but also in eternal life, a gift given instantaneously to the forgiven at death. On the day of a death, however, this confidence in eternal life is not always clearly displayed. People moan, weep, cry out, and even despair. Much of that is good. In fact, pastors worry about those who keep it all in, who deny their pain and refuse to grieve. But eventually we look for a change toward peace and hope, and we are especially careful with those who say, "My heartache will never go away." If I say such a thing, then I have made my heartache bigger than Jesus. My heartache has become my god and I have lapsed into idolatry, breaking the very first commandment.

In the same way, sin within a marriage causes pain. Even with genuine instantaneous forgiveness, that pain often remains. But in time we expect a change toward peace and hope, as the words of the Lord have their way with us. Indeed, we are concerned if eventually we do not see such a change. This needs to be remembered: it takes months or even years to

get into marital difficulties, and sometimes it takes months or even years to get out of them—but it does happen. With a story, a friend of mine describes it brilliantly. A man comes to his pastor and says, “I can never forgive my wife.” The pastor answers, “Well, of course not. But that is not what matters. What matters is that Jesus has forgiven her, that he went through Calvary for her. And now your struggle is to let his forgiveness for her matter for you. After all, if Jesus Christ regards her so, how can you do otherwise?”

A final word before I close. I am a pastor, not a family therapist or marriage counselor. If you come to me about marriage, you will hear about sin and grace, about confession and absolution, about Holy Jesus and his holy gifts. I do not try to do what a therapist does, and unless a therapist is also a pastor, the therapist does not do what I do. These two things can be complementary and they need not compete, but they are not the same.

Let me explain this way. Before I see the sick in the hospital, I often read a short piece by the Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann.

Here is a man suffering on his bed of pain, and the Church comes to him to perform the sacrament of healing. For this man, as for every man in the whole world, suffering can be defeat, the way of complete surrender to darkness, despair and solitude. It can be *dying* in the very real sense of the word. And yet it can be also the ultimate victory of Man and of Life in him. The Church does not come to restore *health* in this man, simply to replace medicine when medicine has exhausted its own possibilities. The Church comes to take this man into the Love, the Light, and the Life of Christ. It comes not merely to “comfort” him in his sufferings, not to “help” him, but to make him a *martyr*, a *witness* to Christ in his very sufferings. A martyr is one who beholds “the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56). A martyr is one for whom God is not another—and the last—chance to stop the awful pain; God is his very life, and thus everything in his life comes to God, ascends to the fullness of Love.<sup>13</sup>

At both places, in the hospital and in the confessional, the pastor’s *Amt* is not that of a medical doctor or a therapist. My task is to help those who are suffering, in the hospital or in a marriage, by witnessing to Jesus Christ and helping them be witnesses to him.

#### LIVING FROM THE LORD’S GIFTS

Finally, this. On the front page of the *New York Times* of February 11, 1996, there was a story describing marriage in Japan. Marriages and the family structure in Japan are exceptionally durable. The *Times* reports that the divorce rate is half that of the United States, that most households in Japan are two-parent households, and that only 1.1 percent of births in Japan are to unwed mothers, while 30.1 percent of births in the United States are to unwed mothers, and that number is rising.

Amazing, right? This, says the *Times*, is the secret to Japanese

marriages: low expectations, the ability to endure hardship, and shame. Often marriages in Japan are arranged between two persons who have little in common, who do not like each other very much, and who do not see each other very often because of long work days. The Japanese stay together, however, because society punishes those who divorce by shaming them with gossip, refusing job promotions to those who seem unable to manage their family life, and awarding child support from fathers to non-working mothers with custody in only about 15 percent of divorce cases. Some speculate, however, that if these strictures ever weaken, the divorce rate in Japan will soar.<sup>14</sup>

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*Christian marriage is two persons  
looking in the same direction,  
with eyes on Christ.*

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Here one needs to be careful not to disparage the Japanese as Japanese. For us the analysis is valuable precisely because it is *not* culture bound, not tied specifically to the Japanese. A similar sadness infects any marriage anywhere that gasps and falters under the heavy yoke of rules, restrictions, oppression, mistrust, shame, abuse, or infidelity—anywhere where marriage is hopelessly crushed under the law.

But the church could not be further from this, for the church proclaims marriage in, with, and under the gospel. This is a *proprium* of holy marriage, a peculiar, extraordinary, *otherworldly*, holy thing about marriage within the church. Marriage is the Lord’s work. First each Christian is yoked to Jesus Christ—to his meek, mild, humble, trusting, serving, restful, gentle, loving, light, joyful, gospel yoke—to the forgiveness bestowed through the Lord’s word and sacraments. Then the Lord fits, matches, and yokes a Christian man and a Christian woman to each other.

This is the point: because these two have first been fit to Christ and his yoke, they fit each other. His forgiving yoke delivers unity and direction, so Christian marriage is not two persons looking at each other, wondering, worrying, and hoping that their love will hold, but two persons looking in the same direction, with eyes on Christ. It is two persons pulling in the same direction, toward Jesus Christ. His word and sacraments forgive even the best marriages, hallowing them and making them holy ground.

This is where marriage starts, sprouts, grows, flourishes, is forgiven, and is renewed—between the altar and the font. Marriage is lived in the water of holy baptism. Marriage is lived on the body and the blood of the holy supper. Marriage is lived from the words put into our ears at holy absolution. Marriage is lived in Christ, who shares his gifts with us each holy day. Today when you go home, you might take off your shoes, bow down, tremble, and rejoice that Jesus with the shining face is present there by word and sacrament, remembering that for his sake your marriage is holy ground. 

## NOTES

1. So the Nicene Creed. The Apostles' Creed makes the same confession: "I believe in the holy Christian church."
2. *New York Times*, 19 November 1995, sec. 1, p. 12.
3. *Lutheran Worship: Agenda*, prepared by the Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), 120.
4. *Wall Street Journal*, 6 February 1996, sec. B, p. 1.
5. Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 154.
6. "Marriage, Adultery, Bride, Bridegroom," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 575–590.
7. "συζέγγυμι," in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2d ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 783.
8. William H. Willimon, "Family Values," *Pulpit Resource* 23, no. 3 (July-September 1995): 32.
9. R. C. D. Jasper and G. J. Cuming, ed. and trans., *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed*, 3d ed. (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1987), 86, 73, 112.
10. Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, trans. N. E. Nagel (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), 9, 221.
11. *Lutheran Worship: Agenda*, 120, 127.
12. This makes sense of Paul's admonition not to be unequally yoked, that is, mismatched or mismatched with one who is not rejoicing in Holy Jesus and his holy gifts (2 Cor 6:14).
13. Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), 103.
14. *New York Times*, 11 February 1996, sec. 1, p. 1.



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When one considers the reformers of the church in the sixteenth century it is quite natural to think first of Dr. Martin Luther. But we also know that there were others who were great men in their own right—and one of these colleagues to Dr. Luther was Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560).

It was Melanchthon who worked closest with Dr. Luther. He wrote the Augsburg Confession, authored the first Lutheran dogmatics, and assisted in the translation of the Scripture into German. A scholar of the Greek language and professor at the University of Wittenberg, he was a scholar and a gentleman in an age when the two seldom came together.

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# A Case for Chastity

JOHN W. KLEINIG



**B**Y SOME STRANGE SHIFT OF VALUES in our society, chastity, which was once prized and praised as an excellent virtue, has now come to be regarded as almost a vice. Many young people who are virgins are ashamed of their virginity and refuse to admit to their lack of sexual experience for fear of ridicule. Some, in fact, regard their virginity as a burden to be discarded as quickly and efficiently as possible. While it is true that there are many in our society who oppose this denigration of chastity and virginity, they are obviously very much on the defensive. They are held in contempt. Their views are barely heard on the media except in distorted form. They rarely influence public opinion.

This shift in values has, I believe, created a new kind of problem for the young people in our society, who bear the brunt of this change, as well as for the church when it tries to promote the virtue of chastity. The problem goes deeper than the matter of sexual misbehavior, which is evidenced in the increase of premarital sex, abortions, venereal disease, homosexuality, adultery, and divorce. It is much more ideological than practical, more theological than moral. It has more to do with social values and personal beliefs than with public behavior and conformity to a given social order. We do not face a batch of new sexual vices but rather a new attitude to the age-old sexual virtues and vices. The chaos is ideological. The problem is, ultimately, the problem of idolatry.

There was a time when the admission of extramarital sexual activity was regarded as an exercise in shamelessness, and the defense of it was taken as evidence of a desire to justify personal immorality. But now the tables are turned. People openly admit their immorality without feeling any apparent need to defend themselves and their actions. We have, it seems, a new set of values that regards chastity as something undesirable, if not evil. It champions sexual intercourse as something inherently good, perhaps even the highest good. Promiscuity is taken as the mark of a warm, passionate, caring person, while chastity is, apparently, only to be found in cold, bloodless, miserly souls. The profession of virginity is, it seems, nothing but the sanctimonious self-display of a hypocrite or else a shameful admission of inadequacy on the part of a frigid, emotional cripple.

I am not as alarmed by any supposed increases in sexual immorality as by this apparent reversal of values that is used to

justify sexual misbehavior and aggravate the sexual chaos in our society. I don't believe that our young people are at all responsible for this shift of attitude, this reversal of values, which calls "evil good and good evil," which puts "darkness for light and light for darkness" (Is 5:20). We can't blame them for that. They have not created this disorder but are in fact its chief victims who suffer most from its ravages. They are, I fear, much more sinned against than sinning. Furthermore, I don't reckon that there is more sexual immorality among the young than the adults. There may indeed be less, if I can judge merely from my own experience. But that question does not interest me here. I merely maintain that the adults in our society are largely responsible for the confession of the young, which stems from their own immorality and sexual idolatry.

We Christian pastors, teachers, and parents may also be to some extent responsible for this situation. We have suffered a loss of nerve. We have failed to convince ourselves and our people that sexual chastity is in fact a moral and theological virtue. We have been scared of being regarded as unenlightened moralists. We have failed to foster and defend those social customs and institutions that built up a system of support for this virtue to flourish. We have not backed up those young people who have tried to practice chastity. Those who have felt impelled to be sexually chaste or celibate have received more help from Buddhism and new age philosophy than from the church. The result of this is apparent. While young people find it easy to justify sexual intercourse apart from marriage, those who believe in the value of chastity are hard put to defend it; they find little social support for their beliefs and behavior.

The pressure of public opinion has not only led to the removal of many former sexual taboos that in the past set the limits for interaction between the sexes, but has also created a situation where sexual indulgence is the norm. Anyone who refuses to bow to group pressure is made to feel like a freak and is in danger of becoming a social outcast. This pressure for sexual involvement is, of course, nothing new. But at least in the past, peer group pressures and values were vigorously counteracted by general social pressure to avoid extramarital sexual intercourse. This gave young people room to make up their own minds, or at least it gave those who felt unready for sexual intercourse a ready excuse to say no. But now it is hard even for those who do not wish to have sex to refuse to do so. And those who do remain virgins often wonder whether they are right about it all, especially when they merely react against the immorality of their parents.

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JOHN W. KLEINIG, a contributing editor for *LOGIA*, serves as a professor at Luther Seminary, North Adelaide, South Australia.

I should therefore like to mount a defense of the virtue of chastity, which, as Chesterton once remarked, is by no means as old-fashioned as unchastity. In it I show how I would confirm the convictions of those who wish to remain chaste, convince those who are wavering, and convict those who attempt to justify their unchastity. My first series of arguments are moral and rational, as I am convinced that chastity is not merely a Christian virtue but part and parcel of human sexuality. My second series of arguments are, however, theological, for unlike many modern theologians, I believe that chastity is a truly Christian virtue and a great gift from God.

### A MORAL CASE FOR CHASTITY

This argument for chastity both before marriage and in marriage has as its foundation the conviction that sex, though obviously physical, is also a deeply personal matter. For better or worse, it touches and affects me in my very self. It has as much, if not more, to do with my soul than with my body. If sex is not properly personalized, it can depersonalize those who engage in it.

#### *Sexual Intercourse as a Natural Activity*

There are those who argue that sex is a natural, physical need, like eating, and it should be similarly satisfied (see 1 Cor 6:12–13). They maintain that they merely give of their bodies to each other, when they have sexual intercourse with each other. Their soul, their self, however, remains as uninvolved and detached from the other person as from food when it is eaten. So, for them, chastity has no more moral value than refraining from eating or drinking.

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### *Depersonalized sex depersonalizes the people who engage in it.*

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Now the analogy of eating food does not quite hold, since we must eat to remain alive. What's more, any kind of sexual activity, except masturbation, necessarily takes in another person, which is not the case with eating. It is true that a person can become mentally and emotionally detached from the process of sexual intercourse, so that it becomes nothing but an exercise in physical mechanics, like the transaction between a prostitute and her client. But that can be achieved only by violating the unity of body and soul, and at great cost to both. In schizoid fashion the mind splits off the soul from the body and takes control of the sexual process, so that desire is willed and sex is made to follow the dictates of the mind and its imagination. Paradoxically, by this attempted delimitation to the area of physical exchange, sex increasingly becomes a mental matter—D. H. Lawrence's sex on the brain. It leads to the severance of the soul from the body, and with it from the world of nature and natural sexuality. The body is then regarded as a mere thing, the focus of narcissistic idolatry or else of paranoid dis-

gust. It is thoroughly depersonalized and falsely abused. Such activity leads to the denial of natural sexuality.

At best, casual sex, where people deliberately withhold themselves from each other, devalues the currency of physical intimacy. It is then no longer capable of enacting those levels of personal intimacy and affection that cannot otherwise be enacted. At worst, it leads to a division within the self that either retains some shreds of its integrity by retreating into the fortress of the mind, or else disintegrates as it loses the sense of its own unity, continuity, and responsibility. Those who feel crippled by a bad conscience often initially welcome such an orgiastic, liberating loss of self in casual sex. Only later does it dawn on them that they may thereby have lost their sense of individuality and personal worth. Depersonalized sex depersonalizes the people who engage in it.

#### *Sexual Intercourse as Self-Fulfillment*

Another group of people agree that sex is in some sense a personal matter, but for them it is a means, if not *the* means, by which they achieve their personhood. It is held to be a rite of passage into personal fulfillment and wholeness.

Unlike most traditional societies, we have no clear rites of passage for the young in our society that bridge the transition from childhood to adulthood. And so sexual intercourse is looked upon by many young people as such a rite of passage by which they achieve the status, identity, wisdom, and power of an adult. By it they expect to find themselves and fulfillment for themselves. In recent years this rather crude notion has been refined under the influence of certain kinds of psychology that in turn have borrowed certain aspects of eastern mysticism. In some circles sexual intercourse is now held to aid the passage from a lower trammled state of consciousness to a higher, liberated consciousness. By it a person is initiated into a larger, superior sphere of being with the gift of greater energy, better health, fuller freedom, clearer bliss, and higher consciousness. By submitting to the cosmic current of sexuality in and about them, they have arrived—their souls have become whole. They are at harmony with themselves and their environment. They have both become aware of themselves and gone beyond themselves. So sex is prized as a kind of therapy, perhaps even a religion, which promises salvation and transcendence to those who participate in it. Such sex has value apart from the other person and a relationship with a particular person of the opposite sex. It is part of the cosmic order that gives us life and shapes our being. To it chastity is anomaly, a denial of the demand for maturity and growth.

Now there are considerable problems with this view of sexual intercourse as a rite of passage, as everyone who has made this transition knows. Most people feel no such transformation of themselves. They often feel nothing but some intangible sense of loss. Many feel disillusioned by the whole business and wonder what the fuss was all about, especially as initial attempts at sexual intercourse are often botched up. Sex is very much an art best learnt over a period of time in a secure, personal environment. Some fear that they have compromised and perhaps even lost themselves in some inexplicable way.

Sex in itself does not make me somebody. It does not give me my self, nor does it heal my soul; it merely enhances or dimin-

ishes, refines or corrodes my existing self-esteem and sense of self. If I am unsettled, uncertain, or deficient in myself, sex will confront me most powerfully with the truth about myself and even prove to be rather destructive. This is especially so with young people who become sexually involved before they have a firm sense of themselves as persons in their own right and before they are emotionally ready for those kinds of contact with the opposite sex that make sexual intercourse so much more than mere physical intimacy. Urged on by public pressure and a sense of their own deficiency, they expect to find and prove themselves in sexual intercourse, only to experience disillusionment and damage to their self-esteem. Premature sexual intercourse is therefore much more likely to lead to a loss of self rather than its gain. Hence most sensitive people view it with fear as much as with desire.

### *Chastity as an Important Aspect of Self-Giving in Marriage*

Sex is part of a relationship between two people who meet together and complement each other physically. Whether they know it or not, they always give something of themselves to each other in sexual intercourse. In many cases they give much more than they first plan to do, as they often come to appreciate, when they lose each other after a period of contact and cohabitation. Ideally, two people in a sexual relationship give themselves totally and unreservedly to each other. That is the Christian ideal, the positive side to its more frequently voiced negative strictures, the reason for its advocacy of chastity. Sexual intercourse is the gift of the self physically in love to another.

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***Chastity before marriage frees two people to give themselves totally with their whole past to each other.***

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Now such self-giving is not complete at any one point in time, or on any one occasion. My soul is not a static fixed entity, but an historical continuum that stretches back and reaches forward in time. The gift of myself sexually thus includes my past and foreshadows my future. If that is so, then the acceptance of marriage as a process of willing, giving, and receiving of each other necessarily gives rise to the demand for chastity before and within marriage. Both fornication and adultery short-circuit and inhibit this self-surrender. They prevent it from coming into fruition and deny its consummation.

Chastity before marriage frees two people to give themselves totally with their whole past to each other. In a sense, they are in possession of themselves by virtue of their chastity. They have not been given to another, but still have themselves unencumbered to give to the person they love. There is, theoretically speaking, no part of themselves that is sexually reserved for another and cannot therefore be shared. There is no root for sexual jealousy, which inflicts and afflicts even the most rational and enlightened people. Neither the man nor the woman

bring with them the fear of recurring sexual failure and any basis for unwelcome sexual comparisons. Couples may, of course, and must confess their previous sexual liaisons, if their marriage is to be set on a firm basis, but that necessarily involves a partial repudiation of their past, which, I would argue, remains outside their marriage, even though it is still part of themselves and their experience. Chastity, which reserves itself sexually for marriage, cannot then by any means be equated in itself with a lack of passion and emotional generosity. Rather, it clears the way for total and passionate self-abandonment to another without any suspicious reservations and the haunting fear of hurt or failure from previous sexual experiences. Chastity creates trust, that precious prerequisite of all personal relationships.

Now don't get me wrong! I don't at all claim that people who have had no sexual experience before marriage will therefore automatically have better sexual relationships with each other. That may or may not be so. We have no way of telling, as so many diverse factors influence sexual adequacy and the capacity for sexual enjoyment. Chastity does not guarantee supersex, but ensures that sex does not become an end in itself, a beautiful but destructive idol. It sets sex firmly within the context of stable, personal relationships where it is a token and pledge of continuous self-giving and self-giveness. Chastity subordinates sexual intercourse to the relationship between husband and wife. It personalizes sex which otherwise threatens to depersonalize people.

## A THEOLOGICAL CASE FOR CHASTITY

### *Unchastity as Apostasy*

People have always sensed a close link, if not an overlap, between sex and religion. This was especially so in the ancient world with its fertility cults and the marriages of its deities. Sex is still the one area of life where apparently secularized people sense something sacred. In it they experience something of the captivating yet frightening power of holiness, which has so fascinated the human race for most of its checkered history. In both religion and sex we are threatened and gripped more deeply as persons in our souls than in any other areas of experience, except perhaps the mysteries of parenthood and death. In sex we come upon something mysterious, something larger than us, something beyond our control.

It is interesting that in Romans 1:24–25 Paul argues that people do not just dishonor each other's bodies by engaging in unchastity; they dishonor God. They exchange the truth of God for a lie; they worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator. In other words, he argues that unchastity in all its manifestations involves idolatry and apostasy from the living God (see Eph 5:6; Col 3:5). And in this he merely echoes the Old Testament. Unchastity is rebellion against God and a denial of reality.

Now that's not a very popular idea for us and our generation, which has been fed the notion that sex is a private, personal matter for the parties directly involved. Yet I know the truth of what Paul asserts from my own personal and pastoral experience. I have often noticed the close connection in myself between sexual temptation and rebellion against God. In my work as a pastor I

have often come across this link in two different ways. On the one hand, people who have been brought up as Christians and have come to reject what they have learnt, often get involved in some sexual irregularity when they break with God. On the other hand, problems of intellectual doubt and personal unbelief in God are often closely linked with sexual guilt. The advocates of sexual liberation bear out the truth of this in their own way. They make it quite clear that they don't just aim to liberate themselves and others from the trammels of sexual inhibition and conventional morality. Their aim is to break from bondage to the "Jewish-Christian God." God is their real enemy. Sexual liberation is thus liberation from the Triune God and a guilty conscience before God. Belief in God is for them the main cause of our sexual misery. Of course they are wrong about that. But they are at least aware that God is somehow tied up with their sexuality. They know that unchastity will only work if such a God does not exist. But such a God does exist. Christ himself declares in Matthew 5:27–30 that our sexual behavior affects our relationship with God. He maintains that unchastity leads to damnation. It doesn't just damage us and our relationships with others; it destroys our relationship with God.

#### *Chastity as an Aspect of Our Relationship with God*

If unchastity destroys our relationship with God, then the opposite must be also true. Chastity enhances our relationship with God. That is what gives chastity its spiritual value. Its value differs slightly, depending on whether a person is single or married, but ultimately it is the same for both.

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### *Sexual liberation is thus liberation from the Triune God and a guilty conscience before God.*

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Chastity has spiritual value for an unmarried person. This is spelled out most clearly by our Lord in Matthew 19:10–12 and by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:7–8 and 25–35. Neither of them sees celibacy as a matter of shame for a Christian, as it was so often in the ancient world and is even today. Under certain circumstances, it could even be a good thing, a charisma, a special gift of grace for those who have a special vocation from God (1 Cor 7:7). The purpose of chastity is threefold. First, it frees single people to give themselves more simply, more directly, and with fewer distractions to the Lord in his service than married people, whose loyalty is always divided between their spouse and their Lord. Second, it is a witness that the chief loyalty of Christians is to their Lord, who has reclaimed them totally for himself and his service. It is lastly a reminder that marriage, even at its best, is but a provisional reality limited to this age. The union of husband and wife prefigures the ultimate, perfect physical unity and intimacy with Christ in the communion of saints. So the celibacy of single Christians is a byproduct of their physical devotion to the Lord and an aid to it.

Chastity in the form of marital fidelity has an equally important spiritual value for those who are married. According to Paul in Ephesians 5:17–33 and 1 Thessalonians 4:3–8, marital chastity has to do with the bodily sanctification of those who are Christians and therefore holy in Christ. It is God's will that all our relationships with each other should be grounded on and therefore consistent with his relationship with us in Christ. God's fidelity requires and inspires the fidelity of husband and wife to each other in marriage. Where such fidelity cements husband and wife together in their relationship with God and each other in the body of Christ, there the Holy Spirit can get on with his work of sanctifying people bodily for increasing participation in the divine life of the Holy Trinity. Through its chaste fidelity a couple is not only refined for deeper fellowship with each other but also prepared for deeper intimacy with God. So, although sexual intercourse in itself neither consecrates nor defiles two married people, they are sanctified by the Holy Spirit in their physical fidelity to each other and their Lord. On the other hand, sexual infidelity and impurity defile Christian couples and so desecrate their holiness. It gives Satan a foothold in their lives. He uses it to do his destructive work in them.

Whether people are single or married, their sexual chastity is a necessary byproduct of their fellowship with Christ and is required because they are holy in him. It points to a higher and fuller purity that has to do with the whole self in relation to God (see 2 Cor 11:2–4). Jesus purifies us. He gives us that purity of mind which gains wisdom from God by following him in his way of thinking and acting, that purity of heart which is sensitive to God and able to feel with him, and that purity of spirit which enables us to see God and to participate in his divine life. As Jesus reminded us, only the pure in heart see God (Mt 5:8). This kind of total chastity, which integrates and clarifies our whole being, makes us wholly translucent, with nothing to hide from God. It comes from intimacy with God and leads to further intimacy with him.

Chastity is not just a necessary aspect of intimacy with God; it is also a vital requirement of our work with him. The more we are purified and sanctified by the Holy Spirit in all aspects of our physical existence, including our sexuality, the more fit we are to be used by God in his work and the less likely we are to mar his handiwork, when we do work for him. St. Paul puts this beautifully in 2 Timothy 2:20–22:

In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and earthenware, and some for noble use, some for ignoble. If any one purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work. So shun youthful passions and aim at righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart.

In other words, we are sanctified sexually for divine service as well as for intimacy with God.

Ultimately the demand for chastity is, as St. Paul affirms in 1 Corinthians 6:12–20, linked for the Christian with the belief in the resurrection of the body. Since God created the body, and



with it our sexuality, our bodies and their sexuality are in themselves good (1 Tim 4:1–5). But like all created things they can be abused and defiled. They are meant to be sanctified and made for fellowship with God. Our souls are closely and intimately connected with our bodies. We don't just possess bodies; we are embodied souls. Hence salvation involves our bodily nature and with it the whole physical world. What we do with our bodies affects our relationship with God. Any split within ourselves between our bodies and souls damages this relationship as much as it does us. Since our bodies are consecrated as shrines of God's presence and temples of the Holy Spirit, they can be desecrated and defiled by sexual unchastity and so be rendered unfit for God. They are already now meant to share in the eternal life of God and convey something of this to others. We are to glorify God in our bodies, which have been redeemed for intimacy with a holy God.

Chastity is thus a fine virtue and an excellent gift, because in it we have a foretaste and pledge of the resurrection of our fully personalized, humanized, glorified bodies (see Rv 14:1–5). By the hope of the resurrection our bodies acquire a dignity and glory that far exceeds their apparent glorification in *Playboy* and other similar magazines. In fact, these magazines and the whole cult of nudity tend to trivialize, depersonalize, and ultimately desecrate the body beautiful that they idolize. At the resurrection our bodies will be unveiled in such wholesome yet dazzling splendor as will make the ritual disrobings at nudist beaches seem rather sad attempts to achieve purely physical innocence and a wholly desacralized chastity. Our bodies will then no longer mask our true selves, as they have since the fall of our

first parents, for we will have nothing to hide and nothing to fear from disclosing ourselves. We shall be fully at home in our bodies. They will be utterly translucent and able to show us fully as we are. Then at last we shall be truly chaste. We shall be as totally and radiantly chaste before God as Christ would have us be and as he promises to make us. Our Lord will present us to his Father holy and splendid, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing (Eph 5:27).

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*Chastity is by no means the supreme Christian virtue.*

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In spite of all that I have said I must add one final qualification to all this. At the end of the chapter on Sexual Morality in *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis reminds his readers that Christians should not consider unchastity as the supreme vice. Sins of the flesh may be bad, but the sins of the Spirit such as unbelief and pride are far worse. Conversely, chastity is by no means the supreme Christian virtue. In fact, St. Paul doesn't even mention it among the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22, even though he lists fornication, impurity, and licentiousness among the works of the flesh. The greatest virtue, the most important gift of the Spirit is love, and Christian chastity is a byproduct of that kind of love. LOGO

Inklings



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# In Search of Adequate Wedding Vows

ALLEN C. HOGER



IN the history of English-language wedding rituals, the influence of Thomas Cranmer's order of 1549, *The Forme of Sollemnization of Matrimonie*, can scarcely be exaggerated. From the first line of its opening address, "Dearly beloved, we are gathered here," to its vow, "to haue and to holde from this day forward," the *First Prayer Book of Edward VI* became a published pattern for weddings whose influence is still great today. It consists, in part, of the following elements in outline:

- (1) An address on the significance and purposes of holy matrimony, and on how it should be entered and upheld;
- (2) A call for the statement of any known impediments to the marriage taking place;
- (3) The vows ("Wilt thou haue...");
- (4) Each person's "taking" of the other, with attendant pledges ("And thereto I plight thee my trouth");
- (5) The man's placing of a ring upon the woman's hand, with words of devotion and commitment;
- (6) The quotation of Christ's words about not rending asunder "Those whome god hath joyned together";
- (7) The minister's pronouncement of husband and wife in view of what has taken place; and
- (8) The blessing of the married couple.

How cherished this form became is clear to us when we next consider the American *Book of Common Prayer* of 1928, where we find Cranmer's order of service essentially intact. It has undergone, nevertheless, a number of striking changes. First, the opening address has been shortened, and now omits the earlier service's recitation of marriage's three "causes"—God-fearing children, sexual intercourse without fornication ("a remedie agaynst sinne"), and "mutuall societie, helpe, and comfort." Also removed is the emphasis in the address of 1549 on not marrying "to satisfie mens carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that haue no understanding."

Second, the speech that accompanies the man's giving of a ring to the woman has been greatly changed. Gone are his words "With thys ring I thee wed: thys golde and siluer I thee giue: with my body I thee wurship: and withal my worldly Goodes I thee endowe." And whereas in the earlier service the minister next spoke a prayer asking for God's blessing of the couple and men-

tioned Isaac and Rebecca in their nuptial exchange of jewelry, the 1928 text inserts a blessing of the ring ("Bless, O Lord, this Ring, that he who gives it and she who wears it may abide in thy peace, and continue in thy favor . . .") and leaves Isaac and Rebecca out of the prayer that follows.

What is most significant about this modification of the ring-giving, of course, is that all explanation of its meaning has been lost. In the 1549 service, just as in the book of Genesis, the gift of gold jewelry to the woman was a statement of material providence. It signified a future commitment of the man's wealth to the woman's welfare ("and withal my worldly Goodes I thee endowe"). The jewelry represented, in other words, the promise of the man that the woman could count upon him as provider. But with this account totally extracted from the twentieth-century wedding service, the door was opened for the invention of other explanations for the ring—for instance, the golden circle representing endless love.

Of even greater import, however, is the modification of the vows. As everyone knows, we have witnessed in recent years a mass movement to eliminate the verb "obey" from the wedding vows taken by the bride. Previously, this word had often dwelt in the bride's vow as an "additional requirement" not placed upon the groom. But in the American *Book of Common Prayer* of 1928, each party simply agrees to "love, comfort, honor, and keep" the other, and to the female's vow is no longer added the extra term "obey."

In the Agendas of the last two hymnals published by and for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the word "obey" has remained in place for the bride. It would appear, then, that a clear decision was made to dissent from the modern change in the *Book of Common Prayer* tradition and to retain the old wording. So, in the *Lutheran Agenda*, whereas both parties agree to "love, comfort, honor, and keep" their spouse, in between "honor" and "keep" appears "obey" for the bride.

But if we go back to examine once again the wedding service of 1549, we discover the most curious detail. In the wedding vows, the sequence of required actions for each party is as follows:

<i>Man</i>	<i>Woman</i>
Love	Obey
Comfort	Serve
Honor	Love
Keep	Honor
	Keep

ALLEN C. HOGER is pastor of Redeemer Evangelical Lutheran Church, Atwood, Kansas.

Clearly the woman has more words laid upon her than the man, but it is not as simple as the mere addition of “obey.” Does the appearance of “serve,” for example, go beyond not only the text but the intent of Holy Scripture? Cranmer provides at least a precedent for the later pen of William Shakespeare in *The Taming of the Shrew*, where he writes of wives that they “are bound to love, serve, and obey.”

But what deserves the most attention in the above lists is that in the man’s vows the word “comfort” is inserted between “love” and “honor,” whereas the woman takes no vow to “comfort” her husband. The import of this difference, I believe, is quite clear. “Comfort” is intended in the 1549 service to convey a special obligation that falls upon the husband, an obligation that is counterpart to “serve” and “obey” on the woman’s part. What is the meaning of this “comfort”? As even modern dictionaries still show, “comfort” may mean not only to offer consolation and relief but to lend strength and aid for the other’s benefit. So it means in the expression of wartime, “aid and comfort to the enemy.”

Do we not find in this old wedding service, then, a terse attempt to convey the richness of Ephesians 5, where Saint Paul charges husbands to love their wives “as Christ loved the Church, laying down his life for her”? It is simply not true that in this service, the grandfather of published English wedding services,

“obey” was stuck into otherwise equal vows as an additional burden for the bride. The groom had his own burden to bear—“comfort.”

From this brief survey of Cranmer’s wedding form and what became of it, I issue the two following exhortations, one general and one specific: first, let us revisit the issue of what wedding vows say, not to resurrect the exact form of 1549, but to express in the language of today the full truth of St. Paul’s words, words that link the holy estate of matrimony to the mystery of Christ and his beloved. Let us work into our published, authorized, and recommended books a form of the vows that undoes the distortions and erasures of modern times.

More generally, about our weddings and their sermons, let us ask this question: Where in the service do we emphasize not only the identical obligations, but also the reciprocal obligations, of man and woman? Do we often, perhaps, employ wedding services and preach sermons that so avoid the distinction between man and woman that we would not have to change much in the text to make it apply to a homosexual couple? Let us, like the earlier vows we have just studied, endeavor overall to capture both the overlap between the duties laid by God upon both parties and those solemn obligations unique to each, even as man and woman are profoundly alike and yet profoundly not so. LOGIA

# COLLOQUIUM FRATRUM

“Through the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren . . .”

Smalcald Articles III/IV

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## WALTHER AND GRABAU REVISITED

### KURT MARQUART RESPONDS TO LOWELL GREEN

Loath as I am to take issue in public with my friend Doctor Lowell Green, his cartoon of a God-centered Grabau and a man-centered Walther on church and ministry (*LOGIA*, Eastertide 1996) is a bit much to endure in silence.

Now, I certainly agree with Green’s general thesis that Schleiermacher’s pietistic subjectivism has made deplorable inroads into our church-life, with devastating consequences for current conceptions of the church and her mission, ministry, and worship. The question that divides us is whether this melancholy state of affairs has come about despite or because of Walther. Green takes Walther’s doctrine of church and ministry to be the problem; I take it to be the solution.

But if Walther had really meant all that is now attributed to him in tangled webs of half-understood clichés from mistranslated sources, I should take as dim a view of him as does Green. Tyrannical mobs conniving with district bureaucrats to have their own way regardless of Scripture and Confessions, the handling or mishandling of the divine mysteries, and the driving out faithful pastors—after “prayerful consideration,” of course—have nothing at all to do with the royal priesthood as Walther confessed it. Nor have Wichita-style lay celebrations of the Sacrament or ecumenical “levels of fellowship” fantasies seeking to blend Luther with Schleiermacher—yes, Schleiermacher!<sup>1</sup> If all that were really implicit in Walther’s view, I should at once join Green in repudiating him. As it is, however, I must beg good Doctor Green and others of like mind not impatiently to lump Walther together with those who superstitiously invoke him in support of current populist crazes, but rather to help peel away the disfigurements and thus restore a truer, fairer picture of Walther, the humble student of Luther.

Much of this turns on one’s understanding of Luther. I should not like to speak, with Luise Schorn-Schuette in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, of “Luther’s own inconclusive theology of office.”<sup>2</sup> Yet I can see how one could arrive at such a counsel of despair, especially if one set out with juridicalist expectations. Green says that in my dogmatics book on the church I “staunchly [deny] that there were differences in the early and the mature Luther.” Not quite. I spoke of “the dramatic switch in [Luther’s] interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:26–31” between 1523 and 1532. Perhaps I was too timid in following Walther’s judgment that the change was exegetical, not doctrinal. I also relied too much on Regin Prenter’s (“theocentric”?) minimizing of the time element.

The kind of thing Green quotes from the early Luther in his footnotes 10 and 11 (“the ministry of the Word is common to all Christians”) is of course just what made Hoefling’s case seem convincing. Walther rejected Hoefling’s conclusions, but did not expressly take up Luther’s most extreme, admittedly unrepresentative, formulations, which were in any case abandoned after 1525. Perhaps it is not quite fair to speak of Luther’s early, inchoate gropings on the subject as one doctrine, and of his mature, well-founded theology as another. But—and the Trinitarian-Christological terminology is very suggestive here—if someone today were, with the full benefit of hindsight, deliberately to advocate Luther’s early, muddled language about the preaching office being simply equivalent to the royal priesthood, then that should be rejected as false doctrine. On that I think Lowell Green and I would agree.

### *Übertragung*

Regarding the word *Übertragung* I’m afraid I must be less obliging. Green says: “Marquart, *The Church*, 112–113, is not successful when he tries to prove that the term *Übertragung* did not really mean ‘transferral’ but ‘conferral.’” In support I had cited a wide range of sources, none of which Green takes up for refutation or even discussion. Instead he refers to an argument in Pieper. Let us save Pieper for another day, except to point out that (1) in the *Lehre und Wehre* for December 1925, 425, Pieper argued for the calling and ordaining of missionaries by the sending bodies; and (2) in 1893 Pieper put it like this, on behalf of the whole Synodical Conference:

the ministerial office is conferred by God upon certain persons through the divinely prescribed call of the congregation. . . . The ministers have their office from Christ, not immediately, however, but mediately, by the Church, in virtue of delegation through the call.<sup>3</sup>

But whatever people did with the notion of *Übertragung* later, the real question was how Walther and his generation intended it. Here I must cite Grabau’s former assistant, Christian Hochstetter, whose splendid history of the Missouri Synod has this illuminating note:

Although the Missouri Synod does not make a shibboleth of the term “*übertragen*,” it is nonetheless established that this term was not just got up nowadays, but that M. Chemnitz, Polycarp Leyser, Huelsemann, and others, used Latin words which are best rendered as “*übertragen*.”<sup>4</sup>



Pursuing this clue I note just one example. Polycarp Leyser is cited as follows in *Church and Ministry*, 282, with German and Latin versions indicated by me in brackets:

as the power to loose and bind . . . was conferred [*übertragen/tradita*] on all apostles (John 20:23), so this power was given [*gegeben/traditur*] by Christ to the congregation (Mt 18:18), which ordinarily can confer [*übertragen/deferre*] it on persons legitimately called for this purpose.

Note too that in Walther's seventh Thesis (*Church and Ministry*, 268) it is God, not the congregation, who is the real subject of the *Übertragung*: "conferred [*übertragene*] by God through the congregation."

It is disconcerting to find Green's treatment paying no heed to these substantive matters at all, but relying instead on the formalism that the German *über* is *trans* in Latin, not *cum*, hence the word must be *transferal*, not *conferral*! This seems part of a general tendency to make too much of words and not enough of the underlying sense.<sup>5</sup> Walther is judged by the use or non-use of pet words or phrases, without much attention to his own intent and context. A better way is signaled in Chesterton's quip that he was too interested in what George Bernard Shaw meant to be bothered unduly about what he merely said.

### *The Heart of the Matter: Walther and Luther*

We come now to the heart of the matter. What was it that made Walther "anthropocentric" and Grabau "theocentric"? Just what are the criteria for deciding this? Here Green keeps taking away with one hand what he gives with the other. For instance, in his first footnote he scoffs at the notion of a "traditional Lutheran doctrine of church and ministry," holding instead that "Lutheranism has at least two distinct and opposite types, a theocentric and an anthropocentric view of church and ministry." Yet early in his text he argues that "according to classical Lutheran doctrine, the office of the holy ministry of word and sacrament continues today as the extension of the office of the apostles." So is there or is there not a classical, traditional stand on these matters? Yes, there is, and Walther's book copiously documents just what that traditional, classical Lutheran consensus is. Deviations developed in two directions: an unhealthy, Romanizing obsession with the ministry at the expense of the priesthood—Grabau's and Löhe's trouble<sup>6</sup>—and the opposite aberration in the wake of pietism.

Luther himself, of course, more than anyone else, defines the classical position. Here Grabau and Löhe seem to have seen more clearly than Green. Hochstetter informs us that when Grabau was reminded of the Formula of Concord's judgment that Luther was "the most eminent teacher of the churches which adhere to the Augsburg Confession," and that "the true meaning and intention of the Augsburg Confession cannot be derived more correctly or better from any other source than from Dr. Luther's doctrinal and polemical writings" (SD vii, 41), Grabau exclaimed before the whole Buffalo Synod that "if that is true, then he'd rather be released at once from his obligation to the Formula of Concord" (251). And Löhe wrote:

The excerpts . . . are more than sufficient to prove Walther's agreement, or rather the agreement of his book, with Luther. . . . Even though there is at least one passage [in the Symbolical Books] which is written in Walther's (Luther's personal) sense, yet the plain sense especially of some passages of the Augsburg Confession yields no necessity to explain them in harmony with one or two passages. The Symbolical doctrine appears unfinished to me.<sup>7</sup>

In short, to part company with Walther's book at the decisive points of difference with Grabau and Löhe is to part company with Luther, with the Symbolical Books, and with the Reformation.

Green defines the basic options like this:

a theocentric doctrine of church and ministry, in which the church originates in Christ, who himself founds it and calls its pastors and preachers; and an anthropocentric position, in which the church is the sum total of people who have come together to constitute a church and who themselves call a pastor from their midst (transferal theory).

The first part of the contrast certainly captures the radical difference between Luther and Schleiermacher (with Walther solidly in Luther's camp), but the second part is a textbook case of false alternatives: either Christ calls pastors or the church does! Obviously Christ calls through the church—as Green himself admits later. Yet even the first, legitimate contrast seems deliberately framed in "sum-total" language in order to pin that donkey's tail on Walther in due course.

The decisive element of the "theocentric doctrine," as Green traces it, is the treatment of the great instituting texts. Having cited, among others Matthew 16:19; 18:18; and John 20:21–23, Green states: "The office of the keys must not be twisted into words addressed to all Christians; Jesus spoke only to the disciples and not to everyone." The argument is clinched with selected sentences from a 1529 *Quasimodogeniti* sermon by the mature, now fully theocentric Luther, of which Green says: "Here the ministerial office is linked directly to Christ without any transferal from the priesthood of believers" (27). Grabau is said to have "made a strong case that the office of the keys belongs to the pastoral office and not the congregation as such, citing AC xxviii, 5" (note 4).

Now, as it happens, Luther's sermons on the *Quasimodogeniti* Gospel, John 20:19–31, while stressing the divine institution and mission of the gospel-preaching office, usually teach its proper relation to the royal priesthood of the baptized as well. The very model sermon adduced by Green (27) states:

For here Christ gives the Holy Spirit to His whole church and Christendom, to the apostles and the apostles' successors, pastors, preachers, yes to every Christian in case of necessity, as regards the office, that they preach, teach, comfort, forgive and retain sin, in short, are to be sent just as the Father had sent Him.<sup>8</sup>

Luther here does the very thing that Green's notion of theocentricity forbids: the instituting texts are "twisted [!] into words

addressed to all Christians” (though not of course in the same respect).

By the end of his article Green even admits all this: “Luther assigned the keys both to the clergy and the laity. For him, the primary father confessor was the pastor; but in an emergency, any Christian could hear confession and bestow forgiveness upon his fellow believer.” Yet Green now complains about “much ambiguity in Lutheran theology about the keys.”<sup>9</sup> He attempts to meet this by distinguishing between the keys and the office of the keys: “In the expression ‘office of the keys,’ the word *office* can only refer to the office of the ministry.” The trouble is, however, that in English as in German “office/*Amt*” can mean either a particular function or task, or else the position or calling that carries out the various functions. The context must determine from case to case which is meant. Note Luther’s use of “office/*Amt*” in the preceding paragraph and also in the Smalcald Articles: “The keys are an office and authority [*Amt und Gewalt*] given by Christ to the church . . .” (III, VII, 1).<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Grabau did not have the “strong case” Green thinks he had on the basis of AC XXVIII, 5. That article does not use the expression “office of the keys.” It speaks of the authority (or power) of the keys or of bishops (German) or of churchly authority (Latin), and the “authority of bishops” is the same thing as “the authority of the church” (explicitly in the German of par. 10).

### *Priesthood and Ministry*

Confronted with Luther’s non-judicial treatment of the keys in relation to the ministry of some and the priesthood of all, Green makes the odd move of playing off “all Christians” against the “priesthood”: “Luther did not say that a layman can do this because the keys have been given to all but ordained ministers, nor can they do this because they are members of the priesthood of believers, but because the gospel has been committed to all Christians” (35). Are we really to think that poor, “anthropocentric” Walther would at once have turned “theocentric” if only he had remembered to say “all Christians” instead of “all believers” or “all spiritual priests”?<sup>11</sup> Also, Green himself had at the outset formulated the point at issue in terms of “all Christians”: the Lord’s instituting words, which Luther’s cited sermons expound, said Green, “must not be twisted into words addressed to all Christians; Jesus spoke only to the disciples and not to everyone” (25). If Walther stands condemned at this crucial point, then so does the mature, “theocentric” Luther. Green wrongly suggests a difference between them by saying that for Luther the local church had authority “not because it was a local congregation, but because it was a part of the total church and bore the marks of the church as a whole” (note 12). But that is precisely Walther’s argument in *Church and Ministry*:

Our church here [Treatise, 24] confesses that the whole church—that means not only as a great ordered whole, but also she ever again in all her smallest parts—has the keys and therewith the Office of the Gospel, just as the same whole picture, which appears in the whole mirror, also reflects again in every piece of it, even if the mirror is smashed into a thousand pieces (271, my own more literal retranslation).

Principle and perspective, not mere details, are at stake here. Consider Green’s concept that “the church service is a divine service because God is the one who acts, the pastor is his representative, and the congregation is the passive recipient of the means of grace” (28). It goes without saying that Green’s rebuke of the abomination of desolations in our public worship is well deserved. But is the worshiping congregation really but a “passive recipient”? No, the whole point of the Reformation understanding is that the priestly assembly is not only a passive *object*, but also in some sense an active, participating *subject*, together with God’s ministers, as Luther points out:<sup>12</sup>

For none of us is born as apostle, preacher, teacher, pastor through baptism, but we are all born simply as priests and clerics. Afterwards, some are taken from the ranks of such born clerics and called or elected to these offices which they are to discharge on behalf of all of us. . . .

On the basis of this our inborn, hereditary priestly honor and attire we are present, have, as Revelation 4[:4] pictures it, our golden crowns on our heads, harps and golden censers in our hands; and we let our pastor say what Christ has ordained, not for himself as though it were for his person, but he is the mouth for all of us and we all speak the words with him from the heart and in faith, directed to the Lamb of God who is present for us and among us, and who according to his ordinance nourishes us with his body and blood. . . .

Now if we are to be a holy Christian church and to possess the most important and necessary parts such as God’s word, Christ, the Spirit, faith, prayer, baptism, the sacrament, the keys, the office of the ministry, etc., and should not also possess the humblest part, namely, the power and right to call some persons to the office of the ministry who administer to us the word, baptism, the sacrament, forgiveness, which in any case are available, and serve us through these, what kind of a church, I ask, would this be (*The Private Mass and the Consecration of Priests* [1533], AE 38: 188, 208–209, 212).

For although we are all priests, this does not mean that all of us can preach, teach, and rule. . . . And he who has such an office is not a priest because of his office but a servant of all the others, who are priests. . . . This is the way to distinguish between the office of preaching, or the ministry, and the general priesthood of all baptized Christians. The preaching office is no more than a public service which happens to be conferred upon someone by the entire congregation, all the members of which are priests (“Commentary on Psalm 110” [1535], AE 13: 332).

“This concept,” says Green of the royal priesthood of believers, “is missing in the Lutheran Confessions” (34). Actually it is just as pivotal in the ecclesiology of the Treatise of the Power and Primacy of the Pope as it is in Luther:

the keys do not belong to the person of one particular individual but to the whole church, as is shown by many clear and powerful arguments, for after speaking of the keys in

Matt. 18:19, Christ said, “If two or three of you agree on earth,” etc. Therefore, he bestows the keys especially [*principaliter*, here probably “originally”] and immediately on the church, and for the same reason the church especially [*principaliter*] possesses the right of vocation. . . . (Tr, 24; Tappert, 324).

Finally, this is confirmed by the declaration of Peter, “You are a royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:9). These words apply to the true church which, since it alone possesses the priesthood, certainly has the right of electing and ordaining ministers (Tr, 69; Tappert, 331).

### *The Sobriety of Walther’s Understanding of the Church*

The ultimate source of Walther’s “anthropocentricity” Green sees in his very definition of the church:

In a genuinely theocentric definition, Christ would be the chief member of the church with the other members called his body. Walther presents an anthropocentric concept when the church is only a sum total. A sum total of what? Only of true believers. But what about Christ, the chief member of the church, which is his body? (32).

Ignoring Walther’s own explanation of his thesis, Green fastens upon the term *Gesamtheit* (totality, sum total), which allegedly suggests “the coming together themselves by people upon the basis of a conscious decision to do so (as also Schleiermacher).” Is this at all fair? Where does Walther say that the church is “only a sum total”? Having cited Ephesians 1:22–23 as his first text under Thesis I, Walther writes: “If, according to these words, Christ is the Head of the congregation or church, and this is His body, then the true church in its proper sense is the sum total of all those who are joined to Christ, just as the members of the body are joined to their head.” It is totally unfair to say: “Like Elert, Odeberg insists that the church is best described as the body of Christ, with our Lord as its principal member. This aspect is lacking in Walther’s doctrine” (Green, note 48). If Walther had said “principal member” instead of “Head,” would he have passed?

Green’s dislike of Walther’s doctrine runs deeper. To Walther’s Thesis II, which excludes all unbelievers from the church in the proper sense, Green responds: “If the church, where the word is preached, is only for ‘converted’ people, how can the Holy Ghost carry out the work of sanctification that Luther outlined in the Catechism?” (32). This muddies the waters. The question is not *for* whom but *of* whom the church, properly speaking, consists. Walther does not dream of denying that the church must serve sinners with the means of salvation. When he excludes the unregenerate and hypocrites from the definition of the church properly speaking, he is faithfully following the Apology,<sup>13</sup> not pietist fantasies, as Green claims without warrant.

Green’s discussion of the visible/invisible distinction comes to a head in his rejection of Walther’s Thesis IX on the church: “Unconditionally necessary for the attainment of salvation is only fellowship with the invisible church, to which alone all those glorious promises pertaining to the church were originally given” (my translation). Green construes this as follows:

This apparently means that the promise of salvation is given exclusively to the “invisible church,” that is, the one without the visible means of grace. Walther here makes a fatal statement when he relegates the word and sacrament to the “visible church,” which is not necessary for salvation. Regardless of what he says about the office of the ministry, the manner in which he has compromised the means of grace has fatally weakened his doctrine of church and ministry (33).

By ignoring Walther’s important qualifiers “unconditionally” and “originally,” Green has made up a scarecrow that bears no resemblance to Walther’s real meaning and intent. In this thesis Walther was concerned to refute Grabau’s claim that the visible, orthodox Lutheran church—or worse, Grabau’s little sect, flying the Lutheran flag—was the one true church outside of which there is no salvation! Green takes only fleeting and indirect notice, in his note 18, of this impossible bit of nonsense maintained by Grabau. Ironically, Green also invokes Walther’s “magnificent work *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*.” Yet this “magnificent work,” in its twentieth thesis, teaches precisely what Green misconstrues in *Church and Ministry*: “The Word of God is, in the sixteenth place, not rightly divided, if salvation is bound to fellowship with the visible orthodox church and the salvation of anyone erring in any article of faith is denied.”

Why overlook Walther’s own explanation of his Thesis IX of *Church and Ministry*?

[It is indeed also true] that outside the visible church there is no salvation, if by visible church we mean not a particular church but the assembly of all the called. For outside the assembly of the called [the elect are not to be sought]. This means that without the Word of God, which is proclaimed only in the assembly of the called, there is no faith and so also no Christ and salvation . . . (Rom 10:13–14, 17) (149–150).

Indeed, in the preceding thesis (VIII) Walther had already said: “every believer must, at the peril of losing his salvation, flee all false teachers, avoid all heterodox congregations or sects, and acknowledge and adhere to orthodox congregations and their orthodox pastors wherever such may be found” (101).

### *Conclusion*

All theologians have their strong and weak points, depending, for example, on what aspects of the divine truth they were compelled to confront, and in what depth. Luther would be the first to insist that no non-inspired writing is beyond criticism, and that human opinions may not be treated as a fetish in the church. It goes without saying that the same applies to Walther. History forced upon him a certain one-sidedness of which he himself was aware.<sup>14</sup> Like all other writings, his too need to be kept constantly under the corrective illumination of the Sacred Scriptures and the church’s orthodox creeds and confessions.

My objection therefore is not to the idea that Walther may be criticized or his language improved, but to how this has been done in the present case. What is so patently unjust is that in comparison with Walther, Grabau gets off with high praise and a very light



slap on the wrist. It is a pity that Hochstetter's gem of a history has not been translated into English. Hochstetter had been Grabau's assistant in Buffalo, and had started out with strongly clericalist, anti-Missouri convictions. If his well-informed account especially of the Missouri-Buffalo fracas were generally known, romantic illusions about Grabau as champion of strict Lutheranism would lose all their charms. Grabau tried, tyrannically and unsuccessfully, to transplant a state-church system without the state-church. Green's euphemism for this is that Grabau's "theological method was based upon the Scriptures, the Confessions, and the church orders of post-Reformation Lutheranism" (29). Hochstetter cites from Walther the real, and far from theocentric, dynamic at work in the opposition to Missouri:

At this the moderns are horrified. On behalf of burghers and farmers we are supposed to conduct our office? they say contemptuously. To be called Royal Prussian or Royal Bavarian pastors, that is their glory. How blind they are, that they seek their honor in shame, and do not recognize what a great honor it is to conduct the office on behalf of Christians. Greater people than Christians do not exist on earth; them the angels serve, above them heaven is opened, to them God condescends, they are arrayed with the priestly adornment of the righteousness of Christ (212–213 note).

Grabau's doctrine was designed to support his tyrannical practice. In the sacraments, he insisted, "the Words of Institution are still effective on account of the office, to which the Lord still commits himself." Green quotes this, as part of a larger excerpt, and comments: "Here we have a truly Lutheran view of the Word as God's reaching into human lives through the agency of earthly pastors" (31). It is nothing of the sort. What Lutheran theologian has ever taught that sacramental Words of Institution are "effective on account of the office"? This is anthropocentric, scholastic superstition, from which the Reformation delivered us. Compare, for instance, the theology of the sacramental consecration in the Formula of Concord (SD VII, 73–87), and the prominence in it of Luther's argumentation.

In short, if Grabau was theocentric and Walther not, then sanctimoniousness is piety, Luther was hopelessly anthropocentric, and—ultimately, and of course quite contrary to Lowell Green's intention—the papal ("Petrine") service to the servants of God is the finest theology of the cross. From this preserve us, good Lord!

## NOTES

1. "Concludes Elert: 'What Luther meant is, then, diametrically opposed to what Schleiermacher meant by fellowship when he spoke of the church. For Schleiermacher fellowship "is created by the voluntary actions of men." This is precisely what Luther rejected when he denied that fellowship means "to have something to do with a person." . . . This distinction, it seems to me, can be most helpful to us as we consider 'Levels of Fellowship.' I want to suggest that Missouri's understanding of fellowship takes into account both of these conceptions. It is also my contention that by clearly distinguishing, but not separating, these two ways of thinking about fellowship, it becomes not only possible but also perhaps even necessary to talk about 'Levels of Fellowship'" (S. Nafzger, "Levels of Fellowship," in J. A. Burgess, ed., *In Search of Christian Unity* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991], 238–239).

2. Hans J. Hillerbrand, editor-in-chief, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1: 332.

3. *The Distinctive Doctrines and Usages of the General Bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States*, 3d ed. (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1893 and 1902), 132.

4. Chr. Hochstetter, *Die Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Missouri Synode in Nord-Amerika* (Dresden: Heinrich J. Naumann, 1885), 212 n. See also 261: "The public preaching office [*Predigtamt*] however is conferred [*uebertragen*] not by the congregation or church, but by God only through the congregation or church."

5. Green thinks the English "worship" a bad term, whereas the German *Gottesdienst* is good because that "word recognizes that God is the subject and not the object, and that the principle [*sic*] means are the *media salutis* [*sic*]" (note 42). Now, this sort of point can be witty and edifying homiletics, but linguistically it is simply not true that the word *Gottesdienst* itself contains or conveys this. Its normal, standard meaning is in fact worship, adoration, service, directed to God as Object, not received from him as Subject. Large Catechism, First Commandment: "There has never been a people so wicked that it did not establish and maintain some sort of worship [*Gottesdienst*]." God serving us? Impossible. Besides, the Latin equivalent is *cultus Dei* or *Dei cultus*. That cannot possibly mean, ever, that God worships us! So the profound truth about divine service in word and sacrament, etc., must be derived from theology, not from the German vocable as such. On the other hand, one can only welcome Green's effective debunking of that tiresome canard about the term *Herr Pastor* (inevitably wrongly accented!) being code for Prussian beastliness (note 29). Yet sometimes Green is not careful enough about the exact form of the word. The Lord did not say to Peter: "You are a rock, and upon this rock I will build my church" (Green, 25). He said: "You are *petros* [man named after the rock], and on this *petra* [rock] . . ." (To anticipate an objection: never mind the hypothetical Aramaic when we have the canonical Greek.) Also, *die heiligen Sakrament* in AC VII, 1 is plural, not singular, "the holy sacrament" (Green, 32).

6. Green (33): "Löhe's warnings were not groundless. Already in Walther's day, lay people could not always be depended upon to vote for sound doctrine and practice." Well then, could clergy "always be depended upon," either then or now? Or perhaps we need "supervision" by the sort of "magisterium" that ELCA "evangelical catholics" hope for from they know not where, as a sort of *deus ex machina*?

7. Wilhelm Löhe, *Gesammelte Werke* (Neuendettelsau: Freimund, 1885), 2: 199; my translation.

8. WA 28: 470, 21–25; my translation.

9. Green's note 64 contrasts an early Werner Elert (1931), who "emphasized the keys as belonging to the congregation," with a later (1940) Elert, who "related the keys to the ministry."

10. The following article, Of Confession, states: "For since private confession comes from the office [*Amt*] of the keys, it must not be despised, but be esteemed highly, like all other offices [*Aemter*] of the Christian Church" (III, VIII, 2).

11. Green faintly praises Walther for distinguishing priestly and pastoral offices, but cavils: "But was the priesthood of believers really an 'office' in the church?" (34–35). Actually Walther expressly denies, under his seventh thesis on the ministry, that "the spiritual priesthood [is] a public office [*Amt*] in the church." Mueller's translation, *Church and Ministry*, 268, misses the point, as regrettably in many other cases as well.

12. Green—and he is by no means alone in this; "Waltherians" love to do it too—creates conceptual confusion by interpreting "congregation" in an anti-clerical way, as meaning "laity" as distinct from ministry. A corollary is the distinction between "congregation" and "church." Theologically such a distinction is invalid—except to differentiate between the local church and the regional or universal church—since they both render the same New Testament term, *ἐκκλησία*. Any theological description of "congregation" must be derived from the meaning of *ἐκκλησία*. Walther knew that very well, hence his insistence that "the congregation, when [rightly ordered], consists of both preachers and hearers" (*Church and Ministry*, 220). Mueller's translation here is very misleading ("organized" for *geordnet*), since "organized" suggests human structure, bylaws, adi-



aphora. Walther's "ordered," on the contrary, has in view divine, not human order. Mueller also badly bungled the first part of the sentence, where he has Walther saying that "there is no longer any call of the 'multitude,'" when in fact Walther says that "the call of the 'multitude' in such a case has no validity" since it then comes in effect from individuals, not from the congregation. In other words, a "multitude" impersonating a congregation is not on that account a congregation or church.

13. "But why belabor the obvious? If the church, which is truly the kingdom of Christ, is distinguished from the kingdom of the devil, it necessarily follows that since the wicked belong to the kingdom of the devil, they are not the church. In this life, nevertheless . . . they are mingled with the church and hold office in the church" (VII/VIII, 17; Tappert, 171). Green's remarks about baptism are irrelevant, unless he wishes to maintain that the regenerate state bestowed by baptism cannot be lost. On the contrary, people who have fallen away from their baptism are not to be rebaptized, to be sure, but "must certainly be converted again" (FC SD II, 69; Tappert, 534).

14. Letter to Pastor J. A. Ottesen of the Norwegian Lutheran Church, 29 Dec. 1858: "While we must defend the rights of Christians principally against hierarchy and priestly domination, to you it is perhaps ordained to guard God's ordinance [of the public ministry. K. M.] against Enthusiasm" (C. S. Meyer, ed., *Walther Speaks to the Church* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973], 58).

#### RESPONSE TO KURT MARQUART BY LOWELL C. GREEN

The criticism of my article on church and ministry by Prof. Kurt Marquart of Fort Wayne deserves a thoughtful answer. It is, of course, clear, that Marquart and I have very different concerns. Marquart is intent on upholding Walther's ecclesiology, which wanted to preserve the "rights" of the local congregation, whereas I am more concerned about preserving the prophetic voice of the preacher and protecting our pastors from lynching by autocratic and aggressive congregations. Men who are faithfully serving congregations are being driven out of pastoral service and into other walks of life. This has had an impact upon declining recruitments in our seminaries. Young men today know that pastors are being mistreated, and this discourages them from studying for the office of the holy ministry. In the following lines I want to respond first to Marquart's position on Walther and the transferal theory; second, I want to move on to the sore problems of pastors in the church today; and third, I should like to discuss once more the episode between Walther and Löhe.

#### I.

The original title of my essay read as follows: "The Theocentric versus the Anthropocentric Understanding of Church and Ministry, with Special Reference to Grabau and Walther." It perhaps misled Marquart when the title was changed to read "Grabau and Walther: Theocentric versus Anthropocentric Understanding of Church and Ministry." The paper is about the difference between a theocentric and an anthropocentric understanding of church and ministry rather than about Grabau and Walther. Marquart contends that I have spoken of "a God-centered Grabau and a man-centered Walther." I am not aware of having said any such thing. Although I think the church would be better served by riding ourselves of the distorted depictions of Grabau (Marquart relies upon the deeply prejudiced account of Grabau's opponent, Hochstetter), I did not call Grabau a God-centered man. It was his doctrine that I found to be theocentric. And although I found

serious weaknesses in Walther's doctrine of church and ministry, I would not call him "man-centered." In fact, one might say that he intended his doctrine to be God-centered.

Marquart advocates that we press back to the original Walther without the accretions of his later followers. As a purely historical discipline, such a distinction certainly commends itself. But we cannot leave it there. Just as Luther scholars study the *Rezeption* of the great reformer, that is, how he was understood by his followers, so scholars in Missouri today must study the *Rezeption* of Walther and the way his ecclesiology was handed down and applied by his pupils such as Franz Pieper. I was disappointed that Marquart avoided discussing Pieper, whom I brought up in my essay, since the form in which this doctrine has so strongly affected our church today was largely shaped by Pieper in his *Christian Dogmatics*.

Marquart takes my words out of context and makes it sound as though I espoused hierarchicalism when he writes: "the Words of Institution are still effective on account of the office, to which the Lord still commits himself." Marquart fails to see that the *tertium comparationis* here is the difference between the person of the minister and the office that he fills; my statement is directed against the Donatist error that the sacrament was invalid if the person of the minister were unworthy. The sacrament is valid regardless of the worthiness of the administrant so long as the sacrament is held as Christ commanded. Marquart also claims that, in citing Walther's Thesis IX from Book 1, I ignored the words "unconditionally" and "originally"; this is not so, for I indeed included those words in my citation. But adding those adjectives will not improve Walther's case. Whether it is *unconditionally* necessary or only necessary to have fellowship with the "invisible church," and whether the wonderful promises were *originally* given to the church or were only given to the church, is of little consequence, over against the larger problem that results from this ecclesiological dichotomy. Marquart tries to explain away my objection that according to Walther's Thesis IX it is not necessary for salvation for one to be in the visible church of word and sacrament, but that it is necessary to be in the invisible church of the truly pious, and that this impugns the importance of the instruments of salvation (*Media salutis*).

It seems that Marquart tries further to justify his claim that *transferre* means the same thing as *conferre*, that *tradere* or commit really means *übertragen*, and that *übertragen* really doesn't mean transfer but confer (*conferre*). Marquart quotes Hochstetter<sup>1</sup> to "prove" that when the Lutheran fathers used the verb *tradere*, they really meant *übertragen*. I must confess that I do not share Marquart's implicit confidence in Hochstetter. Much in Hochstetter's book is misleading and even deceitful.<sup>2</sup> But this proof-texting by Marquart is most devious. He cites Hochstetter's statement that when Walther translated the Latin text of Polycarp Leyser into German, he rendered *tradere* with *übertragen*. This, of course, is not a normal translation, but seems to provide the basis for Hochstetter's claim, accepted by Marquart, that "M. Chemnitz, Polycarp Leyser, Hülsemann and others used Latin words [namely, *tradere*] which are best translated with *übertragen*."<sup>3</sup> I do not accept the credibility of Hochstetter, I reject this kind of "documentation," I do not think that the manner of translation referred to here is valid, and I challenge Mar-

quart to produce adequate evidence from the original sources rather than from translations or even allegations. Even the authority of Walther is inadequate to replace the original sources in this matter. Marquart thinks that my differentiation between *trans* and *cum* “seems part of a general tendency to make too much of words and not enough of the underlying sense.” My allegedly excessive appeal to the real meanings of words injures his case, of course. This criticism is an element of a valiant attempt on his part, but it settles nothing. And to paraphrase that quip of Chesterton, one wonders whether, in regard to Walther, Marquart isn’t more interested in what he thinks Walther meant than in what Walther really said.

The doctrine that the pastoral office receives its authority by transferal of an authority residual in the priesthood of believers raises additional problems. The insistence that the preaching of the word has been committed to the men and women of the congregations raises questions about the relation of women to the preaching office. If also the female members have the “right” to preach and to transfer that right to the called pastors, and if the congregation has the “right” to determine who is to bear this office, and if congregations are really independent of synods, what is to prevent their deciding to transfer their “right” to some female preacher, of which there is already an available surplus? The Bible forbids women preachers, but voters assemblies today are not always deterred by the teachings of the Scriptures, and few district presidents are willing to risk losing the support of congregations.

## II.

The trouble with anthropocentric views of the ministry is that they generally confound the two kingdoms, the temporal and the spiritual. When one kingdom tries to rule the other, we have, in practice, the replacing of a two-kingdom doctrine with a single-kingdom one, which builds upon theocratic enthusiasm. Such enthusiasm goes back at least as far as to Schleiermacher. But confusion of the two kingdoms existed long before Schleiermacher in the old German state churches, where the nobility (*landesherrliche Kirchenregiment*) proclaimed themselves “emergency bishops” and seized control of the land churches. The voters’ assembly today has become the new consistory exercised by a new nobility, prominent patricians in the community, whereby the laity (temporal authority) again seize power in the church and dictate to the clergy (spiritual authority) how they are to carry out their God-given office. In American democracy, where this is built upon the social contract theories of the Enlightenment, it is difficult to counteract such prevalent thinking and to insist that the church is not of this world and is not a democracy, but takes her orders from her Lord Jesus Christ. But when enthusiastic notions of popular sovereignty are incorporated into an American doctrine of church and ministry, the prophetic character of the ministry suffers deeply. Walther developed his doctrine in a time of crisis when the laity had rebelled against the clergy, and he tried to save what could be salvaged of the divinely given authority of the minister. But when he summoned the authority of Luther in the effort to support an American conception of church government, Walther’s *Gemeinde* was not the same thing as Luther’s *Gemeine*, and, although it was in Old

World theology that transferal views of the ministry originated, no one in Europe could have imagined the problems that would arise when lay people in America were told that they possessed all the “rights” that Christ had conferred upon the apostles and their successors, and that the pastor derived his ministerial authority from his parishioners.

It is often assumed that the authority of the ministerial office is derived from the priesthood of believers, and that their “rights” are vested in and belong to the voters’ assembly. But does this group, which is actually a legal entity within the legal articles of incorporation of many congregations, really represent the priesthood of all believers? Only true believers belong to the priesthood. Under the common platonic form of ecclesiology, this would mean the “invisible church.” But is there really a correlation between the voters’ assembly and the priesthood (read “invisible church”)? If the answer is affirmative, does this mean that all members of the voters’ assembly are true believers? And if the “right” to practice the prerogatives of the pastoral office belongs to the priesthood (read “true believers”), can we be sure that the voters’ assembly “transfers” these rights to the pastor whom they “call,” and that those who participate in this legal entity are, in fact, “true believers,” and therefore competent to do so? Suppose, for a moment, that a majority of those exercising their franchise in a given voters’ assembly were not true believers. Would that voters’ assembly indeed possess these “rights,” and would that which they “transfer” in calling a pastor truly be the office that Christ has given to the church? And if such an assembly should order the pastor to go against the teachings of the Scriptures and the Confessions, does the voice of the people represent the voice of God? In any case, a transferal doctrine of church and ministry faces profound issues of Donatist ecclesiology as well as theocratic enthusiasm.

Transferal views have armed our Lutheran laity for attacks upon the clergy. Here, the temporal realm, quite without the benefit of seminary training, dictates to the spiritual realm how the work of the ministry is to be carried out. This movement carries with it the tendency to lynch a pastor who is trying to carry on a faithful ministry. Our fathers left Germany to get away from the tyrannical control by the lay princes (*landesherrliche Kirchenregiment*) and the consistories in the state churches. But the voters’ assembly has become today’s consistory, and a real threat is present among us that once more the laity are seizing control and manipulating the clergy. One is disquieted by the many stories of lay leaders forcing open communion, contemporary worship, and heterodox hymnbooks upon unwilling pastors, and forbidding them to speak out against immoral conduct among prominent members of the congregation. The sheep want to direct the shepherd how he should tend Christ’s flock. But a true shepherd get his directions elsewhere. This raises more serious questions about the validity of the Waltherian doctrine of church and ministry.

Speaking of a confounding of the two kingdoms, one is impressed by the position of Oliver K. Olson that the real problem behind the Adiaphoristic Controversy was that Melancthon allowed the princes who were laymen to dictate regarding ceremonies in the church, and Olson’s claim that the real thrust of FC x was a warning that clergy must not give in to the demands of the laity, even in regard to adiaphora, when they are in a state

of confession, *in statu confessionis*. Article 10 was based upon Flacius's dictum: "Nothing is an adiaphoron in an occasion of confession and trial" (BSLK, 1057, note 2).

How were adiaphora such as the regulation of ceremonies managed in the early Lutheran church, before the lay princes seized control? During the Reformation, the pastor, as the only educated theologian in the congregation, was empowered to make decisions on adiaphora such as ceremonies.<sup>4</sup> An interesting testimony to this is found in the "Ansbach Evangelical Counsel" of September 30, 1524, which said that the pastor determined how things were to be done: "Regarding the other chief articles of your princely grace, we respond as follows: Since, according to St. Paul's admonition in 1 Cor 14:26, everything in the Christian community [*Gemeine*] should be done decently and in order, so every bishop or pastor is allowed and has power (with the consent of his community [*Gemeine*]) and without authorisation or permission of other bishops, to create good order in outward matters, to institute customs and practices."<sup>5</sup>

The authority of the spiritual kingdom on adiaphora was gradually usurped by the princes and relocated within the temporal kingdom; calling themselves "emergency bishops" and the "principle members" of the priesthood of believers, they gradually took control of the church and arrogated to themselves as laymen the right to decide on adiaphora, a category that they expanded to include decisions on liturgical matters. (One of the worst examples of this abuse came when the nineteenth-century king's Prussian Union forced a new church order and agenda upon unwilling Lutherans, which caused our fathers to emigrate to America.) It was this problem of princely control that was thrust upon Melancthon and the other Wittenberg theologians in the so-called Leipzig Interim. Because of the concessions they made to the temporal powers at that time, Article x of the Formula of Concord stated that the church must not yield on matters of adiaphora, matters neither commanded nor forbidden by Scripture, when one ought to confess his faith. How does the pastor today deal with demands of his voters' assembly that run against the Scriptures and the Confessions? How will the problem within the congregation be thereby solved if he is forced to resign and move elsewhere?

The reformational position that pastors have the authority "to create good order in outward matters, to institute customs and practices" seems contradicted by Walther's Thesis ix, Book 2: "The preacher has no right to form new laws, arbitrarily to set up middle things and ceremonies in the church, and to proclaim and exercise the ban alone without previous knowledge of the entire congregation" (Walther, *Kirche und Amt*, 360). Of course, it is not clear what Walther meant by "arbitrarily"; but if the pastor does not have the authority to set up ceremonies in the church, who is competent to do so? Is it better to have a theologically untrained laity make those decisions, and if so, why? Will they have a better grasp of the teachings of the Scriptures and the Confessions than their shepherd, under whose care Christ has placed the flock?

### III.

The way in which Walther treated his benefactor, Löhe, is troubling; but more troubling is Walther's assumption that a certain view of church administration belongs to the fundamental doc-

trines of the Christian faith. Regarding Löhe's role in founding the Missouri Synod, let us remember that in 1846, when negotiations were held at Fort Wayne preliminary to the organization of the synod the next year, twenty-four of those present were men who had been sent over by Löhe and only two were delegates of the Saxons in Missouri, namely, Walther and Loeber. The number of men whom Löhe sent to the Missouri Synod had reached eighty-two by 1866.<sup>6</sup> After Walther broke off relations with Löhe, he asked for and also received the Fort Wayne seminary from Löhe, gratis. The reason for the rupture was the difference over the doctrine of the church. In contrast to the Reformed, who have taught that matters of church governance are a fundamental doctrine that has been prescribed in the Bible, Lutherans historically have rejected such biblicism and have said that matters of church government are adiaphora and may be adapted to local situations, so long as the scriptural doctrine of the instruments of salvation (*media salutis*) is not thereby endangered. Walther broke with this tradition when he claimed that a different doctrine of church and ministry (such as Löhe's) was divisive of church fellowship. He thereby raised his own doctrine of the ministry to the level of an essential doctrine and arbitrarily broke off relations with his benefactor, Löhe.

One of the grievous problems in the church today is the arbitrary and promiscuous discharging of faithful pastors from congregations dominated by aggressive lay power. Perhaps the beginning of this was already signaled in the 1843 constitution of Trinity Lutheran Church of the German Evangelical-Lutheran Congregation in St. Louis.<sup>7</sup> This Constitution, written by Walther, stipulated that a pastor could be dismissed for one of three reasons: "persistent clinging to false doctrine, offensive conduct [*ärgerlicher Wandel*], and intentional unfaithfulness in office," §13.<sup>8</sup> "Offensive conduct" was, of course, a rubber term, capable of being widely stretched. Presumably, if an influential parishioner felt offended, there was sufficient ground for getting rid of the pastor. In Trinity of St. Louis, the right to dismiss the pastor lay in the hands of the congregation, §13.

At Frankenhill, Michigan, a constitution was adopted that had been written by Löhe;<sup>9</sup> this document became the pattern for the model constitution for congregations in the Iowa Synod.<sup>10</sup> In the constitution for Frankenhill it was stated: "The congregation (*Gemeine*) cannot depose or dismiss a pastor or other minister in the church, but must bring its complaint to the Ministerium," §13. After its investigation, if the findings of the Ministerium do not sustain the complaint and the congregation is dissatisfied with the findings, "it may submit its case once more to another orthodox Ministerium; in such a case, the minister does not exercise his office until the decision is reached," §16. In the constitution for congregations of the Iowa Synod, a similar position was taken: "The congregations for its part cannot arbitrarily dismiss or depose a pastor, but must bring its complaint before the Ministerium to which the pastor belongs." In the Iowa constitution, the decision of that ministerium would be final.<sup>11</sup> It might be, as Hochstetter wrote, that the Iowa Synod or the Buffalo Synod were "hierarchical" or even "autocratic," but something positive must be said for any synod that limits the ecclesial demagoguery which runs rampant in America and instead supports the preachers whom Christ himself has sent to the church.



Walther was apparently not so narrowly congregational in his outlook as some have made him out to have been. It is noteworthy than when, under his leadership, the German Evangelical-Lutheran Congregation of St. Louis expanded to four churches (added to Trinity were Immanuel in 1848, Holy Cross in 1856, and Zion in 1860), these four churches or “districts” constituted parts of a *Gesamtgemeinde* or parish, under which Trinity had the *Oberpfarrer* or head parson (Walther, of course), and the other churches had only “pastors.” In this arrangement, the *Oberpfarrer*, who was really a tenured bishop in the New Testament sense, was called by the full parish, which also nominated pastors for the *Distrikts-Gemeinden*, with the final election from the list of nominees being carried out by each separate congregation for itself.

### CONCLUSION

There is a controversy within all American Lutheranism today regarding church and ministry. And I fear that some of the leaders of Missouri Synod, instead of recognizing the dangerous situation, are more concerned with preserving nineteenth-century solutions to nineteenth-century problems. If at that time the issue was asserting the “rights” of the local congregation, the issue today is preserving the prophetic voice of the ministry. To show what I mean, I should like to close with a statement by a Lutheran theologian, Friedrich Brunstäd, who wrote: “The office which preaches reconciliation (the ministry of reconciliation, 2 Cor 5:18), under the mandate of Christ, who has prepared this reconciliation, is the origin of the church. This office is the continuation and the carrying out of the mission of the Son. Those who are in the office are ambassadors in the stead of Christ. As the Father sent him, so he sends us. ‘He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.’ The office receives its content and authority from the command of Christ, the mandate of the Redeemer.”<sup>12</sup> There is no need to replace the mandate of Christ with the mandate of the local congregation.

### NOTES

1. Christian Hochstetter, *Die Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Missouri synod in Nord-Amerika und ihrer Lehrkämpfe* (Dresden: Heinrich J. Naumann, 1885).
2. As an example of the deceitfulness of Hochstetter, note the following. He claims in a footnote that the “autocratic synods” such as Iowa retained the power to seize the property of recalcitrant congregations: “daß im Falle einer Spaltung oder auch sonst zu jeder Zeit nur eine solche Gemeinde im Besitze und Gebrauche des betreffenden Kircheneigentums bleiben dürfe, welche under der Jurisdiktion der namentlich angegebenen, besonderen Synode steht” (Hochstetter, 155, n.). Such an assertion is contradicted by the documents: the 1856 and the 1882 model constitution for congregations of Iowa Synod. See the same in Christian Otto Kraushaar, *Verfassungsformen der Lutherischen Kirche Amerikas* (Gütersloh: Carl Bertelsmann, 1911), 147–163. In fact, the model constitution for congregations provided that (a) in case of a split in the congregation, the property would go to that faction which held to the Lutheran Confessions and to the constitution; (b) that the congregation had the right to secede from the Synod by a two-thirds majority vote cast at two successive meetings of the congregation (Kraushaar, 162–163). Why Hochstetter made such false claims, or why he wrote so bitterly about the sister synods of LCMS, needs an explanation. But he does not earn the authority that Marquart ascribes to him. Marquart would be advised to find more dependable resources, and to cite the original sources instead of Hochstetter.

3. Marquart cites Hochstetter, 212, n.

4. On the subject of pastoral authority, see the following references: AC xxviii, 53–55 and FC SD x, 10. On the power of the pastor to excommunicate, see Tr, 60. Statement from Luther’s *House Postil* of 1544: “Thus all people on earth are subject to the ministry, which the apostles and their successors administer by divine right; they have to submit themselves and follow it if they really want to receive God’s grace and be saved.” Quoted in Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 309. These citations from Paul Harris, “Angels Unaware,” *LOGIA* 3, no. 1 (Epiphany 1994): 36 and notes.

5. *Die fränkischen Bekenntnisse*, ed. Wilhelm Ferdinand Schmidt and Karl Schornbaum (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1930), 195.

6. George J. Zeilinger, *A Missionary Synod with a Mission: A Memoir for the Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Iowa and Other States* (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1929), 17. A list of the congregations that belonged to the Iowa Synod between 1854 and 1896 is given in Johannes Deindörfer, *Geschichte der Evangel.-Luth. Synode von Iowa und anderen Staaten* (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1897), 344–383.

7. Trinity was so anticlerical that it excluded Walther from the voters’ assembly meetings. See Carl S. Mundinger, *Government in the Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987), 107. Cited in Paul R. Harris, “Angels Unaware,” *LOGIA* 3, no. 1 (Epiphany 1994): 39.

8. Christian Otto Kraushaar, *Verfassungsformen der Lutherischen Kirche Amerikas* (Gütersloh: Carl Bertelsmann, 1911), 128.

9. Kraushaar, 139–145.

10. Kraushaar, 147–153.

11. Kraushaar, 148.

12. Friedrich Brunstäd, *Theologie der lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften* (Gütersloh: Carl Bertelsmann, 1951), 116.

## SERMON BY DR. MARTIN LUTHER ON EASTER TUESDAY, MARCH 30, 1529

JOHN 20:19–20

*Translated by Charles R. Schulz (excerpt)*

*Then Jesus spoke to them again: Peace be with you. Even as the Father has sent me, so I am sending you. And when he said that, he breathed on them and said to them: Receive the Holy Spirit. Whosoever sins you release, for them they are released. And whosoever sins you retain, for them they are retained.*

After Jesus had strengthened them through his word and work in the faith of his resurrection, he commits the preaching office to them and gives them power and authority to release and retain sins. By this he indicates what the preaching office is, namely, such an office in which our life and salvation stands. Through his mouth he brings us the word. He commits the word to persons. The word, even if it is preached through persons, brings us life and salvation. It is an excellent office and word that he here commits to the disciples, and for this reason one should not consider it a slight thing. St. Paul praises the word of the forgiveness of sins in all his epistles. The preaching office is such a costly thing for him that he names it the word of reconciliation with God and a messenger in the place of Christ (2 Cor 5), an office of the Spirit (2 Cor 3).

He sends them even as he has been sent from the Father, and he gives them the Holy Spirit for such a mission and office. Here



the question appears whether those who do not have the Holy Spirit also have the power to forgive sins. For while he says, "Receive the Holy Spirit," it is plain that he does not wish to perform this office and work without the Holy Spirit. What then should we do with those who do not have the Holy Spirit? This question has caused trouble for a great many in Christendom and is still a burning question today, against which many stumble. For long ago the Donatists came, and now the Anabaptists and the enthusiasts. They get stuck on the crazy idea that an evil fool and a godless priest cannot preach the gospel or administer the sacrament. Whoever is impure, they say, cannot make anyone pure. Whoever has dirty hands will wash nothing clean, but will make whatever he touches filthier and dirtier.

At this question then learn to answer: It is certainly true that the office to preach the gospel and to forgive sins belongs to no one but to the Holy Spirit alone. Insofar as the Holy Spirit is there, so far also goes the forgiveness of sins. If the Holy Spirit is not present, then there is no forgiveness there. Therefore also to administer the sacrament, to baptize, to feed with the body and blood of Christ belong to no one but alone to the Holy Spirit. It is also the office and work of the Holy Spirit to conduct the external auditory word in Christendom, as St. Peter says, 1 Peter 1. The gospel is proclaimed through the apostles, through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

Indeed the office and word often also remain among the unbelievers and the godless, as it has happened among the heretics and in the papacy. Even if the pope with his followers fights against Christ and his gospel and makes glosses over the gospel and the sacrament according to his own imaginations and opinions, nevertheless they have the office of preaching and retain the text of the gospel, of baptism, of the supper of Christ, which is all the arrangement and work of the Holy Spirit. Now as far as the preaching office and word of the gospel and of the sacrament (which is the Holy Spirit's arrangement) are completely and unshakably there, thus far follow forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, and all that Christ gives and has promised to give through the preaching office and word, even if unbelievers and the godless have and conduct the office and word.

Therefore consider it well, how far the Holy Spirit is there and how far the Holy Spirit is not there. When the Holy Spirit's arrangement is maintained, then the Holy Spirit is there. When, however, one does not allow the arrangement of the Holy Spirit to stay, then the Holy Spirit is not there. When the gospel is preached and the sacrament administered as the Holy Spirit has arranged and established it, then the Holy Spirit is there even if he who preaches and baptizes is unbelieving and godless with respect to himself, yes, even if an ass preaches, as it happened with Balaam's ass (Nm 23; 2 Pt 2). Balaam himself was a godless man and abandoned the right way; nevertheless he spoke a glorious prophecy and preached God's word insistently. The evangelist John speaks of Caiaphas, that he did not prophesy from himself, but because he was the high priest that same year (Jn 11). And Scripture speaks of Saul, upon whom the Spirit of God had fallen,

and Saul had prophesied among the prophets. Then the people were amazed about it and said, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" (1 Sm 10).

One must pay attention not so much to the person as to the office, because the office remains even if some persons are godless and misuse the office. It is proper for you not to look at the person but at the office and word. Now as far as the person deals with the word and conducts the arrangement of the Holy Spirit, so far is the Holy Spirit there, also the forgiveness of sins and everything good. However, as far as the person deals with you without the word and he destroys the arrangement of the Holy Spirit, so far is the devil there and everything evil. God has not established his office, word, and arrangement on our person, righteousness, and worthiness, but on himself. If it were established on our person and righteousness, then we would never be sure of the gifts of God, nor could we be certain of the forgiveness of sins and our salvation.

Then make this distinction and say, "A person may have the Holy Spirit in two different ways, one for himself and his person so that the Holy Spirit enlightens that person through the word and makes him holy, saved, and blessed, even if the person is not in the office and even if he does not govern with the word. That is the best and most blessed way to have the Holy Spirit. Secondly, one can have the Holy Spirit neither for himself nor for his person but for the office, even as a wicked pastor, party spirits, and heretics may have the Holy Spirit not for themselves (i.e., that they may be saved), but for the office that they conduct; because the office is not of men but of Christ, who places the office on the man and commands him to serve others with it. That is a dangerous way to have the Holy Spirit, according to the saying of Matthew 7: "There will be many who say to me on that day: 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? Have we not cast out the devil in your name? Have we not done many deeds in your name?' Then I will let them know: 'I have never yet known you; depart from me, you evildoers.'"

That is also the reason why he here connects the Holy Spirit not to the apostolic person (even though they would also be full of the Holy Spirit for their person, especially on Pentecost), but to their office. He does not say: Receive the Holy Spirit, then you will be saved, holy, and pious, but he says: "Receive the Holy Spirit; those whose sins you remove, they are removed from them," etc. He does such so that one might recognize and honor the power to release and to bind sins and the preaching office as the office of the Holy Spirit. In another place he makes them certain of the Holy Spirit for their person, as when he comforts them about the future scandal of his suffering and death (Jn 14) and says: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, so that he may remain with you eternally, the Spirit of truth which the world cannot receive, because it does not see him nor does it know him. But you know him because he remains with you and will be in you." But here he makes them certain of the Holy Spirit for their office.

From what I have said is clear and apparent that an individual may have the Holy Spirit in two ways: for his person and for his office.

From what I have said is clear and apparent that an individual may have the Holy Spirit in two ways: for his person and for his office. With respect to our person, the Holy Spirit is not with us at all times, because we often allow the evil spirit to ride us and we fall from God, as David did when he took the wife from Uriah; and when he allowed the people to be counted, as the text says clearly, “Satan stood against Israel and incited David so that he let a census be taken” (1 Chr 21). But for our office, when we preach the gospel, baptize, absolve, administer the sacrament according to the institution and arrangement of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is with us at all times. Balaam did not have the Holy Spirit for his person when he plotted with the Moabite princes. But for his office, when he lifted up his voice and prophesied, he had the Holy Spirit as the text says: “The Lord gave the word to Balaam into his mouth and said, Go again to Balak and speak thus” (Num 23). Therefore also St. Peter says, “There has never been any prophecy brought forth from the will of men, but the holy men of God have spoken, driven along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pt 1).

We should mark well such a distinction, so that we do not despise the office on account of the person nor allow the person to deceive us with the covering and name of the office, but we should know how far we should be obedient and how far we should not be obedient. One should fear the office and honor it and be obedient to the person in everything that he does according to the office. Because to this it is said, “He who despises, he despises not a man, but God, who has given his Holy Spirit in you” (1 Th 4). And “You have not lied to men, but to the Holy Spirit” (Acts 5). If however the person does not do something according to his office, but against the office, then one should not be obedient, because the Holy Spirit is not doing it.

We desire to give an example of this. In civil government one must divide the person and the office from each other. Even if a prince is evil and godless in his person, nevertheless he is still a prince and has the lordship and the majesty. Whoever despises him despises the lordship; whoever mocks him mocks the majesty (2 Pt 2). If however the prince steps out of his office and wants to compel me to idolatry and godlessness and therefore misuses his office according to his own whim, then I should be more obedient to God than to man (Acts 5). In domestic government it is also the same. Children of marriage are natural heirs, even if they are evil and godless fools in their person. Father and mother remain parents, even if they are not pious in their person. Now when your parents deal with you in the house according to the office of father and mother, then you are responsible to be obedient to them, even if they are evil in themselves. However, when they want to deal with you not according to the office of father and mother but according to their person, that you should please them by doing something against God, then you should not be obedient.

So also in spiritual government. When your pastor deals with you according to his office, terrifies you, comforts, admonishes, absolves, excommunicates according to Christ’s word and command, then you should receive it in all fear, humility, obedience, and faith, because it is the office and work of the Holy Spirit. When he however deals with you against his office without the word and command of God and misuses his office, then say: “Dear pastor, I would allow it to happen that you would excommunicate me, but I do not ask about your excommunication, because you excommunicate me not according to your office nor according to the arrangement of the Holy Spirit, but according to your person and according to your own stubborn whim.”

When your pastor deals with you according to his office, terrifies you, comforts, admonishes, absolves, excommunicates according to Christ’s word and command, then you should receive it in all fear, humility, obedience, and faith, because it is the office and work of the Holy Spirit.

Whoever maintains such a distinction between the office and the person, he can also properly distinguish between false preachers and true preachers, party spirits and teachers of the truth. And such a discernment must remain with you. You must be certain of this—when your pastor and teacher remains in his office and when he steps out of it—so that you may know whether you should be obedient to him or whether you should avoid him. For such evidences you have the ten commandments, the article of the Christian faith, baptism, the sacrament, the keys. Now if he preaches the ten commandments, the creed, baptism, the sacrament, and conducts his office according to the word of Christ, then he walks in his office and observes the arrangement of the Holy Spirit, and you are duty-bound to be obedient to him. But if he preaches the command of men, makes up his own creed, brings new teaching, conducts his own order with baptism, administers the keys outside and against the arrangement of the Holy Spirit, then say: “That is not the office of the pastor, but the person of Peter and his own whim; therefore I am not here duty-bound to be obedient, but I should much rather flee and avoid you.”

Therefore one should deal with this matter properly and know how what I have said is to be understood: To forgive sins belongs to the Holy Spirit, and no one can forgive sins except that he have the Holy Spirit. For the office to forgive sins does not belong to any man, but to the Lord Christ and his Holy Spirit. As far as that same office is administered properly by a person, so far is the Holy Spirit also with that same person. Should he, however, step out of the office, then the Holy Spirit is not present. It can well happen that he does not have the Holy Spirit with respect to what concerns his person, and nevertheless he has the Holy Spirit on account of the office, as far as his deals and acts according to his office. Then here Christ gives the Holy Spirit to his whole church and Christendom, to the apostles and their successors, pastors, preachers, yes, even to each and every Christian in time of need; he gives what concerns the office, that they preach, teach, comfort, forgive and retain sins, in all, that they should be sent even as the Father has sent him.

If the Holy Spirit had not been given to the preaching office and if the word of God and the office should stand on the worthiness of men, then all would be uncertain—word, baptism, keys, etc. If someone were baptized today, then he would have to be baptized again tomorrow, because he could not be certain if the baptizer was pious, believing, and holy. But Christ does not only establish the preaching office through this command, but he also gives the Holy Spirit to the preaching office, so that when we hear the gospel, are baptized and absolved from sins, we may be certain that the Holy Spirit has proclaimed the gospel to us, baptized, and absolved us.

Therefore one should close his eyes and not stare at the person to determine if this one is pious or evil, but direct everyone's conscience to the following (whether the preacher is pious or not, whether he has the Holy Spirit for his own person or not), and each should pay attention to this directive: That everyone who is called to the preaching office has power and authority to preach, baptize, and absolve; and each should acknowledge that such an office is not of men but of the Lord Christ, who founds such an office here, orders it, and commends it to men. Where a person who is called to the preaching office deals according to the office, there the Holy Spirit is certainly present. Should he however step out of the office, preach another gospel, bring a new baptism, the Holy Spirit is not there. Then say to such a preacher: "I hear and do not follow here, because you step out of the office into your own person and whim; this does not count."

Secondly, he encloses the preaching office in the command and the divine call and gives to the apostles and their successors not only one and the same sort of power and authority to preach, to loose and retain sins as he has, but he insures them also in their office through the certain command, call, and sending. He comforts them against all future misfortune and danger with his example and their call, whatever may happen to them while they are about their office. "Even as the Father has sent me," he says, "so I send you." It is as if he would say: I give you the same power to teach, to forgive and retain sins as I have received from the Father. Concerning such an office it will happen to you in the world even as it has happened to me. But do not be terrified, even if you have great opposition; do not even ask what the world will do to you. Comfort yourself with my example, that the world has done the same thing even to me before you, and comfort yourself with your call, that you are sent from me.

You see then that no one should presume to practice the power to forgive and to retain sins publicly in Christendom, except that he is sent and called to it through a certain command. He who has no command to preach, to baptize, to absolve, to administer the sacrament, let him be content and let him not presume such an office. He who is called to it, however, and has the command

that he should preach the gospel, baptize, release from sins through power of the absolution, bring under excommunication through the power of the keys, punish and admonish, etc., let him go forth comforted and let him not be terrified, no matter what may happen to him because of it.

That is the comfort which a preacher must have in spiritual government when one preaches the gospel, releases and retains sins, so that both of these—even he who should receive the forgiveness of sins from him, and he himself—must be certain that he is called to such an office and has a command from God to do such things. For of course it is the same way in worldly government, that everyone must know for himself if he is in a good, godly position, if he should lead others with a good conscience

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and be certain of his activity. A prince must know that he is called by God to government and has the command to govern his subordinates and to punish the evildoer with the sword; otherwise he will not accomplish much good. Much more must every preacher in spiritual government be certain that he is called to such an office by God and has the command to preach, to forgive and retain sins, etc.

This business about the call to the preaching office is of highest necessity, so that one conduct it diligently in this time. Because now many false preachers, party spirits and enthusiasts, Anabaptists and sacrament-despisers sneak in secretly and force themselves on the people without a command and unasked; they preach in the corner and turn the people from their appointed congregation. And so that they may sow their seeds and inject their poison and deceive the simple with it, they make a great boast, saying that the Holy Spirit drives them. They boast the great faithfulness of their hearts, that they have a sincere compassion on the poor people, saying that what they do is done from great, compelling devotion and Christian zeal to better the world and to help the souls of people. With this show they deceive the simple.

Against this stands this text: "As the Father has sent me, I send you." By this, one acknowledges which are apostles of Christ, and which of the devil, namely, by the call and by the sending. The apostles of Christ are called by Christ and sent and come publicly. The apostles of the devil are neither sent from God nor through men, but creep secretly as the snakes and the otters without call and command. They may well boast of their high spirit and pretenses: They want to help the people out of the prison of their sins, the Spirit drives them; because they see that the poor people are stuck in error and blindness, so they must have pity on the poor souls, etc. But this one thing crashes the whole business to the ground, that they run of themselves, because no one really sends nor calls them, as the prophet Jeremiah writes about the false prophets, "I did not send the prophets, nevertheless they run; I did not speak to them, nevertheless they prophesy" (Jer 23).



Then here you understand that also the high apostles did not come from themselves to preach in the world, but are compelled to the preaching office, necessitated, called, and sent through the command of Christ. Therefore every proper teacher and preacher does the same: If he is ever so full of the Holy Spirit, may he be so learned, still he does not go in that he may preach and teach unless he is called and sent in an orderly way, so that he may be certain in his office, as he who is set in it through the divine command and must do such things.

Such things I say to you listeners as a warning, that you may well watch out for yourselves against the secret sneaks and the “in-the-corner-preachers,” who would infiltrate you now by all means possible, and force themselves on others to preach and infect many people with their poison. I say this so that you may be instructed in this matter and allow no one to preach either secretly nor publicly, except he be called to it and have the command to do such. Indeed you have without our warning even the command of the prince of the land that you should not allow nor even hear the secret sneaks and the “in-the-corner-preachers,” because such rarely depart without disruption. Such sneaks attach one or two citizens to themselves, then ten, until they pull the whole mob to themselves and set out on murder and disturbances.

And this is also what the devil seeks through such secret sneaks. He smarts when God’s word is preached loud and clear in this principedom. Therefore he would gladly set up a diversion, and he uses such sneaks and “in-the-corner-preachers” for it. So that he may filch through the same in the corner, he might leave a squabbling behind, afterward wipe his mouth and go away, as if he was never there, and thereafter the guilt would be placed on the gospel. To protect against such schemes the prince has commanded that everyone should remain by his appointed congregation, hear his called pastor in public preaching, and flee and avoid the secret sneaks and the “in-the-corner-preachers.”

Now even if the command of the prince in the worldly government is not enough for you in this case, then I must also do my own thing in the spiritual government. Therefore I sincerely warn you and earnestly admonish that you protect yourselves against the sneaks. When they come to you and want to preach, ask them who sent them here or called them to preach, and let them show their letters and seals to demonstrate their call. If they then say that God and his Spirit has sent them even as the apostles were sent, then let them prove the same with signs and wonders. For if God wants to change the ordinary way, then he always does miracles with it. If they then have no testimony to set before you to demonstrate that they are sent here by men, if they can also do no signs and wonders to prove that they are sent by God from heaven without means, then tell them to be quiet.

Yes, they say, in this way the Spirit will be suppressed, prophecy despised, and the poor souls deceived. Answer: The spirits allow themselves to be discerned by the congregation (1 Cor 14). And prophecy allows itself to be acknowledged and tested, if it is in

accordance with the faith (Rom 12). But you want to preach before you have been examined, tested, and acknowledged, and you come to it without a call or a command. That does not count. If the people are deceived, what does that have to do with you, since you have no command? Even if the pope, as he who would have the office, should preach here and should lead the people in hordes to hell, and even if the angel Gabriel should come without a call and command and venture to preach here and to help the people, then he should nevertheless not be allowed to do it.

Note such things well, so that you can properly meet the poisonous snakes and blindsneakers. When they come with their pretense, as if they want to help the people out of prison, tell them to be quiet. If they want to preach and if their spirit is right, let them do it as it is proper for them, namely, that they present their call and publicly step forward and not secretly sneak around. Tell them: Go on and demonstrate first that you are commanded to preach. If you are called through men, then show the letters and seals. If you are sent by God from heaven, then prove it with signs and wonders. They would say: Why do you not want to hear us? Are we not more learned than your pastors? You say against them: It may well be that you are more learned than our pastor, but what does that matter? That does not join me to you so that you need not the common, usual way that God has ordained.”

St. Peter says: No one should reach into another’s office, but everyone should pay attention to his own call and command and serve it, so that he allow the other his own call unhindered and with peace (1 Pt 4). And St. Paul says, everything should happen with decency and order (1 Cor 14). If I now want to go forth and do what is not mine, but is commanded to another, to punish a thief (which the worldly authority should do) and build a gallows in my house and hang the thief on it, what kind of order would that leave in the worldly government? Therefore also when everyone wants to set up his own pulpit in his house or everyone wants to step forward in the church and preach, what kind of decency and order would that be in the spiritual government?

Therefore the secret sneaks are the true snakes and poisonous worms sent from the devil; they throw everything together in a pile and tear down all offices. If they were from God and accountable, then they would not come sneaking around in corners, but they would first find the pastor and deal with him, if he would allow them to preach publicly. Or if they saw a deficiency in the pastor’s teaching, they would speak with him themselves and say, “Dear pastor, you preach such and such, which does not appear right to me,” and they would show the foundation and basis for the teaching from the Scripture. If the pastor would not allow them or would not allow himself to be instructed nor forgo his own teaching, then they would be excused before God and the whole world. For the pastor has the pulpit, baptism, sacrament, and all pastoral supervision is committed to him.

When now such sneaks come and boast of their high spirit, and they reject and damn our teaching and preaching, then say: It

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first that you are  
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ters and seals. If you  
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from heaven, then  
prove it with signs  
and wonders.



may well be that you have a higher spirit than our pastor and your teaching is right and our pastor errs, about that I do not want to fight it out with you now, but why do you come secretly sneaking and pilfering in the corners? Use the common arranged way that a person should use in the church. Christ sends his apostles freely into the world publicly with the word and strengthens their word through signs and wonders. If you are now sent from God as the apostles, as you boast, then step forward publicly and show your call and teaching with miracles.

This is how one should counter the sneaks. When they boast of their spirit and praise their own teaching and faith, then say: Why do you say so much about the spirit that directs you? Why do you boast of your teaching and faith? Even if you should preach the gospel as purely as the angel Gabriel, nevertheless you should not set up any pulpit before me in the corner that I should hear you there. Go on to our pastor and step out publicly, so that the others can also hear you and may test your spirit, if it is from God. Because the gospel is not a secret, envious preaching for a few alone, but a common, public preaching for all.

Yes, they tell you, how should we go to the pastor? Of course, he will not allow us nor permit us to preach. He alone wants to be clever. What we say will not get any hearing with him; only what he says should count. Then say: If our pastor will not permit you nor hear you, then I also do not want to hear you, because our pastor has the preaching office, baptism, the sacrament, and the pastoral supervision publicly and with right. The matter is committed to him, and he must give account for it.

Let that be said to you as a warning and an admonition. There is nothing to joke about here. Murder and rebellion commonly follow when one infiltrates and secretly sneaks in to preach in a disorderly way. Therefore hold to the orderly way; do not preach without call and command. If the pastor to whom the office is commanded will not allow you, then go out from that home or city and shake the dust from your feet as Christ has taught (Mt 10). If the pastor does not teach properly, what does that have to do with you? You may not give an account of that; let him carry the guilt and sin.

These six years Satan has sent many such sneaks under my eyes, but they have also come to their shame. They do not want to stand with us any more, but sneak around secretly and blaspheme our teaching. But even if we are as evil as we can be, nevertheless they should let our commanded office alone. Of course, Christ stands before Pilate, and he does not remove him from his government, even though Pilate is evil. Yes, he stands before Annas and Caiaphas and does not take their office from them with power and outrage, as long as God allows them.

If the Spirit were to so drive me that I should go to Leipzig and preach there myself, then I would not sneak around secretly in one house or two and allow a couple citizens to hang around me, but I would go on to the mayor or pastor and ask if they would

allow me to preach. But through the grace of God, the Spirit does not drive me, neither do I feel such great cleverness in me, as the Spirit drives them and wants to burst their stomach with cleverness. I have not yet preached nor do I desire to preach where I am not requested and called through men. Then I cannot boast that God from heaven has sent me without means, as they do.

They boast of their high spirit, and yet none of them has stepped forward so publicly as I have stepped forward through the grace of God. All parties and sects have appeared through such snakelike sneaking. Once they have brought the mob over to themselves, they establish murder, uproar, and all misfortune. We do not sneak around secretly, but are called to our office and step forward publicly; we are also accountable to spiritual and civil courts. Our gospel is not to be preached in the corner, but freely goes forth publicly, and it may not be said that the Spirit so drives me, as they say about the Spirit.

St. Peter says: No one should reach into another's office, but everyone should pay attention to his own call and command and serve it, so that he allow the other his own call unhindered and with peace.

That is said about the sneaks and the "in-the-corner-preachers" as a warning, so that you not listen to them. If you desire to be a pious Christian, then you are duty-bound to avoid them. If they then sneak and set themselves up in a corner to preach without a call or command, then say: Either be silent, or if the Spirit does drive you that you cannot be silent, then let yourself be called and sent, so that you preach in the arranged way. We have a pastor to whom the office is committed to preach, baptize, absolve, etc. If he himself should allow you, then I allow it to happen that you step forward and preach. If he does not allow you, then do not set up any preaching in the corner. For the Holy Spirit does not preach in the corner, but freely and publicly.

Thirdly, he indicates also the *causam finalem*, the final goal and power of the preaching office for which it is established and what it should accomplish, namely, even that for which Christ has come into the world, for which he was sent from the Father and that he has accomplished. This is the most glorious part, that to the apostles and their successors he not only gives power and might to preach and calls and sends them to administer the keys in his kingdom (which is the properly arranged way to conduct the preaching office), but he sends them also in every way as he was sent from the Father, and he places the power and the work of his resurrection into the mouth of the apostles and all preachers (who have the office and word), and he sets them over sin and righteousness, heaven, and hell, so that they engage with power either to speak free from sin or to charge with sins, either to open or close heaven. As if he would say: I send you not only in the same power as the Father sent me, but I give you also full authority, so that you should accomplish through your office and word what I have accomplished through my mission and office.

How then was Christ sent from the Father? Or what has he accomplished through his office? He himself says it in Matthew 15: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"; Matthew 18: "The Son of Man has come to save what is lost." Peter says the same in Acts 10: "God has allowed peace to be

preached through Jesus Christ, who is Lord over all.” Again, “God has anointed the same Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who traveled around and did well and made healthy all who were overcome by the devil, for God was with him.”

That is Christ’s office, and for this he was sent and he has come, that he might redeem the people from the power of sins and out of the kingdom of the devil. He was not sent to damn, but to save what is damned and lost. The apostles and their successors should also accomplish this very same thing after him, that they remove sin, death, hell, and the wrath of God through their word and preaching and make the consciences and the souls of men free from them. Therefore St. Paul also calls the preaching office an office that preaches reconciliation, that it makes us friends of God and we receive grace and everything good through it (2 Cor 5). And he boasts that the Lord has given him power to better and not to destroy (2 Cor 10 and 13).

God grant that our bishops could believe such things. They have the call and the command and they sit in the office (that we must concede to them and cannot deny it), but that they should perform through their office what Christ has performed, that they should conduct their office as both need and the office require it, this they do not do. They should be good shepherds, salutary bishops and teachers, comforting saviors and helpers, standing in Christ’s place and preserving the souls of men through their office, as Christ did and has commanded his disciples to do (Lk 9). “Do you not know of which Spirit you are children? The Son of Man has not come to destroy the souls of men, but to preserve them.” But they are wolves and murderers who do not protect the flock of Christ and who scatter, murder, and kill the poor little sheep.

It is their office that they should preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins in Christ’s name, that is, they should punish the world for sin, that the people may acknowledge how they are sinners; and furthermore they should teach how they should be free of their sins through Christ. But they go forward and load up Christendom with new laws and commands of men about eating, vows, clothing, and certain feastdays, and they make sin what is no sin. The gospel that Christ committed to the apostles and preachers makes the consciences of men free from all laws, even the law of God. But the pope together with his own do nothing other than endanger and bind the consciences of men with new laws and dangerous strictures. Christ commands that one should forgive the true sin that remains in flesh and blood, with which people are born and strive against God. But the pope forgives imagined sins that he has made up through his human regulations.

Therefore the pope becomes the true Antichrist and contender against God. He makes new laws in the place of the law of God, and through such laws he makes new sins, which are no sin for God. He establishes a new forgiveness in place of the true, evangelical forgiveness. He should preach the gospel to poor consciences and through it proclaim the remission of sins and freedom from

all laws that weigh down the conscience. But he preaches the command of men and makes therewith new fetters to endanger consciences and to bind that which he should remove and free. This is truly the wolf set up as preacher in the sheepstall. Every single Christian is a lord over all laws with respect to his conscience. But the pope loads down all of Christendom with innumerable laws as a wretched prison of the conscience.

Therefore the papacy is a devilish kingdom in which consciences are terribly captured with fetters, bound, and martyred. The emperor also has in his kingdom laws, rights, statutes, and ordinances, but he places the same on the people’s hands and feet and punishes them in body, goods, and possessions. This is quite appropriate for external things. But the pope makes commands and punishments and does not place them on the hands and feet but on the hearts, so that their inner consciences are caught and ensnared with it. This is the devil himself. This is not to be sent as Christ was sent from the Father and as he sends the apostles here, but goes directly contrary to the mission of Christ. Indeed they are called and sent, and they sit in the office as bishops and leaders of the church, but they do not conduct the office as Christ conducted it and has commanded to conduct it.

Christ was sent from the Father so that he should be the Savior and Redeemer of all the world. And therefore he conducted his office so that he has brought about comfort and salvation for men and through this they were redeemed from death, sin, and law, as the Samaritans confess and say in John 4: “We ourselves have heard and confess that this one is truly Christ, the Savior of the world.” But the pope turns it around, misuses the Christian evangelical office, fashions unbearable loads and burdens, confuses and punishes the consciences with them, plagues and terrifies the people, so that even all kings on earth must be terrified before the pope’s law and command. This is what it is to misuse the office of the Holy Spirit for one’s own whims, which office is established to serve and comfort others, especially the poor troubled consciences.

Christ says: “Whosoever sins you release and retain. . . .” The pope interprets that as the power to make law and to remove it again. But it does not mean to make law and remove it, but to help the troubled and anxious sinners from sins, and on the other hand to leave the impudent and stubborn sinners stuck in sins and to show them that they are damned. It is a divine, Christian, salutary office by which the people should be served toward heaven. For this the apostles and servants of the word are set, that they should help the people from sin to righteousness, from death to eternal life, from the kingdom of the devil to the kingdom of God, from damnation to salvation. But the pope would rush in and misuse the holy office for sins, death, and damnation. For he conducts it not for the bettering but to destroy.

Fourthly, Christ teaches how and through which means one would become righteous and saved, namely, through the forgiveness of sins purchased through his suffering and resurrection in the gospel, brought forth through the mouth of the apostles and

Therefore one concludes from this text that one will not become free from sins and righteous before God through one’s own merit, work, or good life, but through the mouth of his pastor.

preachers and grasped through the faith in the word from the mouth of the apostles and preachers. Through the forgiveness of sins we become free from sin. Such a treasure, however, Christ has purchased through his suffering, death, and resurrection, and placed the word of such a treasure in the mouth of the apostles and preachers. Faith is that which grasps the word, and the heart is the little chest in which this treasure lets itself be enclosed through the hearing of the word and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore one concludes from this text that one will not become free from sins and righteous before God through one's own merit, work, or good life, but through the mouth of his pastor, who announces to him the gospel of the forgiveness of sins won through the suffering and resurrection of Christ, which treasure is grasped through faith in the word. The word of the forgiveness of sins is placed in the mouth of the apostle. Now, however, this same word will not allow itself to be seized with hands or works, but faith alone grasps this word. Therefore it is clear and apparent that man is righteous and saved only through faith in Christ. You should found your righteousness and holiness on the word that Christ has committed to his disciples. If you do that, then you are certain. Nor may you allow yourself to fear before sin, death, and the devil, but you have forgiveness of sins, life, and blessedness.

The pope founds Christian righteousness and holiness on human works, on one's own sorrow, repentance, satisfactions, fastings, prayings, pilgrimages, orders, and vows. But Christ takes righteousness and holiness clearly away from all works of men, from all orders, as many as may have names, and founds it alone on the forgiveness of sins won through his death and resurrection and brought forth in the word. Then pilgrimages, works of the saints, orders, and rules in the monastery and whatever of the same that may be brought forward—they all fall to the ground. For it is true that one does not have the forgiveness of sins through orders and monastic life but through the mouth of every

pastor. So may the devil remain in the monastery and be a monk in my place. Christ commends to Peter, John, and their successors the word and says: When a poor sinner comes to you and would gladly be free of his sin, then speak to him a friendly word: Be comforted, Brother, your sins are forgiven you. The same word should count more than all orders and strict life in the monastery.

Do you now want to know how and through which means one becomes righteous before God? Then hear this: Not through the law nor work done according to the law, much less through papal law and work done according to the pope's ordinances, but through the gospel of Christ suffering and rising. This same gospel he places in the mouth of his disciples and says: "Whosoever sins you loose . . ." as if he would say: Through your mouth you should make the people righteous, namely, that you preach to them forgiveness of sins in my name. Whoever now hears this word from your mouth, "For your sins are forgiven," and believes this same word, for him his sins are forgiven and he is righteous before God in heaven. And such a person will then do good works straightway.

Here is now this text, which we hold glorious and should diligently observe. For from this we hear what the preaching office is, namely, an office of the Holy Spirit. Even if it is men who preach, baptize, forgive sins, yet the Holy Spirit is preaching and baptizing, whose work and office it is. To this office, however, belongs the sending, for without a call and command no one should wriggle himself into this office. And this office should serve people to better, not to destroy as the pope has done. And through this office and word we become free of sins, righteous, and blessed before God, if we believe the word that the pastor announces to us in the place of Christ. Finally, this text goes far above all teaching of good works, and for this reason it is also the empress and standard by which all other teachings should be judged.

To God alone be the glory.

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## A CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

The editors of *LOGIA* hereby request manuscripts, book reviews, and forum material for the following issues and themes:

ISSUE	THEME	DEADLINE
Epiphany 1998	Luther and the Fathers	July 1, 1997
Eastertide 1998	Liturgy as Pastoral Care	September 1, 1997
Holy Trinity 1998	Lutheran Missions [note change]	February 15, 1998
Reformation 1998	Bondage of the Will	April 1, 1998

Send all submissions to the appropriate editors and addresses as listed on the inside back cover. Please include IBM or Macintosh diskette with manuscript whenever possible. (Specify word processing program and version used.) Please write for style sheet.

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# REVIEWS

*“It is not many books that make men learned . . . but it is a good book frequently read.”*

Martin Luther

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## Review Essay

*Die Erlanger Theologie (no. 67 in Einzelarbeiten aus der Kirchengeschichte Bayerns)*. By Karlmann Beyschlag. Erlangen: Martin-Luther-Verlag with the Verein für bayerische Kirchengeschichte, 1993. 295 pages.

✧ Since the nineteenth century, the theological faculty at the University of Erlangen has been the citadel of confessional Lutheranism. In the 1940s and 1950s, students from America and other foreign countries streamed to Erlangen, attracted by the world theological leadership of its university.

But after the deaths of Elert and Althaus, a reaction set in the theological faculty as well as in the Lutheran churches of Germany. The teachings of Karl Barth, the Barmen Declaration, and the “Confessing Church” began to suppress confessional Lutheranism. Principles of the Union Church, including intercommunion and open communion (Leuenberg Concord), were accepted by the Lutheran churches. A much less talented group of theologians replaced the great ones at Erlangen. Several of these sought notoriety by denouncing Elert and Althaus. In 1971, they succeeded in having the traditional subscription of the Lutheran Book of Concord abolished at Erlangen. Since then, Erlangen has been the launching pad for attacks upon the Lutheran Church and its symbolic books. The special target of their assaults has been the Lutheran distinction of law and gospel and the doctrine of the two realms.

The significance of this new book is that Karlmann Beyschlag, a pupil of Elert and Althaus, has written both a brilliant historical work and a strong defense against many falsehoods that have been leveled against these stalwart Lutherans.

The author begins by delineating the background of Erlangen theology, stemming from the Awakening Movement of the nineteenth century. Important impulses came from Christian Krafft, Carl von Raumer, and the earlier thinker Johann Georg Hamann. He then gives sketches of the most important theologians at Erlangen.

First is Adolf von Harleß (1806–79), who was both an important scholar and a powerful church leader. As theologian he was the founder of Erlangen theology and one of its most important writers; as churchman and friend of Löhe he was able to sepa-

rate the Lutheran and Reformed parts of the Protestant state church and to create a confessional Lutheran church in Bavaria (33–57). Next, Beyschlag discusses the greatest Erlangen theologian of the nineteenth century, Johann Christian Konrad von Hofmann (1810–77), giving a brilliant presentation of his complicated thought. Hofmann made a deep impression upon several Americans, including the Dubuque theologian Johann Michael Reu.

Within the scope of this theology came the “Erlangen School,” a movement that built upon the theologian’s personal experience of salvation and emphasized the Lutheran Confessions. Beginning with Harleß and explicated through Höfling, Hofmann, Thomasius, Delitzsch, Theodosius Harnack, von Zezschwitz, Schmid, and Frank, the movement spread from Erlangen to the universities of Leipzig, Rostock, Greifswald, and Dorpat. The “Erlangen School” as a specific theological movement ended with the death of Frank in 1894, but another important theological program was to appear at Erlangen in the twentieth century, building upon the earlier movement.

In a separate chapter, Beyschlag characterizes a group of church historians at the university who did not really belong to the “Erlangen School” movement, especially Theodor Zahn, Albert Hauck, and Reinhold Seeberg. He then discusses three other important historians: Gustav Plitt, Theodore Kolde, and Karl Schornbaum.

In chapter 7 he presents “the second blossoming of Erlangen theology” (143–203). This movement began with the criticism of the old “Erlangen School” by a pupil of Frank, Ludwig Ihmels. Without rejecting the importance of the religious certainty of the theologian, Ihmels warned that not human experience but divine revelation must be the true basis of a sound theology (143–145). Beyschlag names three great men in the rebirth of Erlangen theology: Otto Procksch, Werner Elert, and Paul Althaus.

The Old Testament scholar Procksch, who was a very strong teacher as well as writer, renewed Hofmann’s conception of *Heilsgeschichte*. Unfortunately, Procksch’s important theology of the Old Testament was not published until after his death (1950), so that it was already superseded by the fine work of his pupil Walter Eichrodt (148). Procksch is remembered equally for his firm confessional Lutheranism and for his determined stand against the Nazi movement.



Beyschlag ranks Elert and Hofmann as the two most important Erlangen scholars in the past two centuries. He describes Elert as “the totally unclerical man who, in his outward appearance, looked more like a general in civilian clothing than a theologian” (151). Elert, “like all intellectual giants,” was “an uncommonly complicated character, who was just as easily offended as he was polemically feared” (151–152). He cites the remark of Trillaas: “Elert had not a single friend with whom he had not at least once had a sturdy fight” (151).

Elert’s early writings were historical and systematic, and were largely devoted to Luther, Melancthon, the Lutheran Confessions, and subsequent developments in the history of theology. In some way or other, the distinction of law and gospel took an important place in all these writings.<sup>1</sup> After 1945 he turned increasingly toward his long-projected history of dogma; however, except for the volume on church fellowship and several important essays, this work lay uncompleted at his death, after which Wilhelm Maurer and Elisabeth Bergsträßer edited an additional volume from the materials that he had left.<sup>2</sup> Elert had a revolutionary concept: whereas previous historians had traced the “beginnings” of a dogma, proceeding chronologically from an early date and working downward, Elert proposed starting with the outgoings or conclusion of a churchly dogma, tracing it back toward its beginnings. Thereby Harnack’s speculations that the development of dogma was the hellenization of Christianity could be refuted by showing instead that the completed dogma represented the dehellenization of Christian doctrine (176–177).

Before taking up Althaus, Beyschlag briefly characterizes some other important men on the faculty: the Old Testament scholar and widely-respected *Rechor magnificus* Friedrich Baumgärtel, the church historian and Luther scholar Hans Preuß, the “high Lutheran” church historian Hermann Sasse, the Reformation scholar Wilhelm Maurer, the multi-faceted historian and Luther scholar Walter von Loewenich, the art historian Fritz Fichtner, and the practical theologian Eduard Steinwand, who was also important for his work in the eastern churches (178–181).

Beyschlag gives a thorough presentation on the theology and personality of Paul Althaus (182–203). Althaus taught systematic theology, New Testament, and the theology of Luther.<sup>3</sup> His systematic theology was characterized by his emphasis upon the First Article (Althaus held “a theology of Creation,” 190–194), a theology marked by the contrast between the original revelation (*Ur-Offenbarung*) and the revelation of salvation (*Heilsoffenbarung*), “in which the creator will of God included almightily the revelation of salvation” (191). In the discipline of ethics, this theological concept was expressed in a “theology of orders” (*Theologie der Ordnungen*). These orders were a part of God’s creation: marriage, family, community, government, and cultural development (199). Althaus did not spare criticism of the Nazis. Referring to Althaus’s *Theologie der Ordnungen*, 1935, Beyschlag cites Althaus: “Also in the Third Reich, our critical ethics of orders cannot resign and rest at ease,” and then Beyschlag adds: “There now follows a public catalog of vices which is so close to reality that one at least wonders that the book was not immediately forbidden. For under this ‘critical ethics’ falls not only the ‘autonomous legality’ of the state and the economy, but also the idolatry of folk,

race, destruction of law, and also eugenics, euthanasia, ‘the destruction of unworthy life,’ etc.” (201). In his “creation theology,” Althaus came into fundamental conflict with Karl Barth. Since the death of Althaus, the followers of Barth, of the old *Bekennende Kirche*, and of the Union Church have leashed a merciless attack upon both Althaus and Elert for rejecting the Barmen Declaration.<sup>4</sup>

In view of the attacks upon Elert and Althaus and the allegations that they supported Hitler and National Socialism, Beyschlag presents an excursus, “The Erlangen faculty and the *Kirchenkampf*” (160–170). He specifically deals with their statement on the “Aryan Paragraph” and the “Ansbach Resolution” and shows that the former actually protected Jews and that the latter was leveled against the German Christians as well as the Barmen Declaration. He points out that during the long period in which he was dean of the theological faculty (1935–1943), Elert managed to stave off attempts of a Nazi takeover, that he protected professors and students alike from the state, and that Erlangen remained almost the only “intact” theological faculty under National Socialism. In Appendix 8, Beyschlag reprints Elert’s “Report regarding the deanship of the theological faculty of Erlangen 1935–43” (266–286). He wonders why this Report, which obviously clears Elert’s reputation, was officially suppressed for many years. He points out that, in spite of severe pressure over many years that as theological dean he must join the Nazi party or at least the German Christian Movement, Elert stubbornly refused throughout; that not a single Nazi was able to become a regular professor of theology at Erlangen; that Elert as dean and at considerable personal risk protected 40 or 50 students (including Jews) who had been denounced before the Gestapo (161–162; see also 279).

Beyschlag’s book is important for American readers for two reasons. (1) This book is an excellent resource for learning about the confessional Lutheran theology of Erlangen that dominated scholarship in Germany the past 150 years, a subject about which many younger theologians in America are not well informed. (2) Confessional Lutheranism, which has seriously declined since the death of Elert (a decline brought on partly by the dominance of Karl Barth, the Barmen Declaration, and the Union churches, with their attacks upon the Lutheran distinction of law and gospel), receives an important defense in Beyschlag. This book needs to be widely read in America. It is to be hoped that it will be made available in an English translation.

## NOTES

1. A balanced evaluation of Elert appears in the new monograph by the Icelander Sigurjon Arni Eyjolfsson, *Rechtfertigung und Schöpfung in der Theologie Werner Elerts*, no. 10 in new series of *Arbeiten zur Geschichte und Theologie des Luthertums* (Hannover: Luthertums Verlagshaus, 1994).

2. Since Werner Elert is of special interest to American readers, we present here his principal writings. The first major work of Werner Elert, written while he was still head of the Old Lutheran seminary in Breslau, appeared in 1921 under the title *Der Kampf um das Christentum*; this was an investigation and evaluation of recent philosophy and apologetics, mainly of the nineteenth century. In 1924 appeared the first edition of his *Die Lehre des Luthertums im Abriss*, which was translated and published by Charles M. Jacobs under the title *An Outline of Christian Doctrine*, 1927; the second German edition, 1926, was greatly revised and enlarged. Elert’s chief work was his two-volume *Morphologie des Luthertums*, 1931, of which

volume 1 was translated by Walter A. Hansen and published by Concordia Publishing House as *The Structure of Lutheranism*, 1962. The first edition of his dogmatics, *Der christliche Glaube*, appeared in 1940; parts of this have been published in English by Concordia Publishing House. His *Das christliche Ethos* followed in 1949 and was translated and published as *The Christian Ethos* by Carl Schindler, 1957. The last work that he prepared for publication was *Abendmahl und Kirchengemeinschaft in der alten Kirche, hauptsächlich des Ostens*, 1954, translated by Norman E. Nagel and published by Concordia Publishing House under the title *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*. This book interprets *communio sanctorum* in the Apostles' Creed as a neuter, i.e., as the participation in the sacraments, and it presents a spirited case for closed communion. An important essay by Elert, *Gesetz und Evangelium*, 1948, was translated and published by Edward H. Schroeder as *Law and Gospel*, 1967. Posthumously appeared *Der Ausgang der altkirchlichen Christologie*, 1957, edited by Maurer and Bergsträber.

3. The most important works of Althaus are as follows: *Die Prinzipien der deutschen reformierten Dogmatik im Zeitalter der aristotelischen Scholastik*, 1914. *Die letzten Dinge. Lehrbuch der Eschatologie*, 1922. *Grundriß der Ethik*, 1931; 2nd ed., 1953. *Die christliche Wahrheit. Lehrbuch der Dogmatik* 1947; 3rd ed. 1952. *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 1962. Translation by Robert C. Schultz, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 1966. *Die Ethik Martin Luthers*, 1965. Translation by Robert C. Schultz, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, 1972. Althaus also edited a commentary, *Das Neue Testament Deutsch*, 12 vols., for which he wrote *Der Brief an die Römer*, 1936; 7th ed. 1953. An important part of his work is also reflected in the volumes of collected sermons which he delivered as University Preacher at Erlangen.

4. An example is the attack by Arthur C. Cochrane, a Presbyterian professor of theology at a Lutheran seminary, *The Church's Confession under Hitler* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), in which he attacks confessional Lutheranism *en masse* and takes the intolerant position that only Reformed theology is allowable. He feels that everyone must accept the theology of Barth and the Barmen Declaration. More moderate are the criticisms of Robert P. Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus and Emanuel Hirsch* (New Haven: Yale, 1985). Totally irresponsible and intellectually weak are the attacks on Elert and Althaus by the Erlangen professor Berndt Hamm, "Schuld und Verstrickung der Kirche. Vorüberlegungen zu einer Darstellung der Erlanger Theologie in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus," in *Kirche und Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Wolfgang Stegemann (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1990), 11–55. Both Ericksen and Hamm lack what American historians call "a historical frame of reference"; instead, they judge and condemn past scholars on the basis of notions contemporary with our time. Ericksen, however, does not write with the malicious invective found in Hamm.

Lowell C. Green  
State University of New York at Buffalo  
Buffalo, New York

*Scripture and the Church: Selected Essays of Hermann Sasse.* Concordia Seminary Monograph Series No. 2. Edited by Jeffrey J. Kloha and Ronald R. Feuerhahn. St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1995. Hardcover.

☞ "Missouri is our last hope": Sasse repeatedly made this comment in his correspondence with Lutherans throughout the world. He was convinced that if any rebirth of world confessional Lutheranism was ever to occur, Missouri would play the central role. And conversely, if Missouri should cease to be a clear voice for confessional Lutheranism, all human hope for confessional revival would be lost. And thus, from the end of World War II until his death, Sasse did all within his power to bestir, rouse, prod, and encourage Missouri to rethink critically her confession and boldly confess it. It can safely be stated that Sasse is stirring

Missouri more today, now two decades after his death, than ever before. This volume of essays is evidence of that fact.

Locked out of Missouri (especially Concordia Seminary, St. Louis) after World War II, as a "new" and ecumenically-minded Missouri was emerging from her ethnic ghetto, Sasse was not held in high esteem by many because of his relentless criticism of the dogmatic compromises of Lutherans in the orbit of what would come to be the Lutheran World Federation. Missouri was basking in her newfound "prominence" in the Lutheran world, and Concordia Seminary was gaining academic prominence in such circles just as her confessional resolve began to dwindle. As Missouri (and all Lutherans the world over) struggled with the question of the nature of the Holy Scriptures, Sasse put his hand to the task of defining a particularly christological and Lutheran understanding of the same. This volume of essays contains seven significant essays by Sasse on the nature of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. And a very significant postscript by Kloha, "Hermann Sasse Confesses the Doctrine de Scriptura Sacra," places before us a great deal of the history of Sasse's development on the doctrine of Scripture.

The editors and Concordia Seminary are to be commended for simply placing the material before us, including the "controversial" Letters to Lutheran Pastors, numbers 14, "On the Doctrine De Scriptura Sacra" (1950), and 16 ("What does Luther Have to Say to Us on the Inerrancy of Scripture?" (1950)). These letters caused quite a stir in the circles that had been listening to Sasse's poignant critique of Lutheranism and its loss of confessional resolve in the wake of EKD, EKID, and the LWF. Here Sasse limited inerrancy to the theological content of the Scriptures only. But Kloha quite successfully demonstrates that Sasse's view of Scripture did in fact undergo change in the face of the Australian union negotiations (between the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia) of the 1950s and in view of the larger critique of other confessional Lutherans the world over. Sasse clearly moved from a position of limited inerrancy, as though one could separate human and divine words in holy Scripture, to a position of complete inerrancy, that is, that all words of Scripture are indeed God's words.

Kloha quite freely and fairly notes that this does not mean that Sasse came to identify his position completely with that of Missouri or seventeenth-century Lutheran Orthodoxy (422). He certainly did not. Sasse came to confess the plenary inspiration of Scripture, but this for him never excluded viewing Genesis 1–11 as somehow less than history, rejecting a literal six-day creation, acceptance in some sense of the source hypothesis for the origin of the Pentateuch, unwillingness to forthrightly preclude some form of the evolutionary theory regarding the origin of man, multiple authorship of Isaiah, or viewing large numbers in various Old Testament accounts such as that of the Exodus as symbolic. (On nearly all these points see Sasse's *Sacra Scriptura: Studien zur Lehre von der Heiligen Schrift*, 85–112.) All these were views one can find in writings of Sasse *after* his change. And all these matters are serious matters for the classical Lutheran. Quite often on such matters I simply find Sasse unconvincing. One does not escape the charge of obscurantism or, for that matter, fundamentalism, by asserting a real Adam and a real fall, all in a rather nebulously surreal and less-than-historical "garden."

Nevertheless, Sasse's relentless effort to point out the christocentricity of Scripture dare not be ignored. As this volume of essays demonstrates, Sasse had a prescient realization of how thoroughly the American context had and would affect Missouri. He also clearly saw that in the midst of Missouri's battles of the 1960s and 1970s, maintaining inerrancy would hardly guarantee Lutheranism. And he was correct. It has been all too painful for those who struggled against the gospel-destroying effects of historicism to pause from the struggle twenty years later, only to behold that many of those with whom they had fought shoulder to shoulder for the cause are churchless fundamentalists and inerrantists arguing that substance is divorceable from style, arguing against frequent communion, against a high view of the holy office, against private confession and absolution, for grape juice in place of wine in communion, and equating liturgy with adiaphora. This all comes out clearly in Sasse's "Confession and Theology in the Missouri Synod," included in the volume. Sasse saw it all coming:

If I read in the report on your convention of New York the petitions addressed to presidency and convention concerning doctrinal matters I wonder why just the questions on Genesis play such a role and not other problems, as e.g. the terrible weakening of the doctrine of the sacraments and the weakening of the sola gratia and the theology of evangelism and stewardship. What your church needs is Walther's humble confession: "We are no longer what we were." (Sasse to President Harms, December 13, 1967. Letter in possession of the reviewer.)

The volume contains seven essays on the church, the holy ministry, the church's fellowship, and the sacrament. These essays and many others like them are gaining an ever-increasing audience among young theologians in Missouri. Who could have known twenty-five years ago that today debates about inerrancy would elicit nothing but a yawn in all quarters of the church? Yet those debates were consequential. Twenty years ago Missouri reasserted the very idea of dogma. If Scripture is word of God in any real sense, then it is the sure foundation for church dogma. This was much like the confessional revival of the nineteenth century where from the ranks of pietism with its authoritative Bible one after another theologian discovered ecclesiastical dogma, the confession of the church, the holy office, the sacrament (Löhe, Walther, and others). Now in Missouri a younger generation (so aptly represented in the pages of *LOGIA*) is rediscovering the dogma of the Lutheran Church, and beyond that, rediscovering that the dogma of the church, the gospel itself, cannot but be expressed in the church's liturgy. Said Sasse,

A liturgical renewal is impossible unless the church is prepared to take seriously the doctrine which is witnessed to and sung in the liturgy. Liturgy and dogma belong together; you cannot have the one without the other, Dogma represents the doctrinal content—and therefore the truth content—of the liturgy. (It is for this reason that the liturgy can help men achieve a new understanding of the doctrines and the creeds of the church.) We in Germany have discovered in the last generation that there can be a worship revival

only as a concomitant to a revival of interest in doctrine ("Liturgy and Lutheranism," 40).

Writes Sasse, "there can be no worship revival without a rediscovery of the Real Presence" (42). From the essays on the church, the office, and the sacrament in this volume, Sasse could well be called the theologian of the real presence. To read these essays is to be taken back to the basics, back to baptism, absolution, supper, to the office that dispenses these gifts, to the church born by such gifts, and to the fellowship produced by these gifts.

Let us all don sack cloth and ashes and chant responsively Sasse's "The Lord's Supper in the Life of the Church," learning once again what Luther meant when he stated, "The sacrament is the gospel." Let us be troubled by Sasse into examining our bibliology, that it be as christocentric as that of Luther. Let us be struck to the heart by reading "Confession and Theology in the Missouri Synod" as we realize how much of the genuine Lutheran Confession we have lost. Let us subject our sacramental piety and practice to Sasse's "Consecration and Real Presence" to see if what we confess of Christ's body and blood is borne out by our practice.

Such a collection of essays emanating from "our last hope" may give indication that there, there is hope.

Matthew Harrison  
Zion Lutheran Church  
Fort Wayne, Indiana

*Matthew.* By G. J. Albrecht and M. J. Albrecht. The People's Bible Series. Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1996. 445 pages.

❖ The People's Bible Series is, like all series, uneven. Some authors provide concise, insightful commentary; others do little more than restate the text in their own longer, duller words. The Matthew volume will, in my opinion, prove to be the crown jewel of the series. It is, at 450 pages, long for The People's Bible Series, but it is long for good reason.

Matthew's Gospel, by its very nature, requires more background information than other books of the New Testament. Rooted in the Hebrew world and grounded in Old Testament prophecy as Matthew is, much background information is needed if the lay readers for whom this series is intended are to understand what is being said. The authors of this volume provide that information as concisely as possible, but fully enough to give the reader the necessary background.

The first eighteen chapters were written by G. Jerome Albrecht before his death. The work was then taken up by his son Michael J. Albrecht, who completed chapters 19–28. Michael researched his father's sermon files so that his work would reflect his father's insights. The work is not totally seamless, however. One difference is that more reference is made to the Greek in the last part of the volume than in the first. When this is done it is clear, concise, insightful, and not presented in any way that might be construed as anything but helpful to readers, whether they understand Greek or not. Another difference is that the last section of the volume displays a greater reluctance on the part of the author to present inference with the same authority as facts stated clearly in the text. "Probably," "apparently," "possibly," and similar qualifiers



are more frequent in chapters 19–28 than in 1–18. There are, however, fewer inferences presented as biblical fact in the first part than in most other commentaries, and the qualifiers in the last part are presented with such skill that they do not detract from the power of the writing.

The writing moves along at a lively pace that will hold the reader's interest, even in a cover-to-cover reading (the only commentary I have found which did that for me). It need not only be a reference work to pull down and look at when specific passages are in question.

Its greatest strength is that this is a thoroughly biblical and Lutheran commentary. It is biblical in that it draws its conclusions and makes its comments only in the light of the total biblical witness, both Old Testament and New. It is Lutheran in that it is first christological, then sacramental, and even liturgical. It brings to mind Luther's comment in his preface to the Old Testament: "If you would interpret well and confidently, set Christ before you, for he is the man to whom it all applies, every bit of it" (AE 35: 247). The sacraments are expounded whenever appropriate, and the liturgy referred to frequently. How refreshing that is in a time when the institution of the sacrament of holy baptism at Matthew 28:19 is increasingly expounded as "The Great Commission" without reference to the sacrament at all.

This commentary, though not perfect, is a good example of proper, Lutheran, biblical interpretation. It would serve well as an introduction to the Bible for Christians who would like to learn how to take the Scriptures seriously. It is an especially good introduction to the New Testament, but the necessary discussion of Old Testament allusions, quotations, and prophecies make it a good introduction to a Luther-like understanding of the christocentric nature of the Old Testament as well.

In my opinion, no Lutheran pastor should be without this volume on his shelf, whether or not he owns or will own any of the other volumes of The People's Bible Series.

*John M. Moe*  
*St. John's Lutheran Church-Rich Valley*  
*Rosemount, Minnesota*

*The Schmalkald Articles: Luther's Theological Testament.* By William R. Russell. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995. xiv + 192 pages. Hardcover. \$30.00.

Of the various confessional documents contained in the Book of Concord, the Smalcald Articles (SA) have been the most neglected in scholarly studies. William Russell, campus pastor at North Dakota State University, offers the first book-length study of the SA available in English.

Russell's central thesis is that the SA represents Luther at his most essential. Russell provides ample evidence, both from internal and external sources, that Luther considered the SA to be an extremely important statement of his theology. Luther wrote this document at a time when he was convinced that his death was near. He was having severe problems with kidney stones and apparently also had experienced heart attacks. Elector John Frederick, who ordered the preparation of this document, was also aware of Luther's poor health and wrote:

It will be highly necessary for Dr. Martin to prepare his basis and opinion with the divine scriptures, indicating all the articles upon which he has written, preached and taught. He should do this for the sake of the council, but also in view of his final departure from this world to the almighty judgment of God. He should indicate what he thinks, maintains, and where he remains in order not to offend the divine majesty—the points we must maintain without regard to body or possessions, peace or conflict (36–37).

The Elector was anxious to have something for the church council that was expected to be held in Mantua in 1537. As we know, a church council did not meet until the year 1545, in Trent, and lasted until 1564. As far as Luther himself was concerned, the council was fast approaching and the Lutherans needed something to take with them upon which they could stand and from which they could argue their case before the pope and the Roman Catholic theologians. Luther therefore prepared this document for a meeting of the German estates in the city of Smalcald that was held in February of 1537.

In light of the above, it is noteworthy that the SA was not adopted by the various German estates that had gathered in Smalcald. Russell offers three reasons why this was so. First, Luther's health prevented him from attending the meeting and thus he was unable to present the document himself. Russell speculates that had Luther attended, the articles would have been discussed. Second, Elector John Frederick considered the SA to be a theological statement, not a statement of political rulers as was the Augsburg Confession, which had been presented to the Emperor at the meeting of the Diet of the Holy Roman Empire in 1530. Third, Russell believes that since the Smalcald gathering decided not to attend a church council, they did not consider the SA necessary to take up. Luther, it seems, was completely unaware that his articles had not been adopted, for in 1538 he was still operating under the incorrect assumption that the SA had been formally adopted by the political states in Smalcald. Russell sides with Friedrich Bente, who asserts in his historical introduction that the SA was adopted de facto since the majority of the theologians gathered at Smalcald did subscribe to the SA, and the SA did reflect the views of the majority of the political rulers at Smalcald. The SA was not actually published until the spring of 1538, after Luther had prepared a longer preface and made some changes to the text proper. It was incorporated into the 1563 Brunswick *Corpus Doctrinae*, and then made a part of the Book of Concord in 1580.

Russell provides an ongoing dialogue with Volz's and Ulbrich's *Urkunden und Aktenstücke zur Geschichte von Martin Luthers Schmalkaldischen Artikeln*. In many respects this book is a reaction, both in agreement and disagreement, to this work. The footnotes reveal that Russell has engaged in a thorough study of pertinent secondary sources, impressing the reader with his desire to anchor his comments within the stream of scholarship on the various issues that are raised in the SA. He walks through the SA, noting the key theological concepts Luther raises and providing appropriate references from secondary sources that illuminate the points he is making.

Russell's discussion of Luther's assertion in the SA that the pope is the antichrist is objective, and therefore useful. Russell refrains



from grinding an ecumenical ax at this point, and thus permits Luther's position on this matter to stand without intrusive editorial commentary. Russell disagrees with the commonly expressed view that the SA merely reflects Luther in a pugnacious mood. Of course, the state of Luther's health can be used to support the position that his polemical tone in the SA is not to be taken too seriously. Russell, however, states that even if the harsh remarks made by Luther about the pope do reflect some personal emotional frustrations with the progress of the German Reformation, simply to dismiss Luther's comments about the pope as antichrist

risks missing what Luther (and those closest to him) thought to be the main issue at stake in their efforts to reform the church. For Luther, the gospel of the forgiveness of sin by grace alone, apart from works of the law, is the distinctive feature of the Christian proclamation. Any theology (be it Roman Catholic, Anabaptist, Reformed, or Evangelical) that violated this *sine qua non* of the church's message was open to the charge of being labeled by Luther as "anti-Christian" (95).

Russell is careful to observe that Luther's discussion on the Lord's Supper was purposefully concrete. Luther's realistic description that "the bread and wine in the supper are the true body and blood of Christ" was controversial (104). By using such a description, Luther moved a step beyond the language of the Wittenberg Concord of 1536, an agreement that had been signed by representatives from both southern and northern Germany. Russell indicates that the WC was meant to be a compromise statement, noting that the WC was "rather ambiguous at the very point it was supposed to clarify" (105). Luther purposefully avoids the slippery word *with* when discussing the bread/wine and body/blood connection in the Lord's Supper, choosing instead to remain with the much stronger copulative verb *is*—our Lord's language. Luther's wording apparently did not please Melancthon, who was afraid that this matter would cause controversy at Smalcald. He went so far as to recommend that the estates pledge themselves to "the Augsburg Confession and the Wittenberg Concord" (106). We see here a clear foreshadowing of Melancthon's later compromising position on the Lord's Supper, which took full form only after Luther's death. In light of the impending ecumenical agreements between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and a number of Reformed churches, Luther's position in the SA is all the more relevant to our present day and age. Will Luther have the last word in the largest Lutheran church in America on the subject of our Lord's presence in the eucharistic bread and wine, or will Melancthon and his heirs?

Russell's book is actually quite brief, with the text proper taking up only 116 pages. The rest of the book is devoted to three appendices. Appendix A is Russell's translation of the Smalcald Articles. This reviewer is given to understand that Russell's translation, with editorial modifications, will be used in the new Book of Concord translation now in progress. Appendix B is a list of names and terms from the age of the Lutheran Reformation. Appendix C is a topical index to Luther's works and Lutheran confessional

writings, indicating where an interested reader might find other Luther documents on a wide range of theological topics.

In light of the fact that this book is the only one in English devoted to the SA, one hesitates to be critical. But it needs to be said that the book is somewhat disjointed and repetitive. Key themes and concepts are repeated within a short amount of space. This is probably due in part to the genesis of the book as a series of lectures to students at Luther Northwestern Seminary as part of a regular gathering called "Friends of the Lutheran Confessions." It is unclear if this book is meant for the novice to Luther studies or the more advanced reader of the Confessions. It would appear that the latter is the case.

In spite of these minor criticisms, this book will prove useful to student, interested layman, and pastor alike. It is refreshing to have a study of Luther that does not attempt a trendy deconstruction of Luther, or a bizarre reinterpretation in order to gain the attention of academia. This book is a service to the church and reflects the pastoral concerns that are as real today as they were when Luther first penned the SA. While some may disagree with the extent to which Russell asserts the uniqueness of the SA, it is difficult, in light of the evidence that he marshals in this book, to disagree with the conclusion:

Given the mature age of the reformer, the theology asserted in the SA is a rather unique summary of Luther's entire theological program, filled throughout with a sense of personal exigency born of the keen awareness of his approaching death (58).

Paul T. McCain  
St. Louis, Missouri

*Readings in Christian Ethics*. Edited by J. Phillip Wogaman and Douglas M. Strong. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996. 388 pages. Paperback.

❖ Ethics is the study of the shape of the soul. Through it we are invited to engage in the exercise promoted by the inscription carved above the Delphic oracle: *know yourself*. Only when we understand that what we do flows from who we are—what shapes our thought, what are our goals and aspirations, what we value and why we value it—can we understand the decisions we make as we translate who we are into what we do.

The study of Christian ethics, then, is the study of the Christian soul, not a simplistic exploration of what Christians ought to do, but a seeking to understand what shapes the thought, goals, and values of those who seek to walk as Christ walked and to fulfill the law of love as they proclaim the Gospel of Christ. Thus understood, the study of Christian ethics is, in the first instance, an historical discipline. The editors of *Readings in Christian Ethics* emphasize this point in their introduction when they write (viii):

Much of the difficulty regarding the shallow and uninformed ethical thinking of our day is related to the historical amnesia of our culture. It is a commonplace observation, for instance, that Americans and other Westerners only live for (and think about) the present. Rather than drawing upon the past as a

resource for our moral deliberations, we approach present-day crises bereft of the lessons of yesteryear—a situation that contributes to the problem of an ungrounded ethic.

In large measure *Readings in Christian Ethics* attempts to fill in the void caused by our historical amnesia by providing a selection of significant historical writings that illustrate and document the way in which Christians through the ages have thought about how we live as we walk with Christ.

We also recognize that all ethical reflection, like all theological reflection, is contextual in nature. Because ethical reflection involves the application of the universal morality of the divine law and the life of Christ to a specific situation in the life of the Church and the believer, a full appreciation of the selections in this work requires some background understanding of the philosophical, theological, and social contexts in which they are written. The brief introductions at the beginning of the five major sections (Early Christianity, Medieval Christianity, the Reformation Era, Christian Ethics in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, and Christian Ethics in the Twentieth Century) and at the beginning of each selection do not provide an adequate background for understanding the context of these pieces. This is not a major flaw, however, if one accepts that this text is designed as a companion volume to Wogaman's *Christian Ethics: A Historical Introduction* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993). Not having reviewed Wogaman's companion volume to this text, I am unable to comment on its suitability as an introduction to the contexts that frame the various writings which comprise this volume. Some such work, however, will be required to obtain the greatest benefit for the reader who does not already possess a good background in these areas.

As for the selections themselves, the excerpts provided throughout the volume do a good job of illustrating the views of their respective authors. Where non-English sources are used, standard translations are employed. The selections are organized chronologically, corresponding to the historical perspective of this work and its companion volume. This organization would have made it a bit difficult to find discussions of particular topics, but the authors have provided a very useful index. On the whole, the material is accessible and well presented.

In such a collection of works there is always room to quibble about the items chosen for inclusion and those that ought to have been. In this case one's satisfaction with the volume will probably depend upon which era one is examining, and—especially in the case of the twentieth century—one's theological perspective. For the early and medieval periods the choices are very good. For the Reformation era and the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the choices are adequate, though the theologically and socially conservative elements of Christianity in the nineteenth century are somewhat under-represented.

The treatment of Christian ethical thought in the twentieth century (the largest section of the book) is a significant disappointment. There are excellent choices from Barth, Bonhoeffer, and a variety of papal encyclicals. Beyond these, however, the bulk of the readings reflect a preoccupation with the concerns of liberal Christianity. Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel are well represented, as are the issues of race, liberation theology, and feminist

concerns. All of these certainly belong in such a volume, as they do represent one strand of Christian ethical thought in this century.

The book is marred not by what it includes, but by its omissions. Unfortunately, very significant aspects of Christian ethical reflection in our century are not represented at all. For example, there is nothing from the fundamentalist tradition, nothing from Billy Sunday and the abolitionist movement, and nothing representing the evangelical engagement with the social order that has become so significant a concern in American Christianity over the last twenty years. Even less excusable, there is not a single item that reflects the perspective of the pro-life movement in the abortion debate, which has become one of the central foci of Christian ethical reflection in America during the last quarter of our century. Such omissions are inexcusable, and leave the treatment of the twentieth century seriously flawed.

This is not a book for the shortcut ethnician, the person who is looking for a reason to be for or against something. It is a book for those who are prepared to invest the time and the mental effort required for serious reflection on the principles and methods that have informed the way in which Christians express morality in their lives and actions. As a collection of writings it is good, though not great. It would serve well (with some augmentation in the nineteenth and especially the twentieth centuries) as a sourcebook of primary writings for a course in the history of Christian ethics. The index makes it adequate as a source for investigating what Christians have thought about specific subjects, though no one subject is explored in great depth. It is a good choice for a pastor who wants to explore the history of Christian ethical thought, as long as one can accept the omissions described above. The focus on the ethical thought of liberal Christianity in our own century also make it a good choice for anyone looking to develop a background in that area.

David L. Adams

LCMS Office of Government Information  
Washington, DC

## BRIEFLY NOTED

*In the Face of God: The Dangers and Delights of Spiritual Intimacy.* By Michael Horton. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1996. Hardcover. 241 pages.

✦ Michael Horton, editor of *Modern Reformation* magazine and author of several books advocating the Reformation alternative to American Evangelicalism, addresses contemporary “spirituality” from the perspective of the “theology of the cross.” Drawing on Philip Lee's *Against the Protestant Gnostics*, Horton spots the “neo-gnostic” character of much of what is called “spirituality” in Evangelical circles. Such notables as Charles Stanley, C. Peter Wagner, Kenneth Copeland, and Clark Pinnock are measured by the standards of classical Reformation theology and found lacking. While Horton is a Calvinist, he writes with great appreciation of Luther's *theologia crucis* and sees it as a vital

weapon against the “ladder theology” constructed by those “who want to get close to God.” Once again Horton has proved himself to be a brilliant apologist with keen insights into the culture of Evangelicalism. *In the Face of God: The Dangers of Spiritual Intimacy* should be in every Lutheran congregation’s library, and it would make a great text for an adult Bible class.

*Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism.* By Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996. Paper. 317 pages.

✧ It is not possible to understand American Evangelicalism apart from the work of Charles Grandison Finney (1792–1875). It was Finney who asserted: “A revival of religion is not a miracle . . . or dependent on a miracle, in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means,” in his *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*. Hambrick-Stowe has provided readers with a biography of Finney that is sympathetically written, giving insights into Finney’s rejection of Calvinism and his rootage in frontier revivalism. As the spirit of Finney lives on in the technique-oriented evangelisms that have found their way into Lutheran churches, Hambrick-Stowe’s telling of Finney’s story is a significant contribution to those who are concerned with confessional integrity in the American context.

*Calendar: Christ’s Time for the Church.* By Laurence Hull Stookey. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996. Paper. 189 pages.

✧ Stookey, a United Methodist professor of preaching and worship at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC, has authored a popular guide to the Christian year as “Christ’s time” and, as such, it embraces both past (*anamnesis*) and future (*prolepsis*) in the liturgy.

While *Calendar: Christ’s Time for the Church* provides very little in the way of the historical roots of the church year, the book is helpful in identifying key themes in the calendar as these themes radiate out of the central festival of Easter and are reflected in the lectionary.

*Christian Worship in North America—A Retrospective: 1955–1995.* By James F. White. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1997. Paper. 318 pages.

✧ Organized in five sections (history, liturgy and justice, liturgical architecture, pastoral, and pedagogic), James White has assembled previously published essays that have “both recorded liturgical history and have helped to shape it” (vii). Thus *Christian History in North America—A Retrospective: 1955–1995* is not a systematic narrative of the last forty years of liturgical history, but a selective and often provocative glimpse into particular issues that have engaged liturgical scholars ranging from inclusive language to church architecture, eucharistic prayers to evangelism.

*A New Song for the Lord: Faith in Christ and Liturgy Today.* By Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. Translated by Martha M. Matesich. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996. Paper. 178 pages.

✧ The Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith writes out of a concern that much of the Liturgical Movement has given to a search for worship forms with insufficient attention to what the liturgy says about God, Christ, and the church. Ratzinger sees the liturgy in light of christology:

Our entire search for the criteria of liturgical renewal ultimately culminates in one question: Who do people say that the Son of Man is? (Matt.16:14 ff.). . . . Only a close connection with Christology can make possible a productive development of the theology and practice of liturgy (x).

The nine essays in this book are engaging for Lutherans who wish to think about the liturgy theologically, as Ratzinger tackles questions that we also must face. Commenting on culture, Ratzinger observes, “Faith itself creates culture and does not just carry it along like a piece of clothing added from the outside” (100). Chapters 6–8 deal with the place of music in the church and are particularly pointed. For example,

In a form we could not have imagined a generation ago music has become today the decisive vehicle of a counter-religion and thus a showplace for the discerning of spirits. On the one hand, since rock music seeks redemption by way of liberation from the personality and its responsibility, it fits very precisely into the anarchistic ideas of freedom that are manifesting themselves more openly all over the world. But that is also exactly why such music is diametrically opposed to the Christian notions of redemption and freedom, indeed their true contradiction. Music of this type must be excluded from the Church, not for aesthetic reasons, not out of reactionary stubbornness, not because of historical rigidity, but because of its very nature (124).

Ratzinger moves in the direction of an understanding of liturgy as *Gottesdienst*:

Liturgy presupposes—as we have seen—that the heavens have been opened; only if this is the case is there liturgy at all. If the heavens are not opened, then whatever liturgy was is reduced to role playing and, in the end, to a trivial pursuit of congregational self-fulfillment in which nothing really happens. The decisive factor, therefore, is the primacy of Christology. Liturgy is God’s work or it does not exist at all (133).

JTP

# LOGIA Forum

## SHORT STUDIES AND COMMENTARY

### AN ARBITRARY PICTURE OF PHARISAISM

*Pharisaism and Christianity by Hugo Odeberg, translated from the Swedish *Fariseism och kristendom* by John M. Moe, published by Concordia Publishing House in 1964. This excerpt comes from pages 14–15.*

Another way of approaching the difference between Christianity and Pharisaism is the following. It is admitted that this antithesis does in fact exist. The fundamental Christian principles are emphasized and an attempt is made to define them precisely. Thereupon an ethical and a religious view is constructed which forms the direct opposite of the Christian view which has just been defined and the conclusion is drawn that this is precisely what the Pharisaic view must have been, since Pharisaism was the antithesis of Christianity. However, the Pharisaism thus constructed is shown, upon closer examination, to be the very opposite of Pharisaism. Here we really deal with a case entirely analogous to the one described earlier. What is depicted as Christianity is not Christianity but Pharisaism.

How are we to account for this? Clearly by the fact that the Pharisaical ways of thinking have become natural for us without our being aware that they are Pharisaical. And what appears to us natural and reasonable is assumed—if one highly esteems the name of Christianity—as something self-evident in Christianity. We cannot and will not suppose—if we regard Christianity as the supreme religion—that the ideals set up by Christianity can be different from those we set up as the reasonable and the best. The only error is that these ideals have not derived from Chris-

tianity but from Christianity's antithesis: from Pharisaism. The result is that we confuse Christianity with Pharisaism and, while professing to be Christians, actually espouse Pharisaism.

The only proper method of establishing the true difference between Christianity and Pharisaism is obviously that we seek to obtain as accurate a knowledge of both as we possibly can, and it is especially important that we gain a correct knowledge of the doctrines and fundamental principles of Pharisaism. *A true knowledge of Pharisaism is of fundamental importance for the protection of the unique character of Christianity.*

### BIG WORDS FOR LITTLE CHILDREN

Sanctimonious. Eau de toilette. Commode. Frappé. Hideous. Banshee. These are not the kind of words we would expect many children to know—or spell. (I myself had to crack open the dictionary to check “commode” and “frappé.”) These very words, however, were heard in the first fifteen minutes of *Casper*, a cartoon I sat down to watch with my sons last Saturday. This program was rated “Y,” which meant that it was suitable for children under seven.

I watched this cartoon from a rather different perspective than my sons. Not only did I wonder about the propriety of them watching ghosts being frappéed in a commode, but I also wondered what was going on in their minds since they hadn't the slightest idea what such words meant. Did they come to associate these words with what they saw—or did they pass through one ear and out the other, making no concrete connection with the glassy-eyed, mesmerized gaze into the boob tube?

Schools in general have been dumbing down the curriculum for the children. The latest thinking in the elementary education field is that children should be given *only five* vocabulary words since studies have shown that most children can't remember more than that. And there are scores of Christian education pundits who would dumb down the liturgy and hymnody of our church, espousing children's sermons and musical ditties with the belief that such childishness is appropriate for children. It is not.

Our children may run into some big words in our hymns and liturgy that they don't understand. We need not feel com-

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pelled to present an etymological lecture about every word encountered. A passing attempt will suffice while our children are growing into their vocabulary. In time, they will be taught what such “difficult” words mean instead of being programmed to avoid the big words, letting them fall into the oblivion of disuse.

Words can be received and stored up before the meaning of them becomes known. The subsequent knowing, especially regarding the words of faith, will not be achieved solely by experience, intuition, or rationalization. If they were, there would be little left for the Holy Spirit to do. We might well prefer that our children not learn words by associating them with the antics of animated characters, but by having them associated with the living Word of God. Thus they will come to know and love “big” words—words judged to be big not because of the number of syllables, but because of the wealth of meaning and life conveyed therein. Justification. Expiation. Incarnate. Propitiation. Christocentric. Forensic. Sanctification.

JAB

## FACE THE MUSAK

*Leonard J. Seidel's book Face the Music: Contemporary Church Music on Trial (Springfield, VA: Grace Unlimited Publications, 1988) offers some interesting points for discussion. The following points are found on pages 18–19 and 22–23 of this work.*

The controversy regarding proper music is not new. In the early Greek civilization, Plato and Aristotle were dealing with the same problems. Plato understood the power that music had in affecting the lives and nation of the Greek people. He wrote in his *Republic*: “The introduction of a new kind of music must be shunned as imperiling the whole state: since styles of music are never disturbed without affecting the most important political institutions” [Plato, *Republic*, 424c].

Aristotle also spoke of music’s power: “Music directly represents the passions or states of the soul—gentleness, anger, courage, temperance . . . if one listens to the wrong kind of music he will become the wrong kind of person; but conversely, if he listens to the right kind of music he will tend to become the right kind of person” [Aristotle, *Politics*, 8, 1430] . . .

The Musak corporation has cashed in on the mind-controlling aspects of music. You can’t miss it in your doctor’s office, the mall, or in an elevator. They know that music is not neutral, for they have declared that “unlike drugs, music affects us psychologically and physiologically without invading the bloodstream. The subtle influence of music has been harnessed in programs providing controlled stimulus progression for people at work and play” [Dr. J. Keenan, *Research Notes*, Musak Corp., 1976]. No wonder Musak can claim that your department store sales will be considerably higher if you are using the right music!

Intelligent composers and arrangers of music believe that your emotions and thought patterns can be triggered and manipulated by music alone. The effectiveness of those who

write music is directly related to an understanding of music theory. Serious, eternal music is written by those who have done their homework in the area of music theory. If music is neutral, then there is no reason for a music student to study long hours analyzing the works of the masters to see what and how they were communicating through their craft and skills.

## CATECHESIS, CONFIRMATION, AND CLOSED COMMUNION

Catechesis, confirmation, and closed communion are linked together in such a way that there is not to be one without the other. The issue of closed communion continues to be a topic of discussion in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and the range of opinions varies almost with every individual. Closed communion, however, is not based on individual opinion. Rather, it is to be understood in relation to catechesis and confirmation.

Matthew 28:16–20 is one of the greatest catechesis texts in all of Scripture. This is due to the fact that not one but two different words describing catechetical activities are used: μαθητεύσατε (vs. 19) and διδάσκοντες (vs. 20). The issue here is not in understanding the differences of the two words but in seeing their similarities. Matthew 28:16–20 shows that evangelism is so linked to catechesis that there is no possible way to do proper evangelism without catechesis. Evangelizing involves catechesis that leads to baptism as well as obedience to all things whatsoever Jesus taught his apostles. On the basis of Matthew 28:19–20 there could even be evidence for a biblically prescribed order for initiation of people into the church. The order is as follows: (1) catechesis (vs. 19), (2) baptism (vs. 19), (3) catechesis (vs. 20), (4) obedience (vs. 20). This order has been preserved in our churches, for both infants and adults. They are baptized before confirmation, with the difference that usually infants have to wait years to be confirmed and adults only moments after their baptism.

Though Matthew 28:16–20 does not explicitly speak of confirmation, it does implicitly in the word “obey” (τήρειν). Though the debate about confirmation is usually limited to whether it is to be seen, on the one hand, as a reaffirmation of baptismal vows or, on the other, as that which admits to first communion, there is yet another issue that gets closer to the heart of the problem. The deeper issue is the relation of confirmation to catechesis.

According to Matthew 28:16–20 it is necessary to catechize and baptize. It is also necessary that the catechumens obey all things whatsoever they are taught according to the teachings of Jesus that are given to us through the words of the apostles in Scripture. Confirmation is the rite by which the church affirms that people have been properly catechized, and that on the basis of the catechumens’ confession, they are in fellowship with the church and are thereby to commune with us. Confirmation provides the opportunity for the person to confess that he believes all things whatsoever he has been taught in our

church and what is confessed at our altar. If a person does not confess this, then he is not really in fellowship with us and should not commune with us.

One of the main reasons for having closed communion, which limits reception to only those in the Missouri Synod or those of other church bodies in fellowship with us, is that it assures us that we indeed all believe the same thing not only about the sacrament, but about all things whatsoever Jesus has taught us through the apostolic Scriptures. The practice of closed communion is not merely a congregational practice but is precisely a denominational practice. This recognizes the universality of the church as well as unity of doctrine and practice beyond the congregational level.

The reason there are denominations, even denominations of Lutherans, is that there are differences of teaching and practice among them. It is true that denominations are man-made and are not taught or commanded in the Scriptures. But it is equally true that there are denominations for divine reasons, for it is on the basis of divine doctrine and practice that orthodox denominations are established separately from heterodox denominations that teach and practice that which is against whatsoever Jesus has taught. If there are denominations that teach and practice that people earn their own salvation, or that there should be women pastors, or that Christ is not really present in the sacrament, all we can know is that the people in those denominations are in fellowship with those teachings by their association with them and especially by their reception of the Eucharist there.

Individuals in those denominations might not in fact believe what they are being taught, but we as a church body cannot simply take them at their word if we in our confession have not had an opportunity to catechize them properly. For example, no Baptist will deny that Jesus says, "This is my body," though Baptist teaching says "is" means "represents." An inconsistent Baptist individual may even claim to believe that Jesus is really present in the bread and wine, but just because he says he understands the real presence doesn't mean he really does, especially since he has not been properly catechized by us in our denomination.

The decision to commune those who are not in pulpit and altar fellowship with us must not be left up to the individual who is visiting our church. Ultimately, the pastor has the responsibility of making sure that there is true unity of faith in the communion of the altar at which he presides. Only he will have to give an account to God for the way he has conducted his ministry (Hebrews 13:7–24). Any parish pastor who has taken seriously his ministry and responsibility to his people knows that it is a heavy burden to commune those that he thinks should not be communing at his altar. He also knows that it is wrong to relinquish this responsibility to each individual who desires to commune at his altar.

Ultimately, denominational fellowship is an issue of different hermeneutics between denominations. Hermeneutics has to do with how each denomination understands the teachings of the Bible and the church. According to 1 John 5:20, a hermeneutic is a mindset or a way of thinking, and since a way of thinking is determined by what a person is taught through

catechesis, it is not too hard to see that the relation between catechesis, confirmation, and closed communion cannot be separated. Orthodox catechesis gives the right hermeneutic, confirmation affirms the hermeneutic, and closed communion is the practice of the hermeneutic. Where closed communion is not practiced in our churches, the need for confirmation is diminished and the necessity of catechesis is destroyed.

*Robert D. Macina  
Greeley, Colorado*

## DIVINE SERVICE, HOLY MISSION

*On February 7, 1997, Opus Dei and Students in Mission, two special focus student groups on the campus of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, sponsored a Symposium on Worship and Mission. Speakers included Dr. David Luecke, Rev. Robert Scudieri, and LOGIA Book Review editor, Rev. John T. Pless.*

*The following is Pastor Pless's opening statement in the dialogue. Cassette recordings of the symposium may be ordered from the media services department of Concordia Seminary, 801 DeMun Ave., St. Louis, MO 63105.*

In addressing the topic "The Divine Service and the Mission of the Church," I would suggest that we pay attention to three fundamental questions: (1) How is the liturgy understood theologically? (2) Are we sufficiently attentive to the ecclesial culture of North America? And finally, (3) What is the character of the community into which we seek to evangelize unbelievers?

*How is the liturgy understood theologically?* Augsburg VII provides our starting point: "For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word." Note that the Confession does not speak of a generic presence of word and sacrament as establishing the unity of the church, but rather, "The Gospel being preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it," and sacraments "administered in accordance with the divine Word."

Preaching and sacraments require form. Freedom from rites and ceremonies instituted by men does not imply that the question of form is neutral. What Elert says regarding Luther's liturgical thought is also applicable to the Lutheran Symbols:

No matter how strongly [Luther] emphasizes Christian freedom in connection with the form of this rite [the Sacrament of the Altar], no matter how much he deviates from the form handed down at the end of the Middle Ages, no matter how earnestly he warns against the belief that external customs could commend us to God, still there are certain ceremonial elements that he, too, regarded as indispensable (*The Structure of Lutheranism*, 325).

Lutherans are concerned with the form of the liturgy from the perspective of the confession of the means of grace. In con-

trast to Rome's claim that liturgy is sacrifice or, more recently, "the work of the people," and the Reformed, who understand liturgy as the vehicle for the church to ascribe praise to the majesty of a sovereign God, Lutherans see liturgy as God's work, *Gottesdienst*, divine service. Thus Article xxiv of the Apology insists that the liturgy is the Lord's public service to his people (Ap xxiv, 79–83) and that "the term 'liturgy' squares well with the ministry" (Ap xxiv, 81). Essentially, liturgy is what the Lord does.

Luther captures this in his sermon on John 14 (1537–38):

Thus the apostles and pastors are nothing but channels through which Christ leads and transmits his Gospel from the Father to us. Therefore, wherever you hear the Gospel properly taught or see a person baptized, wherever you see someone administer or receive the Sacrament, or wherever you witness someone absolving another, there you may say without hesitation: "Today, I beheld God's Word and work. Yes, I saw and heard God Himself preaching and baptizing." To be sure, the tongue, the voice, the hands, etc., are those of a human being; but the Word and the ministry are really those of the divine majesty Himself. Hence it must be viewed and believed as though we were seeing Him administer Baptism or the Sacrament with his own hands. Thus we do not separate or differentiate between God and his Word or ministry; nor do we seek God in another way or view Him in a different light (AE 24: 67).

If the liturgy is the Lord's work, it cannot be made into an adiaphoron; the pure preaching of the gospel and the evangelical administration of the sacraments are hardly adiaphora. To be sure, certain rites and ceremonies embedded in the liturgy may be adiaphora, but not the pure preaching of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments.

At this point, a few comments regarding Article x of the Formula of Concord are in order, as this text has come to be seen as something of a declaration of liturgical independence. Article x makes a distinction between that which is commanded by God and those items that are neither commanded nor forbidden by the Word of God. Much is often made of paragraph 9:

We further believe, teach, and confess that the community of God in every place and at every time has the right, authority, and power to reduce or to increase ceremonies according to circumstances, as long as it does so without frivolity and offense but in an orderly and appropriate way, as at any time may seem to be most profitable, beneficial, and salutary for good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum, and the edification of the church.

A careful reading of this paragraph in its historical and doctrinal context makes it clear that the Formula is not advocating liturgical anatomy but confessional consistency. The church orders of Braunschwig, authored by Chemnitz, demonstrate that "the community of God in every place" is not a *local* congregation but a *territorial* church. These church orders bind

pastors and congregations to given rites and liturgical orders for the sake of unity in confession.

The theme of confessional consistency is placed in the text of Article x itself as the point is made that in times of confession, items that are in and of themselves adiaphora cease to be matters of indifference.

We believe, teach, and confess that a time of confession, as when enemies of the Word of God desire to suppress the pure doctrine of the Holy Gospel, the entire community of God, yes, every individual Christian, especially the ministers of the Word as the leaders of the community of God, are obligated to confess openly, not only by words but also through their deeds and actions, the true doctrine and all that pertains to it, according to the Word of God (FC SD x, 10).

Is not confessional Lutheranism at such a point over against the Baptist denials of the gospel in these closing years of the twentieth century?

I would suggest that Carter Lindberg is right: there is a continuum from the Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century to Pietism to the charismatic movement and church growth movements of this present century. In one way or another, each of these movements run up against the assertion of the Smalcald Articles "that God gives no one his Spirit or grace except through or with the external Word" (SA III, VIII, 3). Our concern for the liturgy is not fueled by romanticism for the past but for the sake of the gospel, which is given by external means, the word rightly preached and the sacraments administered in accordance with our Lord's mandate.

*Are we paying sufficient attention to the ecclesial culture of North America?* We need to recognize that the ecclesial culture of North America is Evangelicalism. This culture has its roots first in Puritanism, which is basically Calvinistic, and secondarily in the great revival movements of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially the awakening movement associated with Charles Grandison Finney, an Arminian of the first order.

The ethos of American Evangelicalism is at home in North America. As Nathan Hatch has pointed out in his book *The Democratization of American Christianity*, the Jeffersonian ideas of individual freedom and equality are congenial to Evangelicalism's emphasis on conversion as a personal decision and the church as a spiritual democracy. Evangelicalism's stress on the autonomy of the believer and the immediacy of spiritual experience apart from sacramental means has shaped a religious culture that accents an individualistic faith over churchly life and tends to characterize baptism, absolution, and the Lord's Supper as externals on the periphery of the Christian life, at best. Subjectivity coupled with a suspicion of the intellect has produced a religious culture that elevates heart over head, emotion over intellect.

Lutherans are being invited to embrace the culture of Evangelicalism at a time when some of the brightest and best thinkers from within Evangelicalism are lamenting the spiritual barrenness of this culture. Witness the writings of David Wells, Michael Horton, D. A. Carson, Os Guinness, Mark Noll, John MacArthur, and Eugene Peterson, to name but a few. This

past April, the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals issued *The Cambridge Declaration*. Among other things, *The Cambridge Declaration* makes the following assessment of worship:

Wherever in the church biblical authority has been lost, Christ has been displaced, the gospel has been distorted, or faith has been perverted, it has always been for one reason: our interests have displaced God's and we are doing his work in our own way. The loss of God's centrality in the life of today's church is common and lamentable. It is this loss that allows us to transform worship into entertainment, gospel preaching into marketing, believing into technique, being good into feeling good about ourselves, and faithfulness into being successful. As a result, God, Christ, and the Bible have come to mean too little to us and rest too inconsequentially upon us. God does not exist to satisfy human ambitions, cravings, the appetite for consumption, or our own private spiritual interests. We must focus on God in our worship rather than the satisfaction of our personal needs. God is sovereign in worship; we are not. Our concern must be for God's kingdom, not our own empires, popularity or success.

*What is the character of the community into which we are evangelizing unbelievers? We are not evangelizing unbelievers into a voluntary religious organization, but into the church, the body of Christ, the bride of the Lamb. The church lives in many cultures, but is at home in none as our citizenship is in heaven. In Revelation 7 John writes, "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" This is the culture, yes, the *cultus*, of God's doing.*

We may not drive a wedge between heaven and earth. The Lord Jesus Christ "has ascended far above all heavens in order to fill all things," says the Apostle Paul. Our Lord has crossed over from eternity into time in his incarnation. He has given us the new birth from above, the rebirth of holy baptism, by which we are made heirs of his heavenly kingdom. Baptism gives us birth into a new culture, the culture of heaven. We do not have to wait until we die to have a share in heaven.

"The Sacrament of the Altar," said Sasse, "is heaven on earth." That is why we sing the Sanctus with "angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven." That is why our liturgy is not and cannot be an echo of the pop culture with its sound bites and its exchange of edification for entertainment. No, the liturgy is the repetition of the heavenly song. Like Moses before the burning bush, we are on holy ground when we gather in the Lord's name around font, pulpit, and altar. These are holy places, for there God is distributing his gifts. Apart from these gifts, the church has no mission. Far from being detrimental to the church's mission, the liturgy is the source and goal of all missionary activity.

John T. Pless  
Minneapolis, MN

## RUSSIAN BOOK OF CONCORD RELEASED

The *Lutheran Heritage Foundation* of Sterling Heights, Michigan, has announced the completion of the Book of Concord in the Russian language after four years of effort. The first copy from the press run was presented to Dr. Alvin L. Barry in recognition of his encouraging support of the project, in appreciation for his world-wide interest in the total mission of the church, and his loyalty to the Confessions.

In receiving his copy, Dr. Barry said: "I want to commend the Lutheran Heritage Foundation on the work they have done in getting the Book of Concord translated into the Russian language. This volume together with the many other materials they have already produced speaks very well of the activities and work of their foundation. May God continue to bless."

Rev. Robert L. Rahn, LHF Executive Director, served as Project Director and cited the work as one that is unprecedented, unparalleled, and unequaled since it is but one of eight such projects underway at the present time. "We are tremendously pleased that God has given us the talent and the resources to complete this project for the benefit of the emerging Lutheran Church in Russia," Rev. Rahn said.

Mr. Konstantin Komarov, LHF Chief Russian Translator, coordinated the schedule of translators, reviewers, linguists, and theologians for this massive work. Since the work required constant review, the translators were able to continue efforts on other materials so that there were other large works simultaneously completed.

"This particular book is a paperback volume and is considered a review edition," according to Rev. Rahn. "The volume is being distributed especially to selected pastors and church leaders so that through reading and studying, the review process can continue until a more permanent, deluxe, hard-cover copy can be printed in about six months."

The idea of a review edition was suggested by the late Dr. Robert Preus while he served as Chairman of the LHF board. The Book of Concord is one of those books that serves as a constant reference for Lutherans who wish to retain the foundation of their faith. "Thank God there are Lutherans in Russia who believe that there is an abiding relevance for the confessions expressed in the Book of Concord," Rahn stated.

Because of his interest in providing access to the Lutheran confessions in all languages and encouraging the work, the Russian edition is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Preus. A special Foreword to the volume was written by his son Rev. Dan Preus, and the dedication page features a picture of the late Dr. Preus.

The review process has already begun here in America and also in Russia. The American review is being carried out by Russian students using the book in the classroom at Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, Indiana. Rev. Timothy Quill, Staff Coordinator of the Russian project, and the Reverend Dr. Dean Wenthe, Seminary President, praised the work of the LHF: "Like a pebble dropped in a lake, your work causes increasing ripples that carry the living word of the gospel to thousands upon thousands of souls whose faces we will never see. What an amazing thing it was to receive copies of the Book



of Concord in time for the eight men studying Confessions I with Prof. Kurt Marquart. They are being prepared to enter the divinely instituted office of the holy ministry, and with the Confessions in their mother tongue it will be possible to train pastors who are truly stewards of the mystery which is the gospel. And these eight are just the beginning. And this book is just the beginning. I cannot find words to express how grateful we are at Concordia to have these books available to help in the training of confessional Lutheran pastors for Russia.”

The LHF has completed the translation and publishing of more than one hundred books, journals, and documents. Over one hundred individuals in all parts of the world are involved in the various phases of the translation work. According to the publishing schedule set by the LHF, the Latvian and Ukrainian editions should be completed by June and the Swahili edition by the end of 1997. For further information on this global translating and publishing mission effort, call 1-800-554-0723.

## ORDAINING A LAY MINISTER

*The Rev. Dr. David P. Scaer preached for a rather unusual ordination on December 8, 1996, in Hendrum, Minnesota. Dean Bell, who had been serving as a lay minister, heard this sermon based on Mark 1:1–8.*

Those who know the situation of Pastor Dean Bell as a lay minister may find little reason for our being here to ordain him into the holy ministry. You are already providing pastoral services for this congregation. If ordination is considered a human ritual without any divine significance, and without divine command, what we are doing here this evening might be considered redundant; or at best is for only ritual significance. Why should an office be given to you that some would say you already have?

There is also another reason for our hesitancy. Few people at your time in life take up a calling that requires a full commitment to the point of self-sacrifice. Though you were carrying out ministerial functions up until today, you could have walked away from them any time you wanted. Nothing bound you to the ministry in this place or anywhere else. You were doing the work of ministry, but you were still a layman. No one would have held it against you if you left to do something else.

None of us have complete freedom of choice in how we are going to live our lives. I find high school graduations depressing, simply because the graduates are often promised things that will not be possible and simply will not happen. You might be everything you want in the army, but it does not work that way in life. If you are not musical, don't count on conducting the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra. But in a general way, lay people have a freedom in regard to what and where they are going to work that ministers do not. This is not true of all occupations. Career military personnel have little choice where they are going to be stationed. Ministers are like soldiers. They cannot simply get up and move into a church and start preaching. The church calls the minister. The minister does not hire out his services to the church as a day laborer.

Whatever freedom you had, you are giving up today, Pastor Bell. This is not to discount the word you gave to serve this congregation, but you were not really bound by a divine arrangement. You did not have the ministry that Christ gave to apostles. You were under contract. In spite of the exaggerated language of legal contracts, no human contract is really ever permanent. Ordination is not a contract, but an obligation, not only to this congregation, but to one holy, Christian, and apostolic church. You are now bound to Christ Jesus who gives you his Holy Spirit for preaching, baptizing, and celebrating the Lord's Supper. You are joining the Apostles Peter and Paul, their successors Silas, Timothy, Titus, Onesimus, Mark, and Luke, and all other faithful pastors and teachers, as a minister of Christ's church. Today your brothers in the ministry welcome you into their fellowship.

Ministers are not the only church workers. Without these other workers, humanly speaking there might be no church. These workers do not often receive the recognition they deserve. Several weeks ago an article in the newspapers appeared that showed how the major denominations depended on the volunteer work of their members. These are the people who teach Sunday School, put out the publicity for Vacation Bible School and organize it, take care of the church property, the plumbing and the lawn, sing in the choir, arrange the flowers, and put the vessels in order for the Holy Communion. We could enumerate many more things, but we want to leave this place before midnight. Consider the monetary value of the work of one member giving ten hours of his or her time to the church. If our congregations—including this one—had to pay for these services, we might not even have a church, or we would have a pared down church.

Not to deprecate your work, Pastor Bell, but your service in this congregation up to this day was that of volunteer. Like a volunteer you could for good reason give it up. Circumstances at home and work change so that some members cannot help out in the way they used to or want to. You were in the same situation. If you had decided to give up this ministry in this place, you would not have been giving up the apostolic ministry that Jesus gave his twelve disciples.

Something is demanded of ministers that is not expected of others. Even if Christians do not recognize that ministers are different from the rest of us, the world does. If the ministry were not a different kind of work, many mothers and fathers would not be upset when their sons decide to study for the ministry. Ministers have obligations others do not have. They are bound to time and place, to God and people, in a way the rest of us are not. Teaching the word of God at whatever level, in the pulpit, in Bible class, in Sunday School, is a divine work by which we hear the message of salvation. All Christians have the freedom to do this work, but ministers must do it. St. Paul said, “Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.” By ordination God obligates us to preach. To the world this obligation, this duty, this commitment, looks like an infringement on our liberty—if not a slavery, then at least a servitude. But to us who preach the gospel the ministry is a sweet task; it is the yoke and burden that is light.

Within the organizational structure of our Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, very few pastors ever have the chance of being elected a district or synod president or vice-

president. Fewer positions are open to lay persons. After all, the Missouri Synod is a church and not a political party like Democrats and Republicans. It is not even a democracy. A layman cannot reach a higher level in our church body than election by the triennial convention to its Board of Directors. Our church body had expressed its confidence in you by electing you to that high position. In anticipation of your ordination today, you were stripped of this office, which was only first bestowed on you in July 1995. Some might argue that you could have had a greater influence as a member of the Board of Directors than you will as a minister. Some might ask whether you are giving up more than what you will be receiving by being ordained.

But another factor was at work in your life. What the world and even some in the church consider unimportant, you saw as the very core of your life. For if we believe that we are rescued from sin, death, the devil, and everlasting condemnation by the gospel, there could be no more important work, no sweeter task, no greater service than preaching Christ. For this reason and for this reason alone we are here today. You want to preach the gospel with the full authority God gives his apostles and ministers. Being fully conscious of the import of our words and being fully responsible for what these words mean, we hold that the ministry is the highest calling God has given men. This does not mean that the jobs everybody else does are inconsequential or that ministers are morally superior or are more certain of salvation than anyone else. Such ideas are repugnant. Peter, the chief of the apostles, denied Christ, and the great apostle St. Paul saw himself as the worst sinner of all times.

A generation or two ago large Roman Catholic families frequently designated one son for the priesthood. It was handy to have a close relative to say a mass for you after you died. It was a kind of spiritual insurance policy. Most Catholics don't think like this any more, and we Lutherans never did. Still the minister is a blessing to his family and church. Through the word that the minister preaches and the sacraments he administers, we come into the presence of Christ, and through him Christ comes to us. Here is not another occupation, but a calling from God himself.

Our world is so intricate that if one part of society breaks down, the whole system is in danger of collapse. Labor strikes can do this very thing. Years ago, coal miners went on strike and the rest of us became cold. Two weeks ago the truck drivers in France went on strike and the food shelves in supermarkets emptied out. Unlike most other occupations, the ministry makes no contribution to our physical or financial welfare or security. No one would go hungry if our ministers went on strike, but no occupation or profession is as permanent as the ministry. Through the ministry the word of salvation is preached, and so it remains the same one generation after another, one century after another.

For two thousand years ministers have preached the word, baptized our children, and given us Christ's body and blood. Other occupations change. The ministry does not. The little I knew about cars thirty years ago is probably now nearly obsolete and so useless as to be dangerous. Their computerized mechanisms are beyond my ken. Something as basic as farm-

ing is so sophisticated that what was done one hundred years or as recently as thirty years ago may have little resemblance to what is being done now. The capital investment needed for farming says that many who trained to farm won't be doing it, or they won't be doing it for a living. It is not we who have changed, but the world has changed. No occupation can be assured of being required or necessary in the sense that we know it now. Machines make human labor redundant. Today we do not talk to operators on phones but punch numbers on our phones. Many of us live with the knowledge and perhaps the fear that our talents and abilities may some day become useless.

The ministry was established by God, and its work is the same in every time, land, and culture. It now becomes antiquated. God sends his ministers with the one purpose of preaching to us the message of salvation. Today in your ordination, Pastor Bell, Christ through his church is establishing you as his minister. The ministry is not simply a collection of things that we do, but an office, a responsibility that God himself established and from which those whom God has chosen as ministers cannot run or escape. Jonah attempted to run from God and failed. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from his conception and chosen to be a prophet. Today through the ordination God gives you the Holy Spirit to become a minister. This is the same Spirit who was shaped by and shared in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. The Spirit of the Father whom Christ promised his disciples will shape the words of your preaching and extend to God's people grace and salvation in the blessed sacraments. What the prophet Isaiah prophesied of John the Baptist, he spoke of every minister since the world was established: "Behold, I am sending my messenger." John the Baptist prepared the way for the coming of the Son of Man as the Savior of all men and their judge. Dean, you are a John the Baptist, sent as God's messenger, chosen by him to prepare his way into the hearts of men, women, and children.

Your calling into the ministry did not come from inside you, but it came from God working through the good people of this congregation, through all the congregations in our Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and through the pastors and teachers who have known you over the past years. You did not run into this office with undue haste, but only after a lengthy period of testing. In these people you heard the voice of Jesus Christ, who alone appoints men into this ministry. Our life is one long season of Advent in which we wait for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. In our preaching we are preparing for the way of the Lord by making his paths straight and preaching that baptism works repentance so that sins can be forgiven.

Today the boundaries of your ministry are expanded. The entire Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod through this congregation is recognizing you as a minister of the saving gospel. You do not belong to yourself but to the church, and the church belongs to you. In exchange for personal sacrifice, you are given the treasure of preaching. Wherever Christ's church is, there are also his ministers—and wherever his ministers are, there is Christ's church. Through your ministry, God is calling and sustaining his church. Amen.

## JAMES AND JOHN

*The following sermon was preached by the Reverend Dr. Norman Nagel on the commemoration day of St. James at the chapel of Sts. Timothy and Titus on the campus of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis; Mark 10:35–45 serves as the text.*

James and John. It's always James and John, and never John and James. I know what that's like. I had an older brother, and whenever we were referred to it was always Keith and Norman Nagel, and never, never Norman and Keith Nagel. Besides, he was always better at everything. "Get out of the way, I'll do it." You can't imagine how it blighted my tender little psyche to grow up in the shadow of such a brother. It was much more often my brother I wanted to kill than my father.

The advantage was that when something had been going on which ought not to have been going on, he got the first and bigger blame. "You are older, Keith, you should know better," our parents would say, and I, innocently led astray, could not disagree with that.

Now that is not how it goes with Jesus. To him James and John came with their plan, their career projection. James and John were in it together. Both wanted the same thing, or actually not exactly the same thing. If they were both wanting the exact same thing, they might not have been quite so brotherly in cahoots. There were two things and so one for each. "Equal shares," as my parents would say to settle a dispute about the bigger slice. "Share and share alike." So, two seats, one on his right hand and the other on his left, one for James and one for John "in his glory."

Again, that's not how Jesus does it. He never gives any two of us the same. He has his only-one-like-it way with each one of us. There isn't anybody else whom he loves in the same way he loves you, and he would draw James and John and you and me into rejoicing in that only-one-like-it way.

He would free them from doing sizes on each other: Who's bigger, who comes first? James and John, or John and James? But since they are in the same family ("We are the Zebedee boys, we are"), they are agreed to see to it that if he's my brother he should get a place at least as good as mine, but perhaps not better; but why not the both of us better than the others? "Not on your life!" say the others, similarly far from the Jesus way.

His way is the opposite of all the foregoing. That way is the opposite of the way he has as our Savior. So unimprisoned is he in who's first, who's bigger, he is so free of all of that that he does it by giving himself away, his life poured out, a ransom for many. "Are you in for that too?" he asks them—and since it's he who is asking them, and him they are answering, they say astonishingly, "We are able"—and with Jesus if you are that far in, you are in for more than you could imagine.

Jesus says it to them, but how much did they grasp? Or through all their days were there not always days when they saw more fully what Jesus freed them into when he said: "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized. So don't be worrying about the two top spots. There will be two who come to that, not by chance, or by the way you've been asking for them."

Those who heard the Gospels read in church knew how it turned out with those two. Same place, two places; not the same, not equal. One died cursing, the other heard Jesus say to him, "This day you will be with me in paradise."

What of James and John? They didn't get the two places they'd asked for, that they hadn't asked for. They got places better than they could imagine, and not the same. Jesus doesn't answer our prayers giving us the same as somebody else. Risky business, praying. You'll get more than you are asking for, the prayers in his name, the prayers he has promised to answer, in his way, in his name.

When Jesus told Peter how the "Jesus" way would go with him, Peter said, "And what about John? Does he get more or better?" Jesus said, "You can leave John to me. I'll see to that too. You've been a great plunger in following your impulses. When I have brought you to your end, your death will be a gift from me, a death which will "glorify God."

The same, and yet not the same, with St. James. James did come first, by way of Herod Agrippa's sword.

Two brothers freely cast their lot  
With David's royal Son;  
The cost of conquest counting not,  
They deem the battle won.

Brothers in heart, they hope to gain  
An undivided joy;  
That man may one with man remain,  
As boy was one with boy.

Christ heard, and will'd that James should fall,  
First prey of Satan's rage;  
John linger out his fellows all,  
And died in bloodless age.

They join hands once more above,  
Before the Conqueror's throne;  
God grants prayer, but in His love  
Makes times and ways His own.

Happy St. James's Day. We ponder the Jesus way with each one of us, the life of faith, all the way, and always beyond our doing-sizes prayers. Amen.

## MAKING REPENTANCE FUN

*Tom Raabe's satire hits close to home in his book The Ultimate Church: An Irreverent Look at Church Growth, Megachurches, & Ecclesiastical "Show-Biz" (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991). These little vignettes are as entertaining as they are exposing and are well worth squeezing into your already overcrowded bookshelf. The following appears on pages 29–32.*

It's finally happening. After all those years of dreary, vapid, monotonous church services, at long last we're finally putting some life into our worship. No longer are we slaves to a prescribed liturgy week in and week out, but now worship is celebra-

tion, a gala event replete with chancel drama, liturgical dance, dialogue sermons, and anything that's new, exciting, meaningful, and relevant. Neither are we bound to a traditional hymnal anymore, as guitars and synthesizers offer commonplace accompaniment to contemporary praise music.

*Everybody* has a children's sermon these days. The passing of the Peace is *de rigueur* in most churches, with the more liberated ones opting for a kiss of Peace in its stead. Worshipers feel no compunction whatever against whooping it up when the spirit (small s) moves them during a service. People clap in church as if they were at a ballgame. Pastors deliver multimedia homilies; they roam the sanctuary as they preach; they offer monologue sermons, discussion sermons, audience-participation sermons. And parishioners dance in the aisles, break into small groups, and voice their liberation from the pews.

Yes, it took a couple hundred years, but finally the scales have fallen from our eyes, and we can see that the conclaves in the big rooms with the funny benches and funny windows that we go to every Sunday are not atrabilious exercises in somber redundancy anymore. They are alive happenings now, "with it" celebrations where anything goes. Worship these days has finally come around to being what worship always should have been—fun!

However, there remains one area of worship where the shackles of tradition have yet to be unloosed—one integral part of the service still untouched by the revolution.

I speak of repentance—the confession of sins.

Oh, those indefatigable, guilt-inducing words—how ponderously they lay on our lips: "I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess . . . all my sins and iniquities . . . offended Thee . . . justly deserve temporal and eternal punishment . . . heartily sorry for them . . . sincerely repent of them . . ." It's enough to get a guy depressed, these doleful, heavy-hearted phrases, underscoring all sorts of sordid, unpopular, theological concepts.

And the people, quite understandably, are not enamored with this type of material. Consider the ordeal we subject them to, dragging out their dirty souls for inventory every week and finding—without fail—that they do not meet the supernal requirements. All that groveling, all that mental and emotional prostration—let's face facts, people do not get into that scene. No wonder they aren't coming to church.

It's a pity we can't simply write the whole business out of the service—just forget about it and get on with being happy. But, alas, we *are* Christians. The Bible does have a few words to say about repentance and forgiveness, so we have to keep some of this stuff in. But nobody said we had to make it so depressing.

The solution to this problem is simple: We must make repentance fun. If our theology prescribes that we do this confession thing, we might as well make it something that people can get into.

However; changing minds in this area is difficult—so high have the walls of resistance been built. Bringing a congregation into the fresh rays of new meaning is bound to be a tough sell. But it can be done.

A variety of innovative methods can be used, including the passing of mirrors down the pews, followed by spoken confession, or the artistic rendering of individual transgressions via canvas and oils, finger paints, or even crayons. Such methods

are far superior to the incantatory droning from pastor and people currently used in most faith communities.

However, lest the penitential environment grow too cumbersome during any of these soul-searching activities—and this incidentally represents a real concern, because we all know the kind of guilt trip repentance can lay on a person—the pastor would be well-advised to bring perspective back into the proceedings. My recommendation is to apply great quantities of happy-face stickers to the kneelers as constant reminders to worshipers that repentance is not some lugubrious hand-wringing exercise of blame, but that, *au contraire*, it is fun.

Perhaps the most effective means of rendering repentance enjoyable, however, is the role-playing sermon drama. Here's how it works:

At a foreordained point in the sermon, the pastor, pausing to spy a forewarned parishioner reading his bulletin in an ostentatious manner, points toward the play-acting miscreant and reprimands him from the pulpit: "Byron Beanface! You're not listening to my sermon!" The congregation will likely gasp in outrage, and the inattentive parishioner raises his back in feigned anger. A parishioner from the other side of the sanctuary, again a willing player in the drama, then yells, "None of you people over there are listening. You're all lousy Christians!" to which a retort such as "Oh yeah? At least we have our eyes open during the sermon" is issued from the first side. That comment is followed by something like "We close our eyes because it helps us to listen better," from the second side, which is answered by, "Then why do you have them open during the prayers?" from the first side, which in turn draws a response of "How do you know we have our eyes open during the prayers unless your eyes are open, too?" from the second side, and so on, back and forth.

The pastor, for his part, need do nothing more to stoke the fires of acrimony than lean over the front of the pulpit, point randomly at individual parishioners, and scream, "You whited sepulcher!" "You stinking hypocrite!" "You lousy, smelly sinner!" and such like, over and over again.

If handled properly, the scenario can easily escalate into a vigorous, comminatory shouting match, with participants from both sides of the sanctuary rising to their feet to castigate, en masse, those of the other side. When the anger has reached an acceptable level, the creative pastor then descends from the pulpit in the irenic splendor of a circus clown suit, into which he has furtively changed while in the pulpit, and juggles a few Bibles.

This readies the group for the Absolution. And what of this necessary part of the service? Must it whither into obsolescence through the usual staid pronouncement of forgiveness? Not if the pastor is smart and creative.

The Absolution must be made fun, too.

Difficult though it is within the constructs of some liturgies, Absolution can be rendered in an effective and meaningful manner. One soul-releasing moment shines brightly in my memory. During a service once, the fellow sitting next to me fell victim to intense feelings of guilt. The Absolution had been pronounced, yet he sat moping in the pew, head bowed, shaking from side to side. He represented a disgusting reminder of the power of false



guilt. So, at the pastor's direction, a group of parishioners descended upon him, picked him up, and to a spontaneous ovation carried him on their shoulders once around the congregation in a sort of victory lap for forgiveness, after which they deposited him in a nearby locker-room shower, turning on the water and cleansing him ritually. It was a beautiful moment. Sure, it wasn't all that much fun for the guy—he had a five-hun-

dred-dollar suit on—but it imbued the ritual with meaning and brought home the significance of the Absolution in a very real way to the congregation as a whole.

Be it Confession or Absolution, repentance or forgiveness, when we can render these abstractions palpable and active—in short, fun—then we know that we've done our job.

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Joel A. Brondos, Logia Forum and Correspondence Editor—*Pastor, Zion Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, IN*  
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## E-MAIL ADDRESSES for some of the LOGIA staff:

Mike Albrecht: sjlcwspmja@aol.com  
Joel Brondos: stimme@aol.com  
Gerald Krispin: gkrispin@planet.eon.net  
Charles Cortright: cortricl-fac@mlc-wels.edu.  
Alan Ludwig: journal@mdex.net  
Martin Noland: 75113.2703@compuserve.com  
John Pless: lsf@gold.tc.umn.edu  
Daniel Preus: chi@trucom.com  
Tom Rank: tlrnk@juno.com (Note change)  
Robert Roethemeyer: cslroetherv@crf.cuis.edu  
Erling Teigen: 74022.2447@compuserve.com  
Jon Vieker: j.vieker2@genie.geis.com