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On the cover: The sanctuary ring on a door along the western façade of the Notre-Dame de Paris (France). Historically, anyone who took hold of the sanctuary ring of any church door would be granted asylum by the church. In his article (pp. 23-39), Leopoldo Sánchez discusses the current issues and ramifications of the church's role of "hospitality toward exiles." (Photo credit: Myrabella/Wikimedia Commons)

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Editorials

Reflections on Reactions to the Summer Issue of the *Concordia Journal*

The Summer 2017 issue of the Concordia Journal in partnership with Concordia University, Nebraska, on faith and science has elicited a range of responses and reactions from pastors and lay people. I am thankful for such responses, in part because it means people took the time to read the journal!

On the positive side, we received a number of responses that were very encouraging about this issue as a whole as well as the individual articles within it. They appreciated that the journal was dealing with these “real world” topics and sought to address matters of science and faith from a uniquely Lutheran theological stance rather than from a stance shaped by American fundamentalism. Many of these came from pastors who spoke of family members who were in science and had struggled with these issues, as well as those who were teachers or scientists themselves. They were grateful for some tools to help them navigate the waters of faith and science.

On the negative side, we also received a number of responses that took exception to one article in particular, namely, the article by Dr. John Jurchen, professor at Concordia University, Nebraska, entitled, “The Age of the Earth and Confessional Lutheranism.” These responses concerned several issues in the article (such as the meaning of “day”). Some even concluded that the article was opening the door to theistic evolution, even though the article made clear that “old-earth creationists” reject theistic evolution. Such concerns arise out of a legitimate fear of a slippery slope or the next domino falling as we have seen happen in the case of other church bodies.

Our intention with the Summer issue of the Concordia Journal was and is to serve the church by providing ways by which we can navigate difficult issues within the boundaries of our church’s confession. Our intention was not to provoke concern, especially in a time when our confession of Scripture’s teaching regarding creation is often ridiculed in our culture. I apologize that we were not clearer with regard to the purpose of this issue of the Concordia Journal or the direction of the Concordia Journal when it comes to what we teach, promote, and defend on the doctrine of creation.

Trust is in short supply these days within our culture and at times even within the church. Some of this remains the legacy of the broken trust by the pre-walkout Seminary faculty, which came to be known as SemineX, that ruptured our life together as a synod in the 1970s—and its reverberations continue to be felt to this day. Knowing this history, it is all the more important to us that we do not lose your trust for the sake of our life together as a church.

Ironically, it was with the pre-walkout faculty’s lack of transparency (and deception) in mind that we wanted to publish an issue devoted to faith and science—

especially about how we used the Science for Seminaries grant from the American Academy for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). We wanted to share with the church how we used the money as well as what we taught on the subject of creation. We live in an age when people have a right to worry that what they hold as precious might be slipping away. We share that concern and will try harder to be sensitive to it as well as to how articles or statements might be perceived and even mis-perceived.

Our Commitment to Our Readers

Our commitment to you has always been and continues to be that *we will not promote or advocate or defend any teaching that runs counter to the doctrinal position of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*. This includes the Brief Statement in both its thetical and antithetical statements:

We teach that God has created heaven and earth, and that in the manner and in the space of time recorded in the Holy Scriptures, especially Gen. 1 and 2, namely, by His almighty creative word, and in six days. We reject every doctrine which denies or limits the work of creation as taught in Scripture. In our days it is denied or limited by those who assert, ostensibly in deference to science, that the world came into existence through a process of evolution; that is, that it has, in immense periods of time, developed more or less of itself. Since no man was present when it pleased God to create the world, we must look for a reliable account of creation to God's own record, found in God's own book, the Bible. We accept God's own record with full confidence and confess with Luther's Catechism: "I believe that God has made me and all creatures."

This statement not only provides a clear confession of God as the creator of heaven and earth but draws out its pastoral significance for us. Namely, it means, "I am God's creature!" (LC II 13).

As a church, we have also maintained that within our confessional and doctrinal boundaries there is room for discussion, debate, and even disagreement on matters that do not transgress or redraw the boundaries. This includes purely exegetical matters that do not impinge upon the doctrinal content of an article of faith. We hope that the *Concordia Journal* can be a place to discuss where those boundaries lie and whether or not something lies within them or outside of them.

I believe that it was this type of question that Dr. Jurchen sought to address. In other words, must one subscribe to a specific age of the earth—as for example, that it was created in 4004 BC or is 6,000 years old—in order to be considered an orthodox Christian (and presumably to be a Lutheran)? His paper thus surveyed various synodical statements to determine if we as a synod had adopted a position on that question.

In the course of his paper, Dr. Jurchen used the example of the day-age theory that Old-Earth Creationists¹ employ in order to accommodate the claims that the geological record supports a very old earth. I suspect that his language that it was a “credible exegetical argument” (to put the best construction on it) relied on the arguments that have been put forward (and found persuasive) by the Old-Earth Creationists for decades.

Lest anyone wonder as to where we stand on that issue, I can unequivocally say that not a single person on our faculty (as well as Dr. Jurchen for that matter) advocates for a “day-age” interpretation of Genesis 1. We all believe that the most natural and plain reading of “day” (especially in light of Exodus 20:8) is to regard it as an ordinary day. To that end, Dr. David Adams and I have prepared a paper that we hope will be of use regarding the Genesis account of creation and some of the specific exegetical issues mentioned in Dr. Jurchen’s article. It is forthcoming on concordiatheology.org.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we live in a context where we need each other more than ever and thus we need to live together in mutual support and encouragement as we live under the Lordship of the crucified now risen Jesus.

To that end, I hope and pray that the *Concordia Journal* and its online counterpart, concordiatheology.org, will continue to serve a helpful place within the church, where we meet as theologically trained servants in the church to discuss and ultimately confess only that to which the Scriptures commit us.

Charles P. Arand
Dean of Theological Research and Publication

Endnote

- 1 This designation actually refers to a large number of Evangelicals and fundamentalists who have long accepted the geological ages of the earth going back to the pre-Darwinian decades of the early 19th century. Historians have observed that throughout the 1920s many fundamentalists held to an old age for the earth (while vehemently rejecting evolution) and accounted for it with various theories regarding Genesis 1. See my forthcoming blog post: “The Great Evangelical Debate on Creation: A Program Guide.”

Regarding the Editorial Process for the *Concordia Journal*

As has been made previously known, we received letters from the Rev. Richard Snow, President of the Nebraska District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and Dr. John Jurchen, Associate Professor at Concordia University, Nebraska, in which Dr. Jurchen requested that we withdraw his article that was published in the Summer 2017 issue of the *Concordia Journal*. We accepted Dr. Jurchen’s decision, and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, considers his article retracted. As was stated then, that decision obligates us, out of respect for Dr. Jurchen’s request, to no longer comment on the specifics of his article, since it is no longer part of the public discourse. This is also why we did not comment on the status of his article until the letters were received, since it would have been improper and inappropriate for Concordia Seminary to interfere with Rev. Snow and Dr. Jurchen as they were going through their process of discernment, a process that we as a synod have, in charity, agreed to abide by.

But we know that this decision leaves open the question: how did an article that has been withdrawn from publication pass through the editorial process for the *Concordia Journal* in the first place? To answer this question, a word of background is in order. The editorial process for the *Concordia Journal* includes a double-blind peer review process, which is considered best practice and the gold standard for academic publishing. This peer review accomplishes two goals: (1) it ensures the academic scholarship and integrity of writing published in the *Concordia Journal*; and (2) it fulfills Concordia Seminary’s responsibility for doctrinal review of its theological publications according to Bylaw 1.9.1.1 of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

In the case of Dr. Jurchen’s article, entitled “The Age of the Earth and Confessional Lutheranism,” our editorial judgment regarding Dr. Jurchen’s argument was that he was making a case for pastoral care and concern for people who held to Old Earth Creationist views, not advocating for Old Earth Creationism as a doctrinal position. It has become clear to us that portions of the article did not articulate this argument clearly and presented a confusing witness regarding the synodical position as outlined in the Brief Statement adopted by the LCMS at the 1932 Synodical Convention. As Dr. Jurchen himself stated in his letter, “I was in error to imply that the LCMS has acknowledged Day-Age theory as an acceptable exegesis of the Creation account of Genesis 1 and 2.”

Likewise, in this particular case, our editorial judgment failed to correct this error. In hindsight, we should have required a revision of those sections that contained the implication that the LCMS has acknowledged Day-Age theory as an

acceptable exegesis of the Creation account in Genesis 1 and 2.

For that, we were in error. We apologize and ask forgiveness for the confusion this has caused.

We also want to assure our readers that we have renewed our focus upon the editorial process of the *Concordia Journal*. It was not the editorial process that failed, but our implementation of the process in this particular case. As the *Concordia Journal* enters its 44th year of publication, we stand by its exemplary record of theological witness and scholarship. We continue to uphold our responsibilities for doctrinal fidelity and faithfulness with the highest level of care and attention.

Charles P. Arand
Dean of Theological Research and Publication

ADDENDUM

Letter from Rev. Richard Snow



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THE LUTHERAN CHURCH-MISSOURI SYNOD

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To whom it may concern,

In the Summer 2017 edition of the Concordia Journal, Volume 43, Number 3, an article was published entitled The Age of the Earth and Confessional Lutheranism, by Dr. John Jurchen, Associate Professor of Chemistry at Concordia University, Nebraska.

That article raised concerns from a number of individuals and groups that have written various letters to a number of leaders including, but not limited to, Dr. Jurchen, CUNE President Dr. Brian Friedrich, President Harrison, Concordia Seminary, and me. As leaders in our synod we share those concerns and have been working to address them.

Over the last several months Dr. Jurchen has humbly, willingly and eagerly worked with me and Dr. Friedrich to correct misunderstandings, to apologize, and to confess his errors.

This has taken time as we worked through the concerns raised and sought a thoughtful response, amidst the challenges of travel, schedules, holidays, and a death in his extended family.

Our conversations have been fruitful and God-pleasing. As his ecclesiastical supervisor, and working under the guidance of my ecclesiastical supervisor, President Harrison, I now gladly submit to you and to the church his letter of confession. I am satisfied with this confession and have offered to him God's Holy Absolution.

I thank Dr. Jurchen for his cooperative spirit and Dr. Friedrich, President Harrison, and several of my brothers on the Council of Presidents for their counsel and encouragement. All glory to God.

In Christ and His service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Snow". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R" and "S".

Rev. Richard Snow

President, Nebraska District–Lutheran Church Missouri Synod
(2 Corinthians 5:20)

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

ADDENDUM

Letter from Dr. John Jurchen



C O N C O R D I A U N I V E R S I T Y

800 North Columbia Avenue
Seward, Nebraska 68434

January 6, 2018

Dear President Snow:

In response to an article I wrote for the Concordia Journal, Winter 2017, entitled The Age of the Earth and Confessional Lutheranism, you asked me to prepare a confession of my personal faith and beliefs as regards Holy Scripture and LCMS doctrine, especially as it pertains to the Creation narrative in Gen 1 & 2. As my article was intended as a survey of resolutions and statements regarding the Creation narrative from various Christian denominations, especially the LCMS, my personal confession seemed less relevant. Here, I gladly provide it.

First, I would like to provide a note regarding my teaching at Concordia. I do not promote Old Earth Creationism in my classes. I do explain Old earth Creationism, among other perspectives on Creation held by some Christians, as is appropriate for a university education. I hold and teach that a Young Earth Creation perspective with six normal days is taught throughout the clear Word of God. Accordingly, I direct students interested in Young Earth Creation to current research in the area, especially select articles from the Creation Science Research Quarterly that I have found particularly insightful. I have a personal subscription to that journal and donate back issues to the Concordia University, Nebraska Library for the benefit of our students. Although I appreciate and admire the work that my fellow scientists are doing in Young Earth Creation research and pray for their success, my faith rests on the clear Word of God.

In my doctrinal position, I cling to the Bible, God's own book, as the clear, inspired, inerrant Word of God able to make us wise unto salvation in Christ Jesus. With St. Paul, I confess that "all Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (II Tim 3:16-17). I believe in the three Symbols of the Holy Christian Church and hold that the Lutheran Confessions are the true interpretation of God's Word.

I also hold to A Brief Statement as adopted by the LCMS at the 1932 Synodical Convention and all subsequent LCMS resolutions adopted by Synod regarding God's work of Creation and appreciate the several excellent CTCR documents adopted or received by Synod regarding the same. In particular, I consider the 5th article of A Brief Statement an excellent exposition of our LCMS Doctrine of Creation. It has served as a model for every resolution, statement, and CTCR document related to the LCMS Doctrine of Creation adopted by Synod

for the past eighty-five years. As declared in A Brief Statement, I believe that God created the heavens and the earth by His almighty creative Word, and in six days.

I did not mean to imply in my article that pastors and teachers should promote an extended duration for the days of creation. Beyond exegetical difficulties with such an interpretation, several theological difficulties arise. I attempted to highlight two of them in my article when I wrote that “speaking the truth in love requires that pastors and teachers go beyond providing a comfortable approach and present as complete a representation of Old Earth Creation as possible.” Two theological difficulties were presented in the article, namely the mortality of animals before the Fall and the extent of the Noachian flood, the latter of which is sometimes interpreted as a spectacular regional rather than planet-spanning deluge. These are serious difficulties with an Old-Earth Creation perspective. I did not intend to minimize nor endorse them.

Another issue I did not endorse in my article was biological evolution, Theistic or otherwise. A Brief Statement and our Lutheran interpretation of Scripture holds that God created the various kinds of life, commanding the earth to “put forth vegetation” and the waters to “bring forth swarms of living creatures.” A Brief Statement is clear that evolution denies or limits God’s work of Creation as taught in the Scriptures. I neither teach nor endorse biological evolution.

Ultimately, the point I sought to make in my article is that members struggling to understand God’s creative work require careful teaching from the clear Word of God and our patient understanding as they wrestle with this article of faith. I understand and accept the Synodical position on Creation from A Brief Statement that any reliable account of Creation must come from God’s own account in the Bible. I was in error to imply that the LCMS has acknowledged Day-Age theory as an acceptable exegesis of the Creation account of Genesis 1 & 2.

I apologize and seek forgiveness for any confusion I might have caused and will ask the Concordia Journal to withdraw the article due to the lack of clarity and concerns raised.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John C. Jurchen".

John Jurchen

Pastors in the Fear of God

Celebrating the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation blessed us with an abundance of quotations from Martin Luther, but one quotation I did not hear raised up was “We should fear and love God . . .” There certainly is no fear of God in America’s public culture today, but more worrisome to me is hearing little or no talk in the church about the fear of God. Since Scripture promises blessings to those who fear God, we do well to teach the people we serve what it means to fear God.¹ Doing so, like all aspects of our public ministries, is work that benefits others but does not save us personally. In the next paragraphs I offer some thoughts about the salutary effect the fear of God has for us as pastors individually and together in our ministerium.

The Bible lists many causes and consequences of fear.² Nature, disaster, death and slavery cause fear.³ Some people arouse fear.⁴ So do places.⁵ Fear can produce shame and sinful conduct.⁶ “The starting-point of fear, then, is especially a threat to life, living space, and all the spheres that give life meaning.”⁷ God, too, is a source of terror, not just to the ungodly but also to his people. “The Lord of hosts, him you shall regard as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread” (Is 8:13). Jesus’s manifestations of his deity aroused fear (e.g., Mt 28:4; Mk 4:41; 6:30; 9:6). Crowds reacted to his miracles with *phobos* (e.g., Mt 9:8; Lk 5:26; 8:37). Jesus’s enemies feared him for threatening their religious hold on the people (e.g., Mark 11:18). We often use “awe” or “reverence” to explain the fear of God, and that’s fine, but it gives short shrift to what’s really going on in this important biblical concept. The starting point to an understanding of the fear of God is recognizing fear as our natural emotional response to something we can’t control that potentially threatens some aspect of our life or even life itself. The greatest terror of all is when we’re confronted with manifestations of the hidden and incomprehensible God.

Consider creation. Last summer’s issue of the *Concordia Journal* generated ongoing discussions about faith and science. Faith and science are two distinctly different ways of looking at the physical world, perspectives sometimes at odds (e.g., evolution v. *creatio ex nihilo*) but other times mutually beneficial (e.g., drugs and medical advances that help Christians in bodily life). As I followed discussions and correspondence about that *CJ* issue, I did not see or hear any talk about fear, yes terror, at the unseen, incomprehensible Creator. Think back to the friends who theologized to Job about the suffering God had brought into his life. After thirty-seven chapters, God doesn’t take sides in their discussions or justify his ways but simply asserts himself as the Creator. “Where were you when I laid the foundations

of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding.” “Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his?” (Job 38:4; 40:9; cf. Ex 20:18). The vast unknowns of creation are most terrifying when we believe it was called into being by the word of an almighty God who is hidden from us and whose ways are beyond our knowing. Exploding stars, hurtling asteroids, solar storms that can impact Earth . . . might the Creator be capricious? Contrast the theory of evolution, which seeks to explain how things came to be in a natural, not supernatural, way, thus enthroning human intellect, fostering an illusion of understanding and in some cases control. While faith confesses that the Creator is not capricious but our Father (“I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth”), that does not reduce his almighty power. The One who by his word created out of nothing can also reduce to nothing what he has made.⁸

Which brings us to the judgment and the terrifying day of the Lord. “The day of the Lord is great and very awesome; who can endure it?” (Jl 2:11). I believe we as pastors must personalize judgment for every day, not just on the last day.⁹ Think about the thoughts and feelings that are deep, deep down in your being. What are your secret thoughts about other people? What are your true feelings toward other people? Deep down do you have anger, lust, greed, resentment? Imagine if your deepest thoughts and feelings were revealed for all the world to know. How ashamed you and I would be, so ashamed I’d hightail it out of town never to be seen again. Wouldn’t you? What Jesus says in Mark 7:21–22 also applies to us as pastors. “Out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” Sooner or later everything that is deep down within you and me will most certainly be revealed. Jesus promises, “Nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light” (Mk 4:22). If it doesn’t happen sooner, it will assuredly happen later.¹⁰ “No creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb 4:13). As the power of the Creator is beyond our understanding, his power to destroy us who are deeply flawed by sin is terrifying. There is no way out. “Enter not into judgment with your servant [this pastor], for no one living is righteous before you” (Ps 143:2). “Of whom may we seek comfort but of Thee, O Lord, who for our sins art justly displeased?”¹¹

At the cross, the natural emotion of fear is shaped into reverent fear of God. “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong” (Lk 23:40–41). Jesus’s disciples had their natural fears, as do we, and they came to the fore when the disciples saw Jesus manifest his power over nature.¹² His authority over nature prompts sinners to distance themselves from his power. “When Simon Peter saw it [the miraculous catch of fish], he fell down at Jesus’s knees saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord’” (Lk 5:8).¹³ Even more than

their terror at Jesus's power over nature, the disciples were existentially challenged as Jesus repeatedly taught them and resolutely led them to the cross. "He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly" (Mk 8:31–32a). Note that Jesus's prediction of the cross includes the subsequent resurrection, but before new life, death must come. Death, the annihilation of our natural self, causes people to fear. "Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him" (Mk 8:32b). Fear asks, "What's to become of me?" Jesus answers, "Death is what is to become of you." "Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mk 8:35).¹⁴ And so he inexorably leads fearful disciples to his death. "And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid" (Mk 10:32). Science explores with reason and our natural philosophical bent is to theologize on various topics, but it's only in the death of the Son of God and our baptismal union into his death that true fear of God is defined. "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20). The cross is the annihilation of our natural self so that the word can create a new you, a new me, new creatures in Christ. *In extremis* the one criminal understood. Do we pastors see ourselves daily *in extremis*?¹⁵

Here pastors are in an especially precarious spiritual position. I recall one of my professors, Dr. Robert Preus, telling about a woman who told him it was nice that Jesus died on the cross "but he didn't have to do that for me." The same sentiment is most assuredly deep in each of our hearts because we still have the innate law stirring up the original sin that lurks in our hearts, forgiven and regenerate though we be. Deep down our rebellious old Adam looks for a way out, for some slight merit. *I'm a pastor. I know the Scriptures and Confessions. I apply them in my preaching and teaching. Doesn't that count for a little something?* This is the scandal of the cross also to us pastors. St. Paul confessed, "I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is in my flesh" and he laid bare that as an apostle he was still chief of sinners (Rom 7:18; 1 Tm 1:15, in which note the present tense, "I am the foremost"). Romans 3:21 makes the point in a way easily overlooked. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Note the present: You and I are still falling short. Martin Luther drives this home in the Heidelberg Disputation of April 1518. Luther's theses pierce the presumption that something about us in some small way merits the grace of God. I quote here three of his theses, but extended study of all these theses personally, in your study group or Winkel will be beneficial.

Thesis 7: "The works of the righteous would be mortal sins if they would not be feared as mortal sins by the righteous themselves out of pious fear of God."

Thesis 11: “Arrogance cannot be avoided or true hope be present unless the judgment of condemnation is feared in every work.”

Thesis 18: “It is certain that man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ.”

While the pride deep within us is a special temptation to pastors because of our public professions, we are also specially blessed because our public life brings us plenty of criticism and suffering. Sometimes justified, other times unjustified, we take it all the time from parishioners, from people outside our congregation, from seminary people and critics, and indeed from many directions. It wears us down and is supposed to! In this is hidden God’s mysterious alien work, grinding us down to his orders for our every day, daily baptismal death so that his word can create *ex nihilo* new life and coming resurrection with his Son.¹⁶ Luther: “Other virtues may be perfected by doing; but faith, hope, and love, only by suffering, by suffering I say, that is, by being passive under the divine operation.” “The soul is taken hold of [by the pure word of God] and does not take hold of anything itself; that is, it is stripped of its own garments, of its shoes, of all its possessions, and of all its imaginations, and is taken away by the word . . . into the wilderness. . . . But this leading, this taking away, and this stripping, miserably tortures [the soul]. . . . This, indeed, is to die.”¹⁷ In this stripping away, our own personal *Anfechtungen*, we have only the word.

Thus says the Lord: “heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be,” declares the Lord. “But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.” (Is 66:2)

“We should fear and love God.” Where and how does love come in? The emotional terrors of an unseen and incomprehensible Creator who will judge us is stark law through which God’s alien purpose is worked to humble us and make us desperate for salvation in Jesus. “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Lk 23:42). He does, and through faith the Spirit shifts us from emotional terror about “what’s to become of me” to contemplate with reverential fear and love what our gracious Father and his Son have done for us through the cross and Easter. The God who thundered at Sinai was already a God jealous for the love of his people.

And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good?” (Dt 10:12–13. See also Dt 10:20; 13:3–4)

From time to time, I've heard older pastors look back and say they would have been more compassionate when they were younger. Learning to fear and love God makes that possible at every age and in every situation of ministry. As Luther indicates in explaining the commandments, fear and love of God are expressed in specific life situations.¹⁸ His explanation of the eighth commandment says, "We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way." We pastors don't have the esteem and power of this world, nor do we aspire to them, but each of us treasures his own reputation. Hasty accusations can put a long-lasting cloud over a dear brother's reputation and life. The fear and love of God cautions us, slows us down when we want to go public with something we think is wrong in the church. And the fourth commandment directs us to honor proper authority. Sometimes in our "discussions" about important issues in our life and practice together, we disrespect procedures put in place by our synod in its bylaws. People watch us. They want to see in each of us the compassion of Christ that grows from fear and love of God.

Keep me from saying words / That later need recalling;
Guard me lest idle speech / May from my lips be falling;
But when within my place / I must and ought to speak,
Then to my words give grace / Lest I offend the weak. (LSB, 696, 3)

Every morning while it is still dark, I step outside, look up, and remember my Father's question. "Lift up your eyes and see: Who created these?" (Is 40:26). In the proof for Heidelberg thesis 28, Luther says, "Sinners are attractive because they are loved." Sometimes our less than compassionate conduct sadly makes obvious that "we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor 4:7). May we humbly look up to the Creator's love in his Son raised on the cross, risen and exalted to recreate us. "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6).

Dale A. Meyer
President

Endnotes

- 1 Some passages speaking of blessings upon those who fear God: Dt 6:13–15; 28:58; Pss 25:12, 14; 31:19; 34:7, 9; Prv 9:10; 16:6; Is 33:6; Lk 1:50; Rv 11:18. That the fear of God is teachable, see 2 Chr 26:5.
- 2 *Phobos* and its verbal and adjectival forms in the LXX and NT.
- 3 Nature: Ex 20:18. Disaster: Job 6:21; Death: Gn 26:7; 2 Sm 14:15; Neh 6:10–13; Slavery: Gn 43:18
- 4 Some examples of fear before an ungodly person: Goliath (1 Sm 17:11), Og (Nm 21:34), Jezebel (1 Kgs 19:13). Fear before a person of God: Noah (Gn 9:2); Isaac (Gn 26:7), Jacob (Gn 35:5), Moses (Ex 2:14; 34:30), David (1 Sm 21:13).
- 5 Lot was afraid to live in Zoar (Gn 19:13). The Israelites were afraid to enter Canaan (Dt 1:19). The sanctuary is to be feared or revered (Lv 19:30).
- 6 Adam's shame made him fear God (Gn 3:10). Fear led Sarah and Isaac to lie (Gn 18:15; 26:7) and Jacob to steal (Gn 31:31).
- 7 Guenther Wanke, TDNT, IX, 200.
- 8 Cf. Gn 6:13, which destruction becomes a type of baptism (1 Pt 3:21).
- 9 1 Pt 1:17 puts judgment in the present tense.
- 10 Think of the numerous recent revelations of sexual misconduct that destroyed careers.
- 11 *Lutheran Worship: Agenda*, 94.
- 12 About Jesus's power over nature, Charles Arand reminds us that the Son participated in creation with the Father. "Have you ever thought of Christ as both our Creator and our Redeemer or have you only thought of him as our Redeemer? Why or why not? What difference might it make to see that it is not just God the Father but also Jesus the Son who participated in creating the world we experience all around us? Why don't we speak about Christ as the one who created all things?" (In "The Great American Eclipse and Our Creaturely Sense of Wonder," CSL.edu). See Jn 1:3; Heb 1:2–3.
- 13 Just as Adam's fear made him hide from God, Gn 3:10.
- 14 Note that those verses have an eschatological climax: "Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."
- 15 As the next paragraph shows, claiming we teach and preach the cross does not necessarily make it so. "Theologians of glory are not above turning even 'The Theology of the Cross' to their own advantage." Gerhard Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1997), 83.
- 16 On God's alien work, see Is 28:21.
- 17 Forde, 86–87.
- 18 So also, for example, Ps 34, Phil 2.

Articles

The Church is the House of Abraham

Reflections on Martin Luther's Teaching on Hospitality Toward Exiles

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According to the United Nations, more than 65 million people (about 23 million of them refugees) are counted as forcibly displaced due to persecution, war, and violence.¹ Only one percent are resettled each year, and over half of them are children. The numbers are staggering. Closer to

home, about three-quarters of the US foreign-born population (33.8 million) are lawful immigrants, and some 11 million are unauthorized immigrants.² In a world experiencing the greatest transnational movement of refugees and immigrants in history, including those coming to our shores and their children, one is right to ask what Lutheran theology has to contribute to our current situation. As Lutheran churches around the world commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, it is appropriate to ask if Martin Luther, the Reformer himself, said anything specifically on exiles.

In the middle section of this essay, I explore Luther's own thoughts on exiles in his study of Abraham's hospitality in Genesis 18, a section of his *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–1545). I will preface Luther's teaching with some thoughts on the thorny issue of terminology when referring to migrant peoples today, focusing ultimately on what

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Luther means more specifically by the term “exile.” I will conclude by suggesting how the Reformer’s teaching might offer us some guide posts as we think about the shape of the individual Christian’s, and the church’s, ministry among immigrants in the right-hand realm, as well as the potential role of Christians or groups of Christians as residents of the left-hand realm in assessing immigration issues.

My goal in this essay is to argue neither for *the* Lutheran church’s strategy for working or doing ministry among exiles nor for *the* Lutheran public policy for the state toward exiles. Nor is my primary intention to understand how Luther’s commentary on Genesis 18 fits in the broader framework of all the *Lectures on Genesis* or, more broadly, his political or ethical writings as a whole. My main goal is simply to let the mature Luther’s own voice be heard on Abraham’s hospitality in order to understand how the Reformer frames biblically and theologically his thinking about exiles and what he seems to suggest Christians should do as a result. While Lutherans will typically agree on the *what* of hospitality toward exiles, they will often have various takes on *how* one should deal with exiles in both realms. Therefore, my concluding thoughts on ways Luther’s thought can inform our thinking today are not meant to be read as exhaustive or normative, but as suggestive and as part of a broader and ongoing conversation.

Who Is an Exile? A Word on Terminology

A word on terminology will be helpful right from the start. One could make a case that, from a broad theological perspective, terms like exile, sojourner, stranger, resident alien, foreigner, and immigrant fall within the semantic field of the Hebrew word *gēr* and the Greek word *ξένος*, and therefore, can be used interchangeably to refer to someone who lives in a land not his or her own. Broadly speaking, these terms would apply, for instance, to Abraham who left Ur of the Chaldeans and lived as a stranger in the land of Canaan; Israel which lived as an exile in bondage to Egypt; Ruth who was a foreigner in Naomi’s land; Esther who became the foreign wife of a Persian king; Daniel who served Babylonian and Persian kings in exile; and even Jesus who fled to Egypt with his parents for a while during Herod’s persecution. In his reflections on Genesis, chapter 18, Luther uses the Latin terms *hospes* (stranger) and *peregrinus* (foreigner) to render the Greek *ξένος*.³ As a synonym, Luther also uses various conjugations of the words *exul* for the person in exile and *exilium* for the experience of exile itself. For the sake of convenience and consistency, we will simply retain the translation of the American edition of *Luther’s Works*, which renders Luther’s Latin terms with the English word “exile.”

From the perspective of modern nation states with their own laws and policies for migrant peoples, some or all of the terms above could mean entirely different things. In the US for example, *immigrant* is a technical term for someone who has been admitted to live in the country as a lawful permanent resident. There is even a category of *nonimmigrant*, which applies to people who are permitted to enter the

US for a limited time (e.g., under a student, tourist, or religious visa). While *asylees* and *refugees* may share experiences of being forced to flee their homelands for fear of various kinds of persecution or misfortune, the former are already in the country hoping for asylum and the latter are outside the country they hope to be resettled in. Refugees in particular go through a strenuous vetting process which can take many years prior to resettlement. Then, there are immigrants who are in the country illegally, or without proper documentation or authorization, due to a variety of reasons. Having said all that, when terms like immigration law or immigration policy are used in everyday language, they are often employed as a broader umbrella term to designate any federal regulations dealing with the transit of people across national borders, including the status of nonimmigrant visa holders, permanent residents, refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented or unauthorized immigrants. At the end of the essay, we often make use of this broader sense of the terms *immigrants* and *immigration* to refer, in general terms and respectively, to persons and policies dealing with foreign-born people who have left their countries of origin for the US.

As far as Luther's use of the term is concerned, who exactly is an exile? In his *Lectures on Genesis*, exiles are first of all Christians who are persecuted for the sake of the gospel and are seeking refuge in German lands.⁴ He also makes room for a broader category of exiles who migrate to German lands because of various misfortunes. We should, therefore, keep Luther's use of terminology in mind as we hear him reflect on Abraham's hospitality to the strangers at Mamre who were fleeing ungodly Sodom; the identity of Adam and the Old Testament church as an exiled community in the world; Abraham's own identity as an exile, as well as the identity of New Testament saints such as Protestants under persecution at the time of the Reformation; and the status of other migrants who are not persecuted for their Christian faith but seek refuge from other types of hardships. All of these categories of persons and situations are included under the term "exile" in Luther's exposition.

Was Luther an exile himself? Strictly speaking, none of the terms suggested thus far would apply to Luther because they deal with persons who have left their homeland for another country. Although Luther faced persecution and death threats, spending ten months in hiding at the Wartburg Castle in 1521, he still remained under the protectorate of his prince in German lands. Luther was, at least for a while, what we call today a displaced person—one who is forced to move to a different area of his homeland due to persecution or misfortune. Here Luther

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differs from John Calvin, who was literally an exile in Geneva—a city where hundreds of Christians fled or passed by mostly due to religious persecution. Recently, Reformed theologians have argued that Calvin’s identity as an exile shaped significantly his theological and practical approach to dealing with exiles flowing into the city from other lands. Rosario Rodríguez has shown that Calvin’s experience as a refugee, exile, and resident alien in Geneva had an influence on his view of the church’s call to practice hospitality towards strangers in society.⁵ He suggests that Calvin’s view of the diaconate as a divinely ordained office and his support of institutions of assistance to refugees and the poor in Geneva remain an example for us today of the need for the church’s ongoing commitment to vulnerable neighbors in our midst.⁶

Even though Luther is not, technically speaking, a refugee or exile by today’s terminology, he nevertheless knew at some existential level the hardships of the religiously persecuted and of living in a place not his own, apart from family and friends and his evangelical work. As far as the Reformer is concerned, his experience is one of exile from his Wittenberg “home.” Indeed, Luther likens his experience to that of the Apostle John’s by calling his time at Wartburg his “Patmos.” There seems to be no indication in Luther’s writings that his experience as an exile at Wartburg explicitly shaped his concern for exiles in his own day. Accounts of Luther’s exile at Wartburg focus more on his spiritual struggles (Lat. *tentatio*, Ger. *Anfechtung*), and discuss his criticism of monastic vows or his translation of the New Testament into German.⁷ Nothing is said on how Luther’s own experience colored his outlook on the struggles of other exiles. While we cannot exclude the possibility that Luther’s exile shaped his own thinking on exiles, we will simply seek a more productive venue and explore what Luther actually says on exiles in his *Lectures on Genesis*, focusing on his teaching on Abraham as our example of hospitality.

Luther on Exiles: The Church as the House of Abraham in the World

In North America, a number of Christian writers and official church bodies have written on exiles, sojourners, or strangers, mainly from the perspective of Scripture and pastoral responses to ministry and justice work among immigrants today. Some work has also been done from the perspective of how theological traditions draw from their normative confessional documents, narratives, and/or frameworks to reflect on immigrants and immigration issues today.⁸ Among Lutherans, some work has been done on the ways Luther’s reflections on the two realms or kingdoms and his teaching on vocation can be used in part as a lens to discuss immigration reform.⁹ Surprisingly, less has been done on what Luther’s teaching specifically on hospitality toward exiles or strangers might offer to this ongoing discussion. Let us then turn to a place in his writings where he specifically deals with how Christians should approach these neighbors both as members of

the church and as members of society in the realm of the state.

In the *Lectures on Genesis*, Luther's commentary on chapter 18, where Abraham is visited by the three men at Mamre, extols the patriarch as "a beautiful moral example of hospitality."¹⁰ When the letter to the Hebrews exhorts Christians, "do not neglect hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels" (Heb 13:2), the writer is alluding to Abraham's kind actions toward the three strangers whom he welcomed (LW 3:178). By asserting that "there is hospitality wherever the church is" (*Est autem hospitalitas, ubicunque Ecclesia est*) (LW 3:178; WA 43:2.29–30), Luther sees the virtue of hospitality as a mark of the church, "so that those who want to be true members of the church" (*Qui igitur Ecclesia membra vera esse cupiunt*) remember and are "encouraged" to practice it.¹¹ Since in the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord commanded his disciples to "give to him who begs from you" (Mt. 5:42), the church possesses "a common treasury" through which members care for each other spiritually "not only by teaching" but also bodily "by showing kindness and giving assistance."¹² Such care makes the church a place of "refreshment" (*refectionem*) for the weary (LW 3:178).

Appealing to a representative Christology, according to which "whatever you did to the least of mine, you did to me" (Mt. 25:40), Luther reads Abraham's service to the three strangers as an embodiment of the church's hospitality toward the Lord himself who comes to us in the form of his needy disciples, "especially the strangers whose lot is rather hard."¹³ Following the tradition of seeing the three visitors at Mamre as a theophany of the Lord himself, Luther argues that those who practice the "virtue" (*virtutis*) of hospitality like Abraham are not simply "receiving a human being but . . . the Son of God Himself" (LW 3:178; WA 43:3.1–5). Therefore, "even though we do not have the custom of prostrating ourselves, yet we should prostrate ourselves in our hearts before brethren because of Christ, who dwells in them."¹⁴ Abraham thought of the three visitors as brethren of the Lord, exiles who had no safe haven in Sodom or surrounding nations, and he bows before them due to his "regard for the Lord, whom he is worshipping in the persons of these guests."¹⁵ Since inhospitality towards strangers amounts to a neglect of the Lord, Luther refers to it as "hideous" (*foediis*), a form of "inhumanity or cruelty" (*immanitatem vel crudelitatem*) which will be punishable with eternal separation from the Lord when he returns on the last day and says, "I was a foreigner or a stranger and you did not receive me" (Mt. 25:43) (LW 3:178).

According to Luther, Abraham learned hospitality from two sources. First, he learned it from the practice of the church toward exiles persecuted on account of God's word; and second, from his own experience as an exile. It was Satan's hatred of God's word that led to his deceiving of godly Adam and his expulsion from paradise, making him the world's first "stranger and exile" (*peregrinum et exulem*).¹⁶ Since then,

Luther sees the virtue of hospitality as a mark of the church.

Satan has made miserable the lives of God's people, making them objects of "the hatred of the world," driving them "out of their homes" into "exile by whatever means he could" (LW 3:179). Given that "persecutions and exiles" (*persecutiones et exilia*) are often common among those on whom the light of the word has shone, including persecuted saints at the time of the Reformation, the church has been at all times "a sort of refuge of the exiles and the poor" (*ceu asyllum quoddam exulum et pauperum*).¹⁷ Due to the oppression from "the pope, the bishops, and tyrannical princes," godly exiles suffer "misery, thirst, hunger," and thus "there should an Abraham, and . . . some little domain of a godly prince in which there can be room for such people."¹⁸ Luther's frustration about believers being driven into exile by both church and state authorities convinces him that hospitality toward exiles must be the concern not only of godly Christians but also conscientious princes and other governing authorities.

When Luther defines "true strangers" (*veros peregrinos*) as "those who live in exile because of the Word" (*qui exulant propter verbum*), he does so in contrast to those monks who choose forms of self-imposed exile to show off and trust in their "own righteousness" (LW 3:179–80; WA 43:3.38–42). Since many "ministers of the churches . . . are now married and no longer live in impure celibacy," not only "single persons . . . but entire families are now in exile because of their confession of the Word," and it would be "a crime not to help these."¹⁹ On account of "God's command" (*mandato Dei*), the church must never forget the plight of his saints and must be ready "to practice works of mercy, to feed the hungry and the thirsty, to receive exiles hospitably, to comfort prisoners, and to visit the sick" (LW 3:180; WA 43:4.6–8). Following the example of Abraham, whose "house was open to all" and who "joyfully received strangers," Luther exhorts Christians with these words: "Hence, if we want to be Christians (*Si igitur volumus Christiani esse*), let our homes be open to exiles, and let us assist and refresh them."²⁰ The church is the house (*domus*) of Abraham in the world,²¹ "for where there is no house, there can be no hospitality."²²

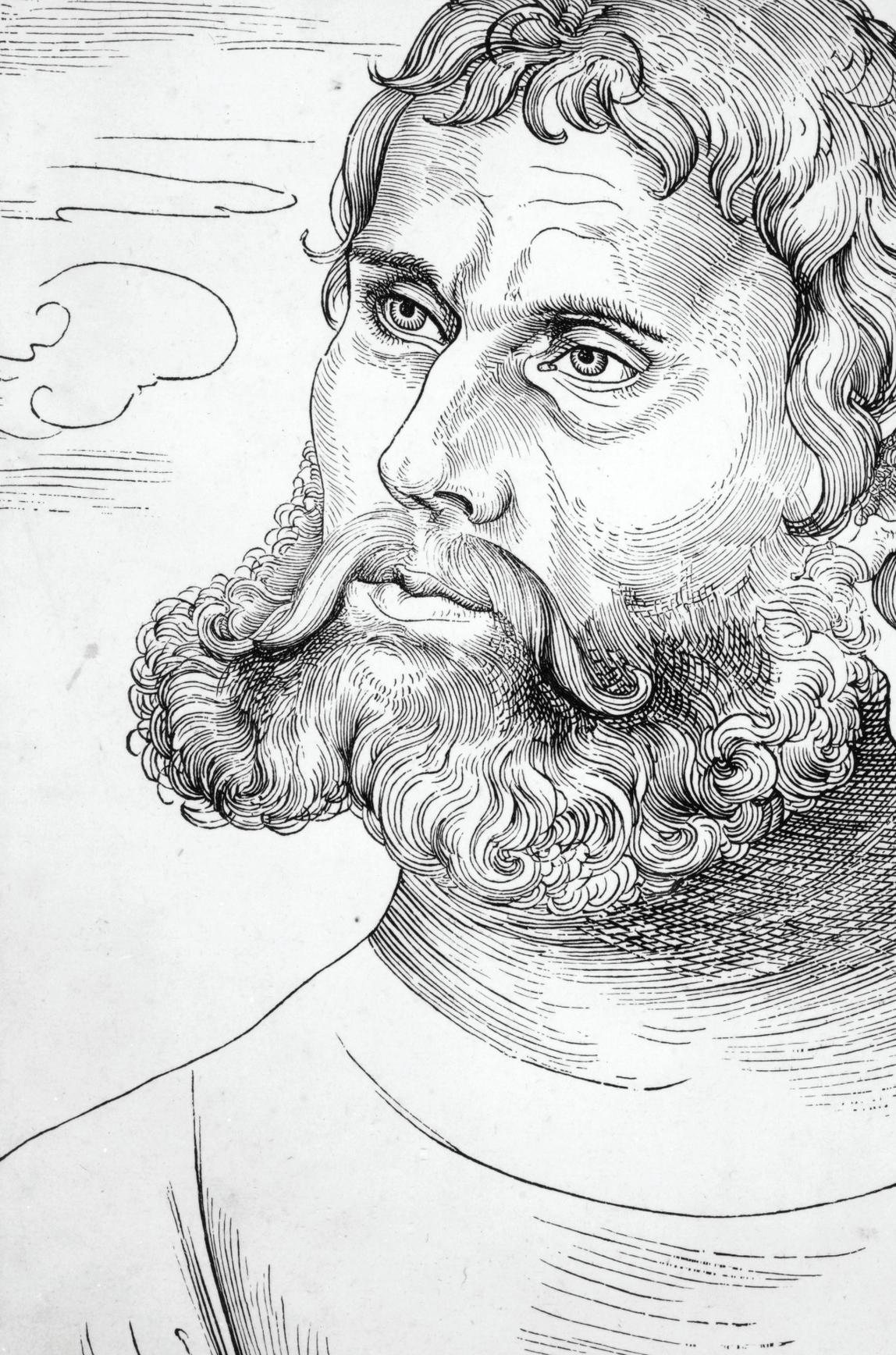
Second, Abraham learned hospitality from his own experience as an exile after leaving Ur and wandering through Canaan and several other places. As an exile, Abraham "often endured the rigors of the weather in the open country and under the sky; he was often troubled by hunger, often by thirst . . . for the term 'exile' includes countless hardships and perils" (LW 3:180). Such hardships, in Luther's estimation, make the patriarch more sensitive to the plight of sojourners and "enable him to be gentle, kind, and generous toward exiles" (LW 3:180). During his sojourn, Abraham encountered difficulties but also became the object of "the services of pious people" who welcomed him, and "from such experience he learned this rule, that he who receives a brother who is in exile because of the Word receives God Himself in the person of such a brother."²³ Luther expects various sectors of society to contribute toward the cause of exile relief, but is disappointed in the lack of generosity of "the nobles, the burghers, and the peasants" who in his estimation are not helping "the

churches with a single obol to be able to be generous toward exiles.”²⁴ Luther’s appeal to show hospitality to strangers under persecution is broad enough to include a spectrum of Christendom with various means of support and from all stations in life, including church, family, workers, the economic sector, and government officials.

In contrast to the papacy’s persecution “against the ministers of the Word, against the heads of households, even against women and children,” Luther highlights the hospitality of “our most illustrious Prince,” Elector John Frederick the Magnanimous (1503–1554), who has offered his protection to “miserable exiles, who flee for refuge” (*miseri exules, quo confugiat*).²⁵ In 1533 the zealous Catholic Duke George of Saxony ordered the Leipzig city council to find out which citizens were not adhering to the Catholic faith and then force them to sell their possessions and leave.²⁶ When the Duke found out that Luther advised the Leipzigers not to cooperate with this request because he was acting like a Herod or Pilate bent on murdering God’s people because of their confession of the word, the Duke complained to his relative John Frederick. Asking the Duke to stop acting like Saul and become instead a Paul, the Elector came to Luther’s defense by arguing that, while he would not agree with rebellion against temporal authority, the theologian nevertheless had the duty to comfort Christians under persecution. Considering the magnanimity of the Elector’s defense of Luther’s own spiritual obligation to exiles, we see why the Reformer praised his Elector’s hospitality toward them.²⁷

In his commentary on Genesis 18, Luther also considers the matter of people who trick the church into giving them things even though they are not truly in need. In particular, he has in mind monks who beg for things without really needing to do so. He also speaks of other “idle hypocrites who are accustomed to begging [*ociosi hypocritae assueti ad mendicationem*]; and if you give them a handout, they at once spend it on gambling and carousing.”²⁸ Just like some believing widows in Paul’s day who burdened churches even though they had family members who could take care of them, there are also people who come to churches “under the pretense of being exiles in distress” (*sub nomine afflictorum exulum*) because of their faith or confession, but actually lack nothing and thus end up becoming “an unfair burden” (*iniquum onus*) on the churches.²⁹ Perhaps deeply disturbed by the universal problem of false beggars in his day, Luther notes that even hospitable Abraham must have come across people who abused his generosity.³⁰ Still, while benefactors waste their beneficence on such people, this should not deter them from being liberal in their giving since “the kind act which is lost on an evil and ungrateful person is not lost on Christ, in whose name we are generous.”³¹

Luther seeks a balance between caution and kindness, a call for discerning *how* one extends hospitality without denying the *what* of hospitality, a call for prudent generosity without denying its character as a divine command. Luther notes, for instance, that just as “we should not intentionally and knowingly support the idleness of slothful people, so, when we have been deceived, we should not give up



Lucas Cranach the Elder's woodcut portrait (1522) of Martin Luther as "Junker Jorg," his assumed identity during his stay at Wartburg Castle as a "displaced person" (Credit: Metropolitan Museum of Art, via Wikimedia Commons)

this eagerness to do good to others" (LW 3:183). If Christ healed the ten lepers even though he knew only one would return to give thanks, how much more should we "not on this account give up our eagerness to confer benefits on others" (LW 3:183). While Luther sees assistance to the needy as God's command, he also asks both churches and the state to discern whether the one asking for help is truly in need—a discernment that is especially prudent, in the realm of the state, given the priority that should generally be given to needy citizens already living in the land over other neighbors.³² Overall, Luther's main concern in Genesis 18 is not with exiles being a burden on others if the cause for assistance is legitimate, but rather with wasting kindness on impostors that could be best used toward others who are really in need.

Although Luther focuses on exiles who flee to German lands due to religious persecution, he also calls Christians to be generous toward "those who are strangers in the state, provided that they are not manifestly evil" (*qui civiliter sunt peregrini, modo non sint aperte mali*) (LW 3:183; WA 43:6.28–29). For instance, if a "Turk or Tartar" came to us as a "stranger" and "in distress" we should not disregard him "even though he is not suffering because of the Word" (LW 3:183–184). Even if a Christian's first responsibility is to those of "the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10), "those who profess the same doctrine with us and for this reason suffer persecution," they are also called to help others "who experience misfortune" and, moreover, to follow Christ's teaching which includes showing "kindness also to our enemies" (LW 3:185). While Abraham's hospitality to the three visitors is explained by Luther in terms of assisting fellow believers, the example of Christ calls us to deal generously with other strangers outside the church who come into our lands, as long as they are not a danger to the citizens of the land, and their presence in our midst follows from legitimate misfortunes experienced in their homelands. Luther does not define what these misfortunes are, but they include events such as wars, famine, and fear of persecution or death for a variety of reasons.

Faith and love go hand in hand in Luther's description of Abraham's hospitality.

Luther sees the Genesis account of Abraham's hospitality as unparalleled. Not only is this kind hospitality toward strangers hard to find in the world, but in the case of Abraham it is portrayed as a prime example of hospitality for the church in the New Testament.³³ Beyond these features, what makes the account unparalleled for

Luther is that the patriarch welcomes his “unknown guests with such reverence, falls to the ground, and receives them. Not only does Abraham exalt the strangers but also takes a position of humility toward them in that “he minimizes his possessions” and does not adorn “his service with words” (LW 3:186). There is a self-effacing character to Abraham’s hospitality. He does not attract attention to the gifts he shares with others and definitely not to the things he might lose by sharing with others. He does not publicize his good works. His kindness is entirely oriented toward the neighbor.

Faith and love go hand in hand in Luther’s description of Abraham’s hospitality. He calls the church to see Abraham both as “a father of faith” (*patrem fidei*) and as “a father of good works (*patrem bonorum operum*) . . . a most beautiful example of love, gentleness, kindness, and all virtues” (LW 3:185; WA 43:7.28–29). Even in Genesis 18 Luther presents Abraham “not so much as a father of faith as a father of good works” (LW 3:190); he also points out that “it is faith . . . that makes him so

eager and ready” to be hospitable (LW 3:195). When we look at strangers through the “eyes of the flesh” (*oculi carnis*), their “bodily appearance is a hindrance to us,” but when we look at them with the “inner eyes of faith” (*internis oculi . . . fide*) we see our “truly present Guest” and that “God is coming” to us in his saints.³⁴ Acting according to the flesh that still clings to them in this life, Christians are often “slow” to be hospitable “and are either displeased or grumble when brethren

What we learn from Abraham is a concrete way to live by faith in the world, one which happens to be filled with exiles among us because of the misfortunes of life.

arrive—these are signs of a faith which, if not altogether dead, is nevertheless asleep and very lazy” (LW 3:196). For this reason, the “examples” of Abraham “must be put before the churches and carefully impressed” upon the faithful.³⁵ What we learn from Abraham is a concrete way to live by faith in the world, one which happens to be filled with exiles among us because of the misfortunes of life.

Embodying Abraham’s Faith: Lessons for Hospitality toward Exiles Today

At the end of his study of second-century understandings of Christian identity through the lens of the biblical language of aliens or strangers in the world, Benjamin Dunning notes that the Christian’s sense of being “other” raises the issue of how they should relate to people outside the Christian community who are also “other.” The author notes that one option to deal with this issue lies in highlighting “the possibility that an identity rooted in an alien status may lead to greater concern for (and solidarity with) others who are marginalized.”³⁶ This is precisely what Luther does in his own way by arguing that Abraham’s own identity as a stranger taught him to be

hospitable to strangers, and moreover, that by taking on the identity of the patriarch the church becomes an Abraham or the “house” of Abraham in a world filled with exiles. By faith, the church embodies Abraham’s hospitality toward exiles as a mark of her Christian identity.

Luther speaks of the church’s hospitality toward exiles suffering for their confession of the faith, but also toward all kinds of exiles suffering from various catastrophes and hardships. In Luther’s language, Christians are called to imitate Abraham by exercising both “brotherly love” toward the saints and “general kindness” toward others.

This is the historical meaning of this passage and an outstanding praise of hospitality, in order that we may be sure that God Himself is in our home, is being fed at our house, is lying down and resting as often as some pious brother in exile because of the Gospel comes to us and is received hospitably by us. This is called brotherly love or Christian charity; it is greater than that general kindness which is extended even to strangers and enemies when they are in need of our aid. Among our adversaries there is neither; for they hate us because of our confession, and for this reason they persecute, proscribe, and even kill us. Moreover, they have the utmost hatred for those who are their enemies in civil life. Therefore hospitality and brotherly love are found only among true Christians and in the church. (LW 3:189)

In this text, Luther elevates the church’s “brotherly love, or Christian charity” (*Philadelphia, seu Christiana charitas*) for her own children above her “general kindness” (*generali beneficentia*) toward strangers and enemies outside her household (WA 43:10.12–13). The former love “is greater” (*maior est*) than the latter not necessarily in terms of the type of aid given to the needy, but in terms of the bond of hospitality that God’s people have with persecuted ministers of the word, their families, and other Christians with whom they share a common faith.

The most basic lesson we can draw from Luther’s teaching for the church today is that her children become the house of Abraham in the world by extending the hand of mercy to exiles, both Christians and others. This mercy can be extended to immigrants today regardless of factors such as their religious commitments or their legal status in the state. Such hospitality will often be exercised within the bounds of the law, and it can include assisting people with food, clothing, shelter, medical assistance, and psychological counseling; childcare and parochial school education; immigration legal services; and visiting immigrants in detention centers.³⁷

This is, however, easier said than done. In his own day, Luther was appalled at how little Christians extended the hand of welcome to exiles and how little Christians working in various sectors of society actually supported the churches to assist

them. Luther's suggestion to deal with this problem lies in instructing Christians in the examples of Abraham and others who did not let the offensive appearance of exiles and strangers distract them from their duty to show them hospitality. Today the appearance of many refugees and immigrants may be offensive among some Christians because they come from a religious background other than their own or because they have broken the law. While Luther admits that some exiles might have an evil intent, he also notes that not all are a danger to others or lazy opportunists. Although one must show wise discernment in dealing with various situations, he challenges the church not to retreat into a default position of fear, suspicion, or shaming of the stranger, but rather lead with hospitality even if at times they might be taken advantage of in doing so.

Luther's teaching on the priority of "brotherly love" suggests that Christians today must put a human face on the immigration debate with particular attention to the situation of refugees and immigrants of their own family of faith. This would include the difficult situation of Christians who are in the country illegally or without proper authorization. In various parts of the country, congregations have members who are undocumented, acknowledge and confess their sins, but also live with the fear of being separated from families or being deported to countries they fled from because of the fear of violence or lack of economic opportunities to take proper care of their families. A factor that often gets lost in abstract discussions on immigration law among Christians is the number of Christian exiles who have fled their countries because of various misfortunes and hardships, but never went through a formal asylum or refugee process. Of recent memory, one thinks of migrants (including unaccompanied minors) fleeing to the US from Central America—particularly from Honduras and El Salvador, places with some of the highest murder rates in the world—due to a legitimate fear of systematic gang violence, rape, torture, and murder. A number of these strangers are Christians who felt they had to leave their countries as a way to fulfill God's command to protect the lives of loved ones. There are also Christians who, due to the backlog in processing family visas, have overstayed their visas to avoid separation from spouses, children, and other family members.³⁸

Often these undocumented immigrants are lumped together with others who have broken the law. Yet the priority of love Luther calls the church to exercise toward Christian exiles suggests that such lumping is not good enough. While the state does not necessarily have to worry about distinctions between Christians and others in applying civil law, Luther suggests that Christians must think through how they might assist brothers and sisters who find themselves in difficult legal circumstances before the state. As we mentioned above, those circumstances today may include fear of violence, family separation, and unemployment upon return to the country of origin. Luther's teaching reminds us that when we deal with the least of these followers of Jesus, we are dealing with God himself. While lumping all undocumented immigrants without distinction under the category of illegality

might make sense from the perspective of the state, Christians must personalize the immigration debate in a more nuanced way so that they can account for the struggles and hopes of their own brothers and sisters in Christ. They could ask more specifically, for instance, how decisions made about refugees, asylum seekers, temporary visa holders, or the undocumented will affect people of the household of faith in terms of the protection of their lives and their families. They can then make decisions about the types of support and advocacy for the least of these they can realistically undertake.

What about those exiles who are not of the family of faith? Luther notes that, unless one is dealing with exiles who are either tricking us into helping them in the church even though they are not in need, or have a manifestly evil intent to harm others in society, Christians should also show a measure of compassion toward them and assist them in any way possible. In the way Christians deal with both exiles belonging to the household of faith and other exiles of the state, they must act differently than “our adversaries” (i.e., the papacy and its representatives) who either unjustly go after their own for their true confession or hate “their enemies of civil life.” In a sense, Luther is suggesting that Christians, by their actions, must also exceed expectations when it comes to treating strangers outside the church. At the very least, they must not hate them or speak hatefully of them. Moreover, they must not lump them together with those who have an evil intent to harm the residents of the city or abuse their generosity through idle begging. Luther’s discernment concerning the particular situation of strangers suggests once again that Christians must put a human face on debates about immigration law. Not all refugees are radical Muslims bent on killing Americans.

Not all illegal aliens are criminals, rapists, drug traffickers, or burdens on society. In our speech, we must be careful not to paint these strangers with broad strokes, making them paragons of sin or scapegoats for our societal ills. We must distinguish between the whole person and the particular act of illegality committed. We must also ask deeper questions about the kinds of misfortunes and sufferings these neighbors have undergone or are undergoing, which may have led to their unauthorized status. We must hear their stories, and consider whether there is in some cases, as Luther would say, “some little domain of a godly prince in which there can be room for such people.” Going through this process of discernment will help us make decisions about advocacy or support for what Luther calls “exiles of the state.”

We may want to press Luther further and ask, “What does exceeding expectations

We must be careful not to paint these strangers with broad strokes, making them paragons of sin or scapegoats for our societal ills.

look like in institutional life?” Today, Lutherans have offered different views on or approaches to policy questions about immigration.³⁹ But in his *Lectures on Genesis*, the Reformer does not offer such details. For instance, Luther praises the Prince for his generosity toward strangers, but does not offer any particulars on the state’s public policy. Further historical research on these questions might be beneficial to see how concerns for strangers are institutionalized in some concrete ways in Luther’s time. We know, more broadly, of Luther’s influence on poor relief initiatives such as the Leisnig *Ordinance of a Common Chest* (1523), which forbids using funds from the chest to assist any kind of beggars, including “nonresident, fictitious poor and idlers who are not really in need” (LW 45:185). More positively, the ordinance also allows for the assistance of Christian “newcomers . . . of whatever estate” through “loans and gifts,” as long as they are willing to be productive members of society or the city “by their labor, toil, and industry,” and “so that the strangers too may not be left without hope, and may be saved from shame and open sin” (LW 45:190–191). In these statements, we see how Luther does not lump all strangers in the same categories, but assesses each situation in which assistance and hospitality are called for depending on the circumstances. He also balances his concern for hospitality toward exiles with an equally valid concern for the needs of the residents of the state—an important consideration in discussions about public policy on refugees and immigrants today.

Luther’s thoughts on relief and hospitality can be explored in the broader context of his teachings on the two kingdoms and vocation. Such teachings offer frameworks for wrestling with questions about the limits of temporal authority in relation to matters of Christian conscience on the adequacy of immigration laws, or how Christian vocation shapes one’s views of what issues and neighbors are given priority in immigration debates and advocacy.⁴⁰ Here we have only focused on the mature Luther of the *Lectures on Genesis*, who praises Abraham as the example for the church of a basic spiritual disposition or virtue in the heart and mind that *precedes* and *prepares* the way for practices of hospitality. Luther’s call for the church to claim her identity as the house of Abraham in the world makes this much clear: as Christians discuss issues related to church practice and state policy toward strangers today, respectively as citizens of heaven and residents of the state, a hospitable disposition toward exiles must remain a constant in their lives and guide in a significant way their thinking on refugees and immigrants. Even though, as Luther himself allows, Christians exercise a certain priority of love toward those of the family of faith in the realm of the church and toward their fellow citizens and residents in the realm of the state, the basic virtue of hospitality toward all exiles remains one of her unique identity markers in the world.

Endnotes

- 1 For a brief version of this essay, see “The House of Abraham: Martin Luther’s vision for a church of radical hospitality,” *America*, November 15, 2017, 34–36.
- 2 <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/08/03/5-key-facts-about-u-s-lawful-immigrants>.
- 3 In Luther’s citation of Mt. 25:35, for instance, Christ says, “*Hospes fui, seu peregrinus, et non suscepistis me,*” that is, “I was a stranger, or a foreigner. . .” (italics mine). WA 43:18.2, 37.
- 4 “Thus in this passage praise is given chiefly to the hospitality we practice toward those strangers who are in exile because of the Word and their profession of the faith.” LW 3:185.
- 5 Rubén Rosario Rodríguez, “Calvin’s Legacy of Compassion: A Reformed Theological Perspective on Immigration,” in *Immigrant Neighbors Among Us: Immigration Across Theological Traditions*, ed. M. Daniel Carroll R. and Leopoldo A. Sánchez M. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015), 44–62.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 50–55.
- 7 See James M. Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 162–178; Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1955), 148–157; Orr argues that Luther’s exile shaped more strongly his outlook on monastic vows. See Timothy J. Orr, “Junker Jörg on Patmos: Luther’s Experience of Exile in the Wartburg,” *Church History and Religious Culture* 95 (2015): 435–456.
- 8 For a pastoral contribution from Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, and United Methodist bishops, see Mark Adams et al., *Bishops on the Border: Pastoral Responses to Immigration* (New York: Morehouse, 2013); for immigration from the perspective of Christian theological traditions, see Carroll and Sánchez, *Immigrant Neighbors Among Us*; for a Lutheran approach, see Commission on Theology and Church Relations [hereafter CTCR], *Immigrants Among Us: A Lutheran Framework for Addressing Immigration Issues* (St. Louis: LCMS), 2013.
- 9 Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., “Bearing So Much Similar Fruit: Lutheran Theology and Comprehensive Immigration Reform,” in *Secular Governance: Lutheran Perspectives on Contemporary Legal Issues*, ed. Ronald W. Duty and Marie A. Failing (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 182–203. For a more implicit use of Lutheran frameworks, see Meilaender’s reflections in Mark Amstutz and Peter Meilaender, “Public Policy and the Church: Spiritual Priorities,” *The City* 4 (Spring 2011): 4–17; and Peter C. Meilaender, “Immigration: Citizens and Strangers,” *First Things* 173 (2007), 10–12.
- 10 LW 3:177; Lat. “*exemplum pulcherrimum morale de hospitalitate*” (WA 43:2.14–15).
- 11 LW 3:178; “*Qui igitur Ecclesiae membra vera esse cupiunt, hi hospitalitatem meminerint praestandam, ad quam non solum exemplo sancti Patriarchae, sed scripturae gravissimis testimoniis invitamur*” (WA 43:3.5–8); Luther lists seven marks of the church (Lat. *notae ecclesiae*) in *On the Councils and the Church* (1539), where he also notes that in addition to these (i.e., the Word of God, the sacraments of Baptism and the Altar, the office of the keys and the pastoral ministry, prayer, and bearing the cross), “there are other outward signs that identify the Christian church” as her members fulfill the second table of the law, such as “when we bear no one a grudge, entertain no anger, hatred, envy, or vengefulness toward our neighbors, but gladly forgive them, lend to them, help them, and counsel them.” LW 41:166. In this latter sense Luther speaks of hospitality as an identity marker for Christians.
- 12 LW 3:178; “Those who are afflicted by spiritual persecution should be comforted and strengthened with the Word; but those who are afflicted by physical persecution should be assisted with bread and water, that is, with love and hospitality, everyone according to his need” (LW 3:184).
- 13 *Ibid.* (cf. LW 3:184); “*Praecipue autem peregrini, quibus fortuna iniquior est*” (WA 43:2.35).
- 14 LW 3:187; Abraham’s bowing does not “present any difficulty, for he recognized God in them and listens to their words just as though God Himself were speaking. He is following the general rule that one should not consider who is speaking but what he is saying; for if it is the Word of God, how would God Himself not be present?” (LW 3:220).
- 15 LW 3:188. Welcoming strangers and angels, Abraham and Lot felt “unworthy of so great an honor that it should give lodging to God in the persons of the brethren” (*ibid.*); following Heb. 13:2, Luther notes that “even though Abraham does not know that they [i.e., the three visitors at Mamre] are angels, he neverthe-

- less has the conviction that in these three . . . he was hearing God, who is one in His essence and trine [sic] in Persons” (LW 3:219-20).
- 16 WA 43:3.21 (translation mine); see LW 3:179; “For wherever the Word is, there Satan, the enemy, is stirring up physical and spiritual persecutions. In Paradise itself he was unable to rest until he drove Adam with his Even into exile” (LW 3:184).
- 17 WA 43:4.27–30 (translation mine); see LW 3:179.
- 18 LW 3:179; “*Oportet esse Abrahamum, oportet ditiunculam aliquam pii cuiusdam principis esse, in qua talibus locus esse possit*” (WA 43:4.34–36).
- 19 LW 3:182; “*Igitur non singulae personae, ut olim, sed integrae familiae nunc propter verbi confessionem exulant, hos non adiuuare scelus est*” (WA 43:5.32–34).
- 20 LW 3:180; “*Patuit igitur eius domus omnibus. Ac cum gaudio suscepit peregrinos, sicut videmus. . . Si igitur volumus Christiani esse, pateant exulibus domus nostrae, foveamus et recreemus eos*” (WA 43:4.14–19).
- 21 “Thus the saints are not received in a kindly manner and treated generously anywhere except in the homes of Abraham and Lot, that is, in the church, which acknowledges that it is the servant of the servants of God.” LW 3:188.
- 22 LW 3:179; “*Ubi enim non est domus, ibi non potest esse hospitalitas*” (WA 43:3.36–37).
- 23 LW 3:187; in his *Lectures on Hebrews* (1517–1518), Luther sees Abraham as a “stranger” on account of the Word, that is, of his faithfulness to follow God’s command, and attributes his difficulties as an exile to his identity as a believer in God’s promises. See LW 29:238.
- 24 LW 3:182; “*Non nobiles, non cives, non rustici uno obulo adiuuant Ecclesias, ut possint esse liberales in exules*” (WA 43:5.25–26).
- 25 LW 3:181–182; “*Nunc Dei benignitate sub nostro principe illustrissimo habent miseri exules, quo confugiant, et ubi tuti sunt*” (WA 43:5.22–23).
- 26 For an account of the event, see Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer*, 261.
- 27 Luther thanks the Elector and others for their “hospitality” to persecuted ministers of the word. See LW 4:210–211.
- 28 LW 3:182; WA 43:5.36–37; for Luther’s comments on the rampant problem of begging in his day, its impact on local resources, and the need for its abolition, see his address *To the Christian Nobility* (1520), in LW 44:189–190.
- 29 LW 3:182 (WA 43:6.4–7). Luther makes a reference to 1 Tim 5:16.
- 30 LW 3:183; for a study of Luther’s influence on poor relief efforts, see Carter Lindberg, “There Should Be No Beggars Among Christians’: Karlstadt, Luther, and the Origins of Protestant Poor Relief,” *Church History* 46 (1977): 313–334; for a more comprehensive treatment, see Carter Lindberg, *Beyond Charity: Reformation Initiatives for the Poor* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).
- 31 LW 3:183; “*Deo tamen probatur voluntas nostra, et beneficium, quod in homine malo et ingrato perit, in Christo, cuius nomine benefici sumus, non perit*” (WA 43:6.19–20).
- 32 Because of the high number of “vagrants and impostors” in his day, Luther calls for discernment in hospitality on the part of churches, who should not “bestow anything on unknown persons who come running along without the testimonies of godly people.” He also asks that “the government do its duty in this matter. It should keep robbers and thieves of this kind from its land and towns.” He also acknowledges that even “fellow citizens” who want to help “do not have such abundant resources . . . to relieve the needs of all who flock to us. Besides, the number of needy citizens in our midst is not small. They must be supported ahead of the others.” LW 7:337–338.
- 33 Luther notes how the King of Canaan and the people of Sodom did not extend a welcoming hand respectively to Abraham and his nephew Lot. See LW 3:188.
- 34 WA 43:15.40–41 (translation mine); cf. LW 3:196.
- 35 *Ibid.*; “Thus Abraham’s example deserves to be set before us by Moses as a mirror in which true services and virtues of every kind are clearly seen, especially, however, that extraordinary faith which is shown by the fact that in these guests he recognizes, reveres, and worships God. This faith is the chief thing, but the flesh hampers it in us in various ways. Like an intervening wall, it obstructs our eyes and prevents us from recognizing God in our brethren, as Abraham did, and from worshiping Him so dutifully. . . . We, too,

could have such guests every day if our unbelief did not stand in the way. Therefore these events are recorded for our shame and reproach, because we do not do the same thing in faith and do not conclude that as often as we show hospitality to exiled brethren and to those who are in distress because of their confession, the Son of God Himself and His angels—not flesh and blood—are lodging with us.” LW 3:198–199.

36 Benjamin Dunning, *Aliens and Sojourners: Self as Other in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 115.

37 See CTCR, *Immigrants among Us*, 47.

38 For some examples of the relative failure of the current immigration system in addressing effectively issues such as family unification, unskilled labor demand, and humane treatment of low-risk immigrants (especially, in light of the increasing use of detention centers), see Stephen Bouman and Ralston Deffenbaugh, *They Are Us: Lutherans and Immigration* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 54–69.

39 For two contrasting approaches, see Peter C. Meilander, *Toward a Theory of Immigration* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), and Stephen Bouman and Ralston Deffenbaugh, *They Are Us*; for a discussion of these positions, see Sánchez, “Bearing So Much Similar Fruit,” 182–196.

40 See Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., “Who Is My Neighbor? Immigration through Lutheran Eyes,” in Carroll and Sánchez, *Immigrant Neighbors among Us*, 29–42; see also CTCR, *Immigrants among Us*, 29–46.

The Word of the Lord Grew—and Multiplied—and Showed Its Strength

The Word of God in the Book of Acts

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It is difficult for me to imagine a more intimidating assignment than that of writing an essay on a theme for which Martin Franzmann has written a book. Even though I now hold the same position at the same seminary that Franzmann was given in the year of my birth, and even though I am

now several years older than he was when *The Word of the Lord Grows* was published, it still feels disastrously presumptuous of me to think that I could say more or other or better than he has said. And yet, the theme is extremely well chosen. And more needs to be said. And what Franzmann said needs to be heard again.

If you were to poll even this audience for responses to the question “What is the book of Acts about?” few but the book’s sharpest readers would tell you that it was a book about the word of God, that you wouldn’t be wrong at all to say that the word was, in fact, this book’s main character, and that it could be described as a biography or even a gospel of the word. This would not only be true of popular audiences; scholars who hold such a view of the Acts of the Apostles are all too rare. “It’s the church’s first mission manual—or earliest mission history—or missiology.” “It’s a picture of the life of the earliest church.” “It’s the gospel of the Holy Spirit.”

Editor's note

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“It’s a defense of the Apostle Paul or of the church in general.” Such are the answers commonly seen as summarizing what Acts is all about. And though there may be some truth to most of those, none of them captures as well the character of the book itself than to say that Acts is about the word. And seeing Acts as about the word is crucial to seeing it as Scripture, and for seeing it as God’s word for you.

This book, in fact, is filled with words and speeches and proclamations and sermons and testimonies. “In Luke’s writing the spoken word is not a thing apart, a set-piece embodying a distinct literary technique of commentary,” explains Colin Hemer in his study of Acts in its setting as a piece of Hellenistic historiography.¹ He continues,

The principal speeches of Acts occupy less than a quarter of its total bulk. In the RSV text, the total of verses occupied by twelve major speeches, five attributed to Peter, one to Stephen, and six to Paul, is 226 out of a total of 1003, or 22.5 percent. But, somewhat surprisingly, there is as much or more direct speech that does not fall under the heading of “major speeches.” Altogether, slightly more than half the book is taken up with direct speech.²

Hemer contrasts these figures from Acts (22.5 percent of the book is devoted to the major speeches; more than 50 percent is devoted to direct speech) to Josephus’s *Jewish War*, where only 8.8 percent of the work is direct speech; other contemporaries show even smaller percentages.³ Hemer concludes:

Thus the author of Acts displays an interest in direct speech that is not readily paralleled in other ancient literature. The reason for this preoccupation is not difficult to understand, however: the progress of the good news was the very subject of the book of Acts, and preaching of that word (and the words spoken in opposition to it) is therefore the heart of the matter, not mere illustrative material as it might be to authors who write about the history of nations or the causes and effects of a war.⁴

In fact, one of the surprising and noteworthy things a word study of *λόγος* in the book of Acts teaches us is the power of words in general—even when they are not *the* word. A person can, in fact, be mighty in word as well as in deed (Acts 7:22). People flee before words and become exiles in strange lands (Acts 7:29). People will send to another city and invite a stranger into their homes all because of a word (Acts 10:29). And a word can cause people to send some of their own to far-off places (Acts 11:22). Words can trouble people, get them all shaken up, leave them mentally dismantled (Acts 15:24). Words can strengthen, confirm, and encourage (Acts 15:27, 32). A word can get you out of jail free (Acts 16:36). A word can make the difference between whether your case is heard or dismissed in court (Acts 18:14). A word can

decide whether your demonstration is legal or criminal (Acts 19:40). Words can be used to measure the value of one's life (Acts 20:24). Words can make your heart ache with sorrow (Acts 20:38). Words can make you drop dead where you stand (Acts 5:5). Now, of course, not all of these instances of the Greek word λόγος are glossed as *word or words* in our English translations; λόγος has a wide range of meanings in first-century Hellenistic Greek, and English translators often prefer to translate the word as "cause" or "reason" or "matter." But for Luke and his Greek readers, they were all λόγοι. And, if ordinary words can do so much, imagine what Luke thinks a word spoken by God can do!

But where to begin? I propose that we let Acts 6:7 be our "textual Jerusalem." We will begin here, and then fan out into all the world of Acts, following this word to see where it goes and what it accomplishes.

In Acts 6:7, we read:

Καὶ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ ἤξανεν καὶ ἐπληθύνετο ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν μαθητῶν ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ σφόδρα, πολὺς τε ὄχλος τῶν ἱερέων ὑπήκουον τῇ πίστει.⁵

I want us to read this verse carefully, so we won't immediately go to the English translation for it. It is not until Acts 19:20 that we see "the word *of the Lord* continued to grow and prevail"—the wording that provided both Franzmann's title and my theme; but 6:7 is the first of a series of summary statements that speaks of the word growing. These statements within the series also "grow" in their own way: in 6:7 the word grows; in 12:24 the word grows and multiplies; in 19:20 the word grows and prevails. Let's follow this series, beginning with 6:7.

"The word of God was growing." I find this pairing of subject and verb to be intriguing, evocative, and puzzling. And I find it intriguing, evocative, and puzzling that so few commentators seem to find Luke's wording here intriguing, evocative, or puzzling. I can't help asking: How does a word grow?

Preachers know one way that a word can grow. Recall the compline service that became a vigil when Paul decided to let his sermon grow all the way to midnight. That's certainly one way that a word can grow, but Luke doesn't speak of that as growth. In Acts 20:7 he uses the verb παρατείνω to describe this "stretched-out sermon."

We may even feel a little uncomfortable with the suggestion that the word of God, the gospel, continued to grow, as if it were getting "bigger" than it originally was. This is made even worse when Luke adds the idea of multiplication in 12:24. We want nothing to do with a plurality of gospels; and yet, we are all quite familiar with a parable in which the word is described as a seed for which the best outcome is growth and multiplication. Many have seen and continue to see the parable of the Sower as the original connection between the word and growth, a connection which makes it possible for biblical authors to speak of the word implanted (Jas 1:21), the word that

continues to grow (Acts), and the word that bears fruit (Col 1:6). That this seems so obvious and natural may partially explain why so few commentators have found the image in Acts all that worthy of comment.

Still, what renders this approach less than satisfying is that, in the account of the parable of the Sower given in Luke, the word does not grow, at least, the verb ἀϋξάνω is not used. Instead, the verb φύω is used to describe the growth of what was planted in the good soil. It could be argued that the image is the same even if the verbs used are not the same, but there are two reasons I am reluctant to think that the parable of the Sower completely explains the usage in Acts. First of all, in the telling of the parable recorded by Mark, ἀϋξάνω is used. Was this simply the result of switching one synonym for another by our Lord in the telling or by Luke in the translation? There is no way of knowing, but we must still acknowledge the differences in the texts we have. Secondly, in the parable as recorded by Luke, the explanation of the final planting places much more emphasis on the recipient of the word than it does on the word itself: “But that which is in the good earth, these are the ones who are of such a character that, having heard the word, they hold it fast in a right and good heart and bear fruit in perseverance.” This suggests that other possibilities are worth exploring.

The only study that I have come across devoted to the question of “the word that grows” is Jerome Kodell’s.⁶ The title makes clear his conclusion: “‘The Word of God Grew’: The Ecclesial Tendency of Λόγος in Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20”; and he, too, acknowledges the difficulties of moving straight from the parable of the Sower to the growing word of Acts. Some adjustments were required, he suggests. Kodell writes: “Luke adjusted his text to highlight the dynamism of the word of God, and in so doing transformed the parable of the sower into the parable of the seed.”⁷ And yet, it’s not even quite that easy. Kodell expresses his reservations:

But this Lucan parallel is not as helpful as it may seem. The growth of the word in the parable is internal and personal; the growth of the word in Acts 6,7; 12,24; 19:20 appears predominantly external, so that there can be no simple transfer of meaning. And, in fact, a consensus is noticeably lacking. Translators have attempted to skirt the problem of the verb ἀϋξάνειν with subject ὁ λόγος by shading its meaning to “spread,” “gain influence,” “grow in power.” Commentators on the texts have followed this tendency to take the verb in various metaphorical senses.⁸

After noting that the most consistent theological use of λόγος in Acts is with

A depiction of Luke the Evangelist from the Illuminated Armenian Gospels with Eusebian canons (circa 17th cent) (Credit: The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford).



reference to “the Christian message,”⁹ (i.e., the preaching about Jesus), Kodell raises the issue of the three summary texts that are at the center of our questions:

But there are other texts, such as the summaries at 6:7; 12:24; 19:20, in which Luke insinuates a materialization of λόγος (cf. 13:48; 20:32). In these texts, it is not immediately evident whether ὁ λόγος means the Christian message, “the whole Christian enterprise,” the living community of believers, or the person of Christ himself, or whether all these realities somehow coalesce in one concept.¹⁰

To reach greater clarity with respect to Luke’s language, Kodell next examines his use of the verb ἀυξάνω which we also will do now, though we will not follow Kodell’s organization of the material.

The verb ἀυξάνω appears in Acts in four verses: the three summary texts we’ve been discussing and in 7:17. This last passage occurs in the middle of Stephen’s speech and is a reference to the growth of the people of Israel in Egypt: “the people increased and multiplied in Egypt.” Stephen does not here quote Exodus 1:7, but he borrows the language of Exodus 1 in its Greek translation. And it is worth noting here that in (LXX) Exodus 1:7 the whole trio of “summary verbs” occurs: “But the descendants of Israel increased (ἠυξήθησαν = ἀυξάνω) and multiplied (ἐπληθύνησαν = πληθύνω) and became numerous and grew strong (κατίσχυον = κατισχύω an intensified form of ἰσχύω), exceedingly much (σφόδρα σφόδρα), and the land was filled with them.”¹¹ When one adds to this Luke’s use of αυξανω in his Gospel to describe the growth of the mustard seed (Lk 13:19), it becomes easy to see why Kodell would choose to speak of the “ecclesial tendency” of λόγος in Acts. When Luke couples ἀυξάνω and πληθύνω in Acts 12:24, he is applying to the word of God the Old Testament formula “be fruitful and multiply” in its Septuagintal form. We may associate this formula primarily with the creation account of Genesis 1, but Kodell notes fourteen occurrences of this formula in the Old Testament, ten of which are “used in connection with the promise of the growth and expansion of the covenant People of God.”¹² From this material, Kodell concludes that “Luke implies that λόγος here means more than the usual ‘Christian message,’ that somehow the meaning ‘community’ or ‘People of God’ is involved.”¹³ Kodell spends the remaining eight pages of his article explaining that “somehow.” His closing lines show us how far he can take us and why we need to explore further.

Luke sees the word so bound up with community life and witness that he can say “The word of God grew” when the church adds new members. This is not Luke’s principal meaning for ὁ λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ and he does not intend by his usage here to obscure the more traditional senses of the term. But in the carefully constructed

summaries at Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20, Luke overworks a traditional Christian term to bind together important theological themes. Λόγος in these texts, somewhat like ὁδός in others, is a word under pressure, ready to explode with insight in the light of broader Lucan purposes.¹⁴

Now, I'm not entirely sure what it would mean for a word to "explode with insight," but there are a few important aspects of Luke's "broader purposes" that have so far gone unaddressed. More than once, in fact, Kodell himself raises the question of why Luke, who had words like ἐκκλησία ("church"), λαός ("people"), and πλῆθος (multitude) at his disposal (all of which he does use in Acts to describe the community of the followers of Jesus), should use the strange formula "the *word* kept on growing." The significance of this is made even clearer by a second place where Kodell's work has not addressed an important issue. Kodell never takes up the question of what it means for the λόγος—whether word or church—ἰσχύειν "to prevail." The difficulties involved in explaining the community's growth or multiplication are much less challenging than those of explaining its prevalence or dominance.

I will mention one more area that invites further thought. This is a point that Kodell mentions but never quite incorporates into his conclusion. We will look in just a moment at the question of "what grows in the NT," but we have not yet given a very complete summary of what grows in Luke's Gospel, that is to say, with what subjects Luke elsewhere pairs the verb ἀυξάνω. Of course, the lilies and the mustard seed grow, but we have not yet mentioned the first two instances of the verb in the third Gospel: the child, John the Baptist, continued to grow and become strong in spirit (1:80), as did—you will now recall—the child Jesus (2:40). It would, of course, be inappropriate to speak of a child multiplying, but both the Child and his forerunner are paired with ἀυξάνω (the exact same form, in fact) and a verb describing an increase in strength. The parallel between the child Jesus growing in the beginning the Gospel's story and that of the word growing in the story told in Acts is a very intriguing one—especially given the suggestion by Acts 1:1 that this second book (actually second λόγος) will tell us what Jesus *continued* to do and teach.

Moreover, in two places Luke describes the growth of the church as adding (προστίθημι) people *to the Lord*. Although there is precedent in classical Greek for using προστίθημι to denote a loyal attachment to a person, the context here in Acts at least suggests an even more organic image. In Acts 9, when Saul is confronted by the risen Lord Jesus, he is told that to persecute the church is to persecute Jesus. Some have suggested, and I think rightly, that Paul's understanding of the church as the body of Christ may have had its beginning right at that moment and have drawn its inspiration directly from these words of our Lord. The Lord is added to. The word grows. The church multiplies. I believe Kodell was closer to Luke's message when he asked whether all of these things—the Christian message, the living community

of believers, and the person of Christ himself—somehow coalesce in one concept.¹⁵ Coalesce or overlap, perhaps, but never dissolve into each other.

To return to the other two points: Luke is not telling the story of the church in Acts. He is telling the continuing story of the Lord Jesus. And Jesus continues to do and teach things through his word. What Luke desires to narrate for his readers is the ongoing story of the word of God in our world. The growth of the church, both numerical and personal, is the evidence of Luke's point and not the point itself. He can and does talk directly about the numerical growth of the community of believers just as he can and does talk about the personal growth in faith and knowledge of individual followers like Peter and James and Paul. At those crucial points in the story, though, where Luke wants to make sure that we, his readers, are following his story, he speaks not of the growth of the church *first and foremost* but of the growth of the word.

Kodell loses this balance and order that Luke so carefully preserves in his inspired choice of words, and the result is that the word gets somehow lost in, with, and under the church. I don't want to make the opposite mistake. The connection to Exodus 1 is very important, and the relationship between the Exodus account and the whole of the book of Acts is a very important one and one that I hope to explore at greater length another time. It's enough now to recall simply what it was that Jesus was talking over with Moses and Elijah, what it was that he was to accomplish in Jerusalem: his exodus (Lk 9:31). Still, that connection is not Luke's main point or purpose.

Is this new Israel, the community of disciples, the church growing? Yes, clearly. Sometimes by the thousands, sometimes by a single person or household. Is the Word himself, the Lord Christ growing? Yes, clearly. His presence through his body is expanding both numerically and geographically as more and more believers are added to him. And his word, his voice is heard through more and more mouths into more and more ears. And so, the one word God has spoken in these last days by his Son (Heb 1:2), the word that he sent to Israel (Acts 10:36), continues to grow. And it is that word that is the most appropriate, the only truly appropriate subject for ἵσχυεν in Acts 19:20. "Prevail" sounds triumphalist (not to mention premature) whether spoken of the church or the word, but it is this word that shows itself capable and powerful and mighty to save. Neither the wrath of Jerusalem nor the brute force of Rome can bind it. It will have free course, as the closing verses of Acts proudly declare.

A couple of brief points need to be made of other uses of ἀύξάνω by New Testament authors. First, ἀύξάνω is used to describe both the personal growth of an individual believer (e.g., 2 Cor 9:10; 10:15; Col 1:10; 1 Pt 2:2; 2 Pt 3:18) and the corporate growth of the church (e.g., 1 Cor 3:6–7; Eph 2:21; Col 2:19)—without a sharp distinction of the two being made in every place. Paul can also make the word the subject of ἀύξάνω, as he does in Colossians 1:5–6, and the emphasis with respect to all of this growth, is that God gives it (1 Cor 3:7). One passage that ties together the themes we've been exploring is Ephesians 4:15–16: "Rather, speaking the

truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

We can return to Acts 6:7 now and appreciate Luke’s careful, artistic, and meaning-full choice of words—Καὶ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ ἤϋξανεν καὶ ἐπληθύνετο ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν μαθητῶν ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ σφόδρα, πολὺς τε ὄχλος τῶν ἱερέων ὑπήκουον τῇ πίστει. “And the word of God continued to grow (imperfect) and the number of the disciples (students of the word) in Jerusalem continued to be multiplied—exceedingly, and a great number of priests began to obey the faith.” Notice how perfectly Luke adds that final thought. He doesn’t rejoice that there are now Christian priests, that there are priests in the church, in the community. He celebrates the fact that these priests have come under this word, too. They hear and obey the faith, what Jesus does and teaches, the word.

This series of summaries, and what it tells us about the role of the word in Acts, leads to other points and questions worthy of our attention. First, since we are moving toward the end and climax of the book as a whole, let me ask this: Why does the final member of the series, the final “growing word” summary text, occur in chapter 19, when there are still nine more chapters to go? Why are Luke’s final words not “and the word continued to grow and prevail”? I think I may be able to suggest an answer, or at least a step toward an answer.

First, we must take a look at the last appearance of the word λόγος in the book of Acts. That final appearance is in Acts 22:22. “Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, ‘Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live.’” The “they” here refers to the people of Jerusalem, the λαός, the people with the advantage, the people to whom the oracles of God have been entrusted. *That* people listened *up to this word*—ἄχρι τούτου τοῦ λόγου. There is a chilling and ironic artistry to this being the final occurrence of “the word” in Luke’s record. And, I believe, a warning. There is subtle reinforcement here of the conclusion of Paul’s speech in Athens. God has fixed a day. Ignorance he has overlooked until now, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. Repentance *will be proclaimed* in the name of the Lord. And the world will be judged by a man, by a word, we could say.

The book of Acts is, in many ways, open-ended, but not in every way. The word does not continue to grow forever and ever. And this word is ignored at one’s peril. And this word is rejected at one’s peril. To push this word out of the way is to judge oneself unworthy of eternal life (Acts 13:46). To reject this word and to wish its proclaimers obliterated from the face of the earth is, simply, the end. There is nothing else. There is no other word.

At the same time, Luke makes clear that human rejection will neither stop nor silence this word. Though there may come a day when the λόγος will not again be

heard, that day is not yet—at least for most of us, and thanks be to God! The word will be spoken to procurators and kings. The word will save lives from sea and serpent. The word will arrive in the Empire’s capital and will speak freely there. And notice the beautiful *inclusio* with which the book closes: the bold proclamation of the kingdom and the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, the two things with which it began.

It is the idea of “boldness” that I want to consider now. In Acts 28:31, we are told that Paul continued proclaiming and teaching μετὰ πάσης παρρησίας—“with all boldness.” The word *parrhsi*,^a is not used by Luke at all in his Gospel, and we meet it in Acts for the first time in Peter’s Pentecost sermon (2:29). Mark uses it once, describing our Lord’s first prediction of his impending death and resurrection (Mk 8:31). It is a favorite of sorts with John, who uses it nine times in his Gospel (Jn 7:4, 13, 26; 10:24; 11:14, 54; 16:25, 29; 18:20) and four times in his first epistle (1 Jn 2:28; 3:21; 4:17, 5:14). In Acts, we see it used five times.

Παρρησία is not an easy word to gloss in English. Words relating to boldness and courage are commonly used, but they don’t really get at the central idea of the word. W. C. van Unnik has shown that the word has more to do with freedom of speech than with simple courage.¹⁶ Even the etymology helps establish that idea somewhat. The noun comes from πᾶν (all, every) and ῥῆμα (word, saying). It is the way you speak when you feel that you have the freedom to say every word, to say every word you want to, that is. You don’t have to mince words or shy away from certain terms or topics. You can speak as if you were among family or friends. It’s the kind of freedom Jesus felt that he had when he wanted to speak to his closest circle of disciples about his own death and resurrection. And it’s the way Peter felt he could speak to the people of Jerusalem about the death of David. It wasn’t a matter of confidence, as if David’s death were being disputed. It was a matter of feeling free of the fear of sounding irreverent or disrespectful in speaking of the death and burial of their beloved king (Acts 2:29). It was this kind of freedom, this ability to say what you want and whatever you want, this unrestrained eloquence that impressed the Sanhedrin when they heard Peter and John, uneducated amateurs, speaking so freely (4:13). The kind of freedom that the apostles and their friends prayed for in the face of threats coming from Jerusalem and Rome. Not the freedom, of course, to speak their own words, but “your word,” the word of the Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, of the seas and all that is in them. Why should *his* ambassadors worry about the censorship of the kings of this earth, with all their vain plots? (4:29). And Luke reports that their prayer was answered visibly, audibly, immediately: the place where they had gathered was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they continued speaking the word of God with freedom. Following this cluster of occurrences of *παρρησία* in chapter 4, we don’t see it again until the closing words of the book. We don’t see the *word παρρησία* that is; we see *examples* of it on every page. They kept on speaking the word of God with unrestrainable freedom in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, all the way to Rome. And when the book concludes, the Lord Jesus

Christ is still being taught with all freedom, without hindrance.

Two additional thoughts before we move on. I would be surprised if I were the only one to think that this idea of *παρρησία* when rightly explained and rightly understood, could prove to be extremely helpful (perhaps even “healthful”) for us, the Missouri Synod, in our own place and time. Even within our own circles, when we should be among family and friends, many feel afraid to speak aloud or think aloud. Even “at home” we choose words carefully and avoid topics that might expose our vulnerabilities. And in the public square, we find that euphemisms blur and blunt every statement, and that’s only in the case of the few topics that can be spoken of publicly. In such a church and such a world, it’s refreshing and renewing to find that what filled the witnesses in Acts was not the kind of raw courage that would stare down every foe—human or bestial. It was simply the conviction that, since the whole world is our Lord’s parlor, we should and we can speak his word whole and complete, freely and gladly.

And a second thought needs to follow that one immediately. Once again, we see how carefully Luke chooses his words to keep us from getting distracted, to keep us from losing focus. Instead of filling his pages with accounts of manliness or fearlessness or daring, Luke speaks of a kind of courageous freedom tied specifically and inseparably to the word. Even here, Luke keeps our attention fixed on this word. This word can make of the stuttering amateur and of the shackled prisoner a free-speaker—a *παρρησιαστής*—a spirited proclaimer of itself, freeing them to speak as it takes them into its service.

It is quite common, I think, to associate this freedom of speaking with the Holy Spirit, but in only one of the five passages we’ve just looked at is there an explicit reference to the Spirit in connection with the giving of this *παρρησία* (Acts 4:31). The only mention of this freedom on the Pentecost of Acts 2 is in connection with speaking about the late King David. Still, the connection between the Spirit and the word is undeniable in the book of Acts. And the first reference to the Holy Spirit in Acts is one of the most remarkable. Jesus, we are told in 1:2, spoke through the Holy Spirit. We are told this in a participial clause, almost in passing, stated simply and plainly. The mysterious inner workings of the Trinity are not plumbed, nor does Luke show a need to defend the statement against charges of subordinationism or modalism. He can state it so matter-of-factly, because there is nothing shocking or even surprising about it. This is God’s Spirit (Acts 2:17), it is the Spirit of the Lord (5:9; 8:39), it is the Spirit of Jesus (16:7). Our Lord himself had announced that this Spirit was upon him, that he had been anointed to proclaim good news (Lk 4:18). The same Spirit in which our Lord brought about the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy is here as the agent through whom this same Lord’s final *pre*-ascension instruction will be delivered to the apostles.

Peter speaks through this same Spirit. So, Peter says, did King David. So do the gathered apostles and their friends. So does Stephen. So does Cornelius and

his household. So does Agabus. So do Barnabas and Saul. And so do the people of Ephesus. And the Spirit himself speaks. He spoke through Isaiah and he speaks directly to his servants Peter and Paul. He is a Spirit who makes his presence *heard*.

Let me draw your attention to just one other Spirit-word connection in Acts, but one that has perhaps become somewhat taken for granted in our circles, a passage whose implications may have much to say in current debates and discussions concerning the word and its conveyors. Turn back to Acts 2. You all know that Peter chose a passage from the prophet Joel to serve as his text to explain to the people of Jerusalem the strange things they were seeing and hearing. We are used to this passage in its context of anchoring the strange events of the first Christian Pentecost in the words of the Old Testament prophets. Read it again, now, in the context of our consideration of the work of the Holy Spirit and the word in Acts.

And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Acts 2:17–21)

If, after hearing that long list of people in Acts who speak by the Spirit, you caught yourself thinking, “*Everyone* speaks by the Spirit in Acts!” you would not have been far at all from the truth. The day is promised when the Spirit of the Lord will be poured out on *all flesh*. But, even in this foretaste of that glorious day, mark the inclusiveness of the Spirit’s presence: sons and daughters, old men and young, slaves male and female. Commenting on the original text in Joel 2, C. F. Keil writes concerning v. 29, that the prophet is not here speaking of a variety of gifts parceled out to different groups of people:

The meaning of this rhetorical individualizing, is simply that their sons, daughters, old persons, and youths, would receive the Spirit of God with all its gifts. The outpouring of the Spirit upon slaves (men-servants and maidens) is connected by *vegam*, as being something very extraordinary, and under existing circumstances not to be expected. Not a single case occurs in the whole of the Old Testament of a slave receiving the gift of prophecy. . . . The gospel has therefore also broken the fetters of slavery.¹⁷

What is Peter claiming in Acts 2, and what does his claim have to do with us? If we share Keil's view that the events described by the prophet find their fulfillment beginning on the first Christian Pentecost, and continuing "throughout the whole Christian era,"¹⁸ then we do need to ask ourselves what all of this has to do with us. Our statements and conversations on "the priesthood of all believers," both formal and informal, both official and private, are filled with explorations of what it means to be a "chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession," finding in Peter's first epistle our starting point and outline. What role has Peter's first *sermon* played in those discussions? Have we explored equally carefully what it means to be "an anointed race, the King's own prophets, an *ethnos* filled with His Holy Spirit?" I must admit that I have not found a full and careful treatment of the implications of this passage in our recent literature. I would be very happy if any of you could direct me to one.

Writing back in the 1970s, Martin Franzmann described the tragic parallels between Christmas and Pentecost, between a Christ who came to his own and his own received him not and a Spirit who came to his own and his own responded with confusion, mockery, and sarcasm. He then issues a challenge:

Still the Holy Spirit comes where and when it pleases God to send Him to proclaim the wonderful works of God. How will we respond? Will we stop short at amazement and perplexity, shaking our heads at some of His stranger (and lesser) manifestations? Will we even stoop to mockery at those manifestations of the Spirit which strike us as bizarre, so that we may ignore the rest of them and proceed to the usual order of business?

Or shall we find grace to go the way Jesus went under the impulsion of the Spirit—the way into the wilderness to meet and overcome the Tempter, the way into the Scripture and obedience to the Father's voice heard in the Scriptures, the way into self-consuming ministry and so into that life over which death has no more authority? Shall we find grace to go the way which the first church went in obedience to the Spirit? The first church did not shrink from ecstasy where ecstasy was the Spirit's gift; neither did she shrink from obedience to the Spirit's will of love. The church that spoke with tongues and felt the earth shake under her feet at the Spirit's presence went soberly about the work of providing for her poor, selling property, and electing as officials men of Spirit and wisdom to that end. The Spirit-filled church went about the work of witness and apology, of mission and martyrdom; she did not even shrink from that dangerous work which has probably killed more Christians than persecution ever did: the sour labor of controversy.¹⁹

In 2013, in Hong Kong, I gathered with missionaries and partner church members to celebrate the 100th anniversary of LCMS work in China. When I was asked to bring something for a smaller gathering of missionaries and church leaders, I happened to be thinking about many of these same questions. “What,” I wondered, “did Luther make of this extravagant outpouring of the Spirit, of this whole nation of prophets?” What I found eventually became an essay entitled “Great Things through Little Preachers.”²⁰ One passage in particular from Luther came back to mind as I was preparing this present article. In his circa 1530 *Second Book of Isaiah*, Luther writes:

This is what happens to the apostles. Under the appearance of barrenness they bring forth many children. This is a comfort to us so that we may not despair. If there is no evidence of our descendants, they will come nevertheless, while we are unaware of it, and cities are converted day by day. So it happened to the apostles as they went about in the world that the Gospel would speed into an area before the apostles came there. So Philip converted Samaria, and the Ethiopian taught Samaria. “My Word shall not return to Me empty” (Is 55:11). Today, too, we see God accomplishing great things through little preachers. It is a grammatical figure to say that he is with child who by God’s design every day strives to bring forth, as it really comes to pass. But the ungodly are like mountains in labor, but a mouse and a blade of straw are brought forth [which, apparently, is not very much]. The godly, on the contrary, sit in hopelessness and do not think they will bring forth, and yet they are the ones that do. Summary: The Word of the Lord will run and fly when we do not expect it. This is a wonderful state of affairs: The daughter of Zion will bear children, not thinking that she will. So in our times everything about us seems barren with never any prospects of bearing children. It is not to be thought of. But when the time comes, there are countless children, so that we say, “Where do these children come from?”²¹

Luther’s discussion of these “little preachers” in the Book of Acts is the closest thing to a real application of Acts 2 to questions of priesthood and pastoral office that I have been able to find. I hope to continue to explore this theme and material, and I invite, encourage, even plead with you to do the same yourselves.

A host of other things are crowding around my heart and mind, clamoring for attention, but I feel I have time to explore only one more. This is the point about Acts that I usually begin presentations and studies with, but it is crucial to any understanding of the role of the word of God in the book of Acts. It is the question of the apostles’ question.

Most readers of the book of Acts base their understanding of the whole book

on their understanding of chapter 1—and their understanding of chapter 1 on their understanding of verse 6. For that reason, a proper understanding of this verse is extremely important.

Οἱ μὲν οὖν συνελθόντες ἡρώτων αὐτὸν λέγοντες· κύριέ
εἰ ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ τούτῳ ἀποκαθιστάνεις τὴν βασιλείαν τῷ
Ἰσραήλ;

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

Almost every word of the apostles’ question raises a cluster of new questions for the reader. The four main concepts—*Lord*, *restoration*, *kingdom*, and *Israel*—are rich with theological meaning for the Bible reader, but they are also controversial and much debated.

Let’s begin with the interpretation of this verse that is probably still the most common. This interpretation begins with the claim that the eleven could only have been thinking of earthly kingdoms when they used the word *kingdom*. The use of *Israel* also shows that the disciples are thinking in human, earthly, ethnic, and political categories. What other possibility is there at this point in the story? *Restoration* would recall Israel’s golden period, perhaps the recent Maccabean kingdom, but more likely the glorious days of King David.

Putting all of these pieces together gives us a picture something like this: The eleven have shown throughout Jesus’s earthly ministry that they do not understand who Jesus really is, why he has come, and what he is going to, rather, now *has* accomplished. Although they acknowledge him as their Lord, their hopes are still tied to this earth and to the past. They still cannot even imagine the future God has in store for them. Realizing that Jesus’s time with them is ending, they anticipate that this will be the time he will restore Israel’s earthly glory and political power. He will make them a strong nation, like they were under David. As a strong nation, they will carry out his will and accomplish his purposes in the world. In short, they still don’t “get it.” But thanks be to God! The Holy Spirit will soon come upon them, correct their mistaken thinking, fill them with power, and send them out into the world to proclaim the gospel.

John Calvin said concerning the disciples’ question in verse 6: “There are as many errors in this question as words,”²² but such an assessment creates some real problems for the careful reader of Luke’s writings. And the most serious of them all becomes clear when we “read backwards” from Acts into Luke. Luke has connected his two books in such a way that the reader is reminded of what has happened earlier in the story. He creates an overlapping section that connects the two books. Television shows do the same thing when they begin a new episode with a flashback to what happened “previously.” In Acts 1:1, Luke repeats the same sort of dedication to Theophilus that

begins his Gospel, even mentioning his “first book.” This first book, Luke tells us, contains the story’s beginning: the things “Jesus began to do and to teach.” This first book tells the story of Jesus up to the point of his ascension. But in the opening verses of Acts, Luke retells part of the story. He reminds us, working his way backward, that Jesus appeared to his disciples for a period of forty days, that he rose from the dead, and that he suffered, that is, died. The overlapping section or the “hinge” between the two books is the period from the death of Jesus to his ascension. And the forty days stand at the heart of that section.

What was Jesus doing during those forty days? According to Luke, he was “presenting himself to them alive after his crucifixion, offering many proofs of his resurrection, and speaking to them” (compare Acts 1:3). This description takes us back to the last chapter of Luke’s Gospel. It is especially important to notice that during this time the risen Jesus “opened [the disciples’] minds to understand the Scriptures” (Lk 24:45). Both in the case of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus and of the larger gathering in the upper room, Jesus showed his followers “how everything written about [him] in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms [had to be] fulfilled” (Lk 24:44; compare 24:27). Now compare this with the summary of Jesus’s activity in Acts 1: “He was speaking to them about the kingdom.”

The eleven men who ask the question in verse 6 are men whom the Lord Jesus himself has taught to understand the Bible correctly. They have had a forty-day intensive course on the kingdom of God taught by the King himself. How is it possible that they could ask a question *about the kingdom* that reflects complete misunderstanding? But what else could the question mean?

If they are working with a proper understanding of “the kingdom,” then they are asking Jesus about his gracious work to reclaim his world under his own divine kingship. That is to say, they are talking about the work of salvation.

Things are a little more complicated with respect to their reference to “Israel.” The book of Acts will show that the apostles still have much to learn concerning the identity of the new people of God, especially the inclusion of all nations, but we can already see in chapter 1 that they at least have the concept of a “new Israel.” How else can we explain what happens at the end of the chapter?

The apostles decide that they need to replace Judas. They consider what qualifications this person must have. (And recall that this is where we see the requirement that the person must have “accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us” (Acts 1:21). That is to say, the person must have been *with Jesus*. They consider the members of their fellowship. They identify two who possess the needed qualifications. Why don’t they simply add them both as new apostles? If you know that your task is to take the good news of Jesus into every part of the world, won’t you use every available, qualified person who can help? It cannot be because they are superstitious about the number thirteen. Even to say that they must have an even number so that they can travel in pairs doesn’t seem a

good enough reason. We will not see these apostles traveling in pairs later in Acts. The best explanation seems to be that they wanted to restore their number to twelve, the number that their Lord had appointed, a number that symbolizes a new Israel gathered together around Jesus rather than around Abraham or Jacob.

I don't think we have to add any more explanation of why they would call Jesus "Lord" at this moment in the story, but I do think we need to say a few things about the idea of restoration. First, it is not *Israel* but rather *the kingdom* that is to be restored in their question. I regularly hear and even sometimes read that the apostles are asking Jesus whether or not he is now going to "restore Israel" or "restore the kingdom of Israel."²³ No, the text is quite clear that the apostles are asking about something being restored to Israel. To restore something means to bring something back to its earlier or original condition, or it means to give something back to someone who has lost it. Many Bible passages speak of restoring lost property or territory to someone. What does it mean to restore *the kingdom* to someone? Had Israel somehow lost the kingdom? How could Israel lose God's kingdom?

If Peter and the others had a correct understanding of the role of God's chosen people, their question is not very difficult to understand. God had chosen this nation to be his instrument in saving the world. He had made himself known to them, and the Savior not only came first to them but also was born among them. But—to borrow the line from John again—when Jesus came to his own, they did not receive him (Jn 1:11). In fact, they rejected him. They rejected his message, and they rejected him *as their king*. They refused to have any part in what he was doing. They killed him.

What would God do with Israel now? His Son has been vindicated. He has risen from the dead and will ascend to his place of glory with the Father. He truly is God's Son. He truly is the Savior of the world. He truly is Lord of all. And what of Israel? This time it is Israel not Esau that trades his birthright for something of no value. Israel leaves everything by *not* following Jesus! No wonder the apostles were concerned about *restoration*.

There is one more piece to look at before we can tie everything together. We have mentioned the choice of a replacement for Judas and the significance of the number twelve. We need to look at those verses one more time and notice Peter's behavior here. In the Gospels, when we hear that Peter has stood up and is going to say something, we all cringe. "Oh no," we think, "what is he going to say *now*?" But in Acts 1:15–26, we see something very different. Peter stands to speak, and he says, "Brothers, the Scriptures had to be fulfilled" and "for it is written." Peter has never spoken like this before! None of the disciples has. Who speaks like this? Jesus. The risen Jesus has taught Peter how to understand the Scriptures properly. Peter now sounds *just like his Teacher* when he speaks; he speaks for Jesus and in the name of Jesus, and he speaks the words that Jesus wants spoken. He does not sound at all like someone who still does not "get it," who still does not understand Jesus and his work. And remember, we are still in Acts chapter 1. Jesus's promise of power from on high

Acts chapter 1 leads us right into a new world in which a forgiven and reconciled people will serve the Lord as he reigns from on high.

has not yet been fulfilled among the apostles.

Let's tie this together. The disciples have come to realize that Israel as a nation has rejected the true Messiah sent by God to save the world. They have condemned this Messiah to death even though the rulers of the world found him innocent. They have

demanded his crucifixion, the worst possible humiliation, the clearest indication of complete rejection. But God has raised his Messiah from the dead. The Lord has appeared among his followers alive and vindicated. He will soon return to the Father's side to await the time when he will judge the world. What will be the fate of Israel? Even those who now call Jesus Lord were part of the Israel that denied Jesus and handed him over to be killed. When Jesus appeared to them, he proclaimed peace among them. This gave them hope, and it gave them the courage to ask their question: "Lord, are you at this time restoring to Israel her role in your work of reclaiming your world under your divine kingship?" I cannot think of a more terrifying question. "Lord, have we lost all chance of being your people? We have broken our relationship with you; can it possibly be restored? Lord, has your patience with us run out?"

The question has two parts. The disciples ask Jesus if he is doing something, and they ask him if he is doing it now. There is both a *what* and a *when* to their question. And Jesus's answer has two parts as well.

The first thing to notice about Jesus's answer is its gentleness. There is no strong rebuke here. He does not ask them where their faith is. He does not ask them why they are still afraid. He does not call them blind and deaf to his teaching. He does not call them dull witted and slow hearted. To their terrifying question, he gives a gracious answer.

We hear first Jesus's answer to their question *when*. Here again, we must remember that the question by itself is not a wrong question or a bad question. Jesus had told them much concerning the future, about a coming destruction for Jerusalem, about signs of the end. He had told them to "Watch!" and to "Be ready!" But to this question *when* Jesus cannot give a direct answer. "This," he tells them, "is not for you to know." The apostles are to be watchful. They are to be ready. But they are to live by faith not by the calendar. They are to be watchful of all that the Lord Jesus is doing in the world. They are not to withdraw and count down the days and the hours and the minutes. These are things that the Father has determined. They will take place according to the Father's will, his plan, and his authority.

But the answer to the apostles' *when?* is not "never." The answer at least suggests that there is still hope for Israel, that God's patience with his people has not run out,

that they will still enjoy a place in his glorious work of redemption. And the second part of Jesus's response makes that hope sure and confident.

Israel's sons and daughters *will* prophesy. Israel's old men *will* dream again. For the Lord is going to pour out his Spirit upon his people. The King will fill them with kingly power, and they will be his kingdom witnesses. Instead of a chapter in which we see nothing but the same old pattern of misunderstanding and doubt, as if Jesus's death and resurrection had made no difference, Acts chapter 1 leads us right into a new world in which a forgiven and reconciled people will serve the Lord as he reigns from on high.

The rest of the book of Acts flows directly from this response. The apostles will be Spirit-empowered witnesses for their Lord to the ends of the earth, and the reader is given the opportunity to see just how Jesus will continue his teaching and his doing, how he will work to reclaim his world through these men and others. And notice the correspondence with the pattern of Israel's life and worship. Following the Passover now fulfilled and redefined in relation to the offering of Christ our Pascha, our Lord's resurrection stands as the firstfruits of this great cosmic harvest, Pentecost as the early harvest festival giving promise of a great and final harvest yet to come, and the great, anticipated Festival of Tabernacles that we are now preparing for, when we shall all celebrate the final, superabundant harvest of our God.

My point in returning to this opening exchange between the risen Jesus and his fallen apostles is this: if we approach the book of Acts as the account of the Spirit bringing life and power to the church after the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus had failed to do so,²⁴ then Acts truly does not belong in our canon. It would not then be the second volume that follows the Gospel but the correction to a book that no longer contains any real good news. If, on the other hand, we see Acts as Luke's account of all that Jesus, the Word, continued to do through his Spirit in his people, as the sprouting, budding, flowering, and fruiting of that Word in the world of these last days, then Acts is for us itself the Word of the Lord, and it continues to grow. And so, I hand you over to God and to the Word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give to you your inheritance among all those who are consecrated to him (Acts 20:32).

Endnotes

- 1 Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1989), 427.
- 2 Ibid., 415–416.
- 3 Ibid., 417f.
- 4 Ibid., 418.
- 5 Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece* 28th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).
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- 7 Ibid., 505.
- 8 Ibid., 506–507.
- 9 Ibid., 509.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Rick Brannan et al., *The Lexham English Septuagint* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012).
- 12 Ibid., 510–511.
- 13 Ibid., 511.
- 14 Ibid., 519.
- 15 Ibid., 509.
- 16 W. C. Van Unnik, “The Christian’s freedom of speech in the New Testament” (1962). *OpenAIRE*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 5, 2017).
- 17 *Minor Prophets* C. F. Keil, vol. 10, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978 repr.), 211–212.
- 18 Ibid., 216.
- 19 Martin H. Franzmann, *Alive with the Spirit* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), 8–9.
- 20 The essay was later republished in *Missio Apostolica* 23:1 (May 2015): 143–160.
- 21 Commenting on Is 66:7. Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 17: *Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 40–66* Jaroslav Pelikan et al. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 405.
- 22 Jean Calvin, *Acts of the Apostles 1–13* Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries, vol. 6, trans. John W. Fraser and W. J. G. MacDonald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 29.
- 23 In conversation after the presentation of this paper, Dr. Leo Sánchez pointed out to me that the New English Bible (2nd ed.; 1970) does exactly this in its rendering of Acts 1:6: “So, when they were all together, they asked him, ‘Lord, is this the time when you are to establish once again the sovereignty of Israel?’” It is interesting to note that the 1989 revision, the *Revised English Bible* corrects this reading back toward the text of Acts: “Lord, is this the time at which you are to restore sovereignty to Israel?”
- 24 Cf. here, too, Calvin’s comment: “Yet their blindness is remarkable, that when they had been so fully and carefully instructed over a period of three years, they betrayed no less ignorance than if they had never heard a word.” Calvin, 29.

Homiletical Helps

Preaching Mark

David Lewis

For pastors who follow the *LSB* three-year lectionary cycle, Series B gives precedence to Gospel pericopes from Mark's account with readings from John's Gospel replacing Mark frequently during the festival half of the year (in particular during the time of Easter). A *lectio continua* from Mark begins in the Sundays after Epiphany and then, after it is interrupted in Lent and Easter, picks up again on Proper 3. This *lectio continua* is then interrupted once again during Propers 13–15 when readings from the bread of life discourse from John 6 are read following Mark's accounts of Jesus's feeding the 5000 and walking on water. Pericopes from Mark then continue from Proper 16 to the end of the church year. This *lectio continua*, however, does not cover the entirety of Mark's Gospel. One notable omission is the important narrative cycle of Mark 8:1–26, a section that James W. Voelz has called "the critical turn" in Mark's Gospel.¹ Perhaps future revisions of the lectionary may one day include these texts in the Series B readings as well.

In this paper I would like to offer some thoughts that I hope will prove helpful for those who plan to focus on the Gospel of Mark in their preaching over the following year.

Preliminary Questions to Consider

How a reader approaches the Gospel of Mark will to a great extent be affected by how the reader chooses to understand the historical background and literary nature of this narrative. Thus there are several isagogical questions that should be considered from the very beginning. How preachers answer these questions may affect how they then approach the task of interpreting and then preaching on Mark.

What is the relationship of Mark to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke?

The two-document hypothesis argues that Mark was written before Matthew and Luke and then was one of two sources used by the authors of Matthew and Luke when they compiled their Gospels. One of the arguments used to support this hypothesis is that

Editor's note

Homiletical Helps for all the pericopies in the three-year lectionary can be found with a full range of other resources at Lectionary at Lunch Plus: www.concordiatheology.org/lalp.

it is more likely that the later narratives would be longer than their sources due to their inclusion of extra material; since Mark is shorter than Matthew and Luke, it must have been one of the first Gospels written and the source for the other two Synoptic Gospels. One does not need to hold to this hypothesis, however, to note that both Matthew and Luke contain longer narratives and in some pericopes they include details not found in the parallel accounts from Mark. Thus it may appear as if both Matthew and Luke contain the “fuller and more complete” accounts of Jesus’s ministry when compared to Mark. And so, whenever a pericope in Mark is brief, missing certain details, or even a bit troubling when compared to the parallel passages in Matthew or Luke, the preacher may be tempted to default to the parallel passages of either of these two “fuller accounts” to give the “whole story.” Preachers who advocate a harmonizing approach when preaching the Gospels might move from focusing on a text from Mark to discussing the parallel texts in Matthew and/or Luke instead.

My advice, however, is that, in spite of its shorter length, Mark should be read, interpreted, and preached first as a narrative in its own right. The unique features in how Mark presents the story of Jesus will be lost if the preacher chooses instead to default to either of the longer narratives. For instance, many details found in the baptism and temptation accounts of Matthew and Luke are absent in the briefer account in Mark 1:9–13 (part of the reading for Lent 1). I have heard preachers who were ostensibly preaching on the temptation account of Mark include the specific details mentioned in Matthew 4 and Luke 4 and then make the point that because Jesus used Scripture to refute the tempter, we ought to do the same. Yet there is no mention of Jesus doing this in Mark’s account! Such preachers wind up preaching on Matthew or Luke, not Mark. Mark’s “briefer” account of the temptation, however, does include elements not found in the other accounts: the verb ἐκβάλλω to describe how the Spirit gets Jesus into the wilderness, the mention that Jesus was with the wild animals, and an emphasis on how the angels appeared to minister to Jesus throughout the forty days. When preaching Mark 1:9–15 (the pericope for Lent 1), the preacher should focus on these features of the story and *not* discuss the three temptations from Matthew and Luke.

Note that the preacher who believes that Mark was written later than Matthew or Luke—or who chooses at least to read Mark as an independent narrative regardless of theories of origin—will not be tempted to default to the “fuller” accounts of Matthew and Luke.

What is the literary quality of Mark’s Gospel?

Opinions regarding the quality of Mark as a literary work tended to be rather low in the early to mid-twentieth century. Generally, Mark was viewed as the first attempt to compile a narrative account of Jesus’s ministry (see the discussion of the two-document hypothesis above). According to this view, the author of Mark preserved certain traditions of Jesus’s ministry and presented them in a loose narrative

framework. Generally Matthew and Luke were considered to have a higher literary quality—and this followed from the hypothesis that they both copied, adapted, *and so improved upon* Mark. Many scholars today, however, have offered opinions that Mark's Gospel displays a higher literary quality than previously thought.² Yet the preacher who holds to the older view regarding Mark's "lesser" literary quality might then again have a tendency to default to the parallel passages from "the superior literary accounts" of Matthew and Luke. My advice, again, is that, no matter one's opinion regarding the literary quality of the second Gospel, the goal still ought to be to focus on the unique features of Mark's account.

Note that the preacher who is inclined to believe that Mark is of "better" literary quality will not be tempted to default to the so-called more superior accounts of Matthew or Luke. Such a preacher also would have greater appreciation for how Mark tells the story of Jesus's ministry and rejoice in the various literary devices used throughout. This would include those texts where Mark might arguably present a "harder reading."

How much of the story of Jesus's life and ministry does the author of Mark assume that his readers already know?

Again, the older opinions regarding Mark—that it was written first and so amounts to a first attempt at preserving the story of Jesus—often sees Mark's purpose as preserving the story of Jesus for those who do not know the details. Thus later readers might naturally see Mark as "less full" or "less sophisticated" as compared to Matthew and Luke when it appears that Mark's Gospel *actually fails to give the full account*, which such readers would need. Consider, again, the temptation account of Mark 1:12–13. If the purpose of this Gospel were to inform readers who do not know the story of Jesus about the temptation account, the preacher might naturally feel compelled to reference either Matthew or Luke for the "full story" because it appears here that Mark simply fails to give the full story.

On the other hand, if a preacher were to assume that the readers of Mark were familiar with many of the details of the story of Jesus, then a different approach to this Gospel would be necessary. For instance, the interpretation of Mark's "condensed" account of the temptation of Jesus might operate with the assumption that the original readers may already know some of the details. Thus Mark presents Jesus as proclaiming and initiating the reign of God in Mark 1:14–15 (also part of the pericope for Lent 1) without the author actually telling the readers specifically how Jesus overcame the tempter while in the wilderness. Perhaps this is because the author knows the readers know this story. Perhaps the author is more focused on bringing his readers to the critical point of where Jesus begins his ministry of proclaiming the reign of God—which is the goal of both his baptism and temptation in the wilderness. Perhaps the author simply trusts his readers to "get it."

Thus the preacher has an important decision to make when approaching Mark.

If Mark is merely presenting the basic story for those who do not know it, then this narrative will certainly appear lacking when compared to Matthew and Luke. Then it might seem imperative to “fill up what is missing” in Mark by referring to the other Gospels. Yet if the preacher believes that Mark is addressing those who know the fuller story, then each of Mark’s choices in what he does *not* present, what he does present, and how he presents it becomes important in the overall rhetoric of this particular Gospel account. This will then inform how the preacher will proclaim the texts from Mark.

Where is the ending of Mark’s Gospel?

Where did the author intend to conclude his narrative of Jesus’s ministry? Is the conclusion of the narrative found in 16:8 when the women leave the tomb and, in spite of the young man’s word in 16:6–7, do not say anything to anyone? Or does the narrative include one of the two “longer” endings that are attested in manuscripts—each of which depicts Jesus appearing to his disciples? Or (as many scholars have proposed) is the original ending that once followed 16:8 now missing—an ending that must have depicted Jesus reuniting with his disciples in Galilee as promised in 16:7? Answering this question will not only affect how one will preach on Easter this year (when Mark 16:1–8 is the text), but also how the preacher will understand the Gospel overall.

The three questions above come to a head when considering this final question. Some of the major objections to claims that 16:8 is the intended ending of Mark include these: (1) Since Mark wrote first, he must have included an account of the resurrected Jesus appearing to his disciples that both Matthew and Luke then later copied and adapted; (2) Since Mark is not a sophisticated literary work, it is unlikely the author could have intended such a sharp “suspended ending” as found in 16:8; (3) Since Mark was writing for people who did not know the full story, he must have included an account of the resurrected Jesus appearing to his disciples.

If the preacher is not convinced that these other assumptions are true—or at least not completely dogmatic about each of them—then the conclusion might be that the author of Mark was capable of concluding his narrative at 16:8 and thus suspending from the narrative any account of the resurrected Jesus appearing to his disciples. On Easter Sunday such a preacher will point hearers to some other feature of Mark’s narrative and not default to accounts of post-resurrection appearances found in Matthew, Luke, or some reconstruction of the lost ending of Mark. This will likely also inform how the preacher approaches other pericopes in Mark as well.

It is my assumption that Mark did intend to conclude his narrative account at 16:8. It is also my assumption that Mark may have been written later than Matthew and Luke and, even if it was not, Mark provides a sophisticated narrative written by a Christian author to Christian readers who already know many of the details of Jesus’s life and ministry. Thus the author can get away with suspending from his account the

post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. Such “suspensions” of events or presentations of “harder readings” may then be found elsewhere in Mark’s account. The preacher thus should focus on what Mark actually relates and not default to the other Gospels for “missing details” or “better and/or easier readings.”

Two Important Themes and the Overall Message of Mark’s Gospel

In his commentary, Voelz draws attention to two important themes in Mark’s Gospel.³ The central theme regards the presentation of Jesus in this Gospel, in particular its emphasis on the reliability of what Jesus says. Voelz argues that, when compared to the narratives of Matthew and Luke, Mark does indeed appear to present a narrative of Jesus’s ministry that frequently includes some troubling features. Jesus in Mark is presented as a divine person, the Son of God who represents his Father in what he says and does. Jesus exercises a unique authority over the demonic realm (e.g., 1:23–28), nature (e.g., 4:35–41), and even the commands in the Torah (e.g., 7:14–15). He is identified outright as the Son of God from heaven at his baptism at the very beginning of the story (1:11). This identification is made a second time at his transfiguration (9:7). And Jesus himself responds to the high priest’s question regarding his identity with an emphatic *evgw, eivmi* (14:62). As the Son of God, Jesus’s word is authoritative and reliable—and this is demonstrated repeatedly throughout the narrative.

Nevertheless, none of the other human characters in the narrative appear to understand Jesus and his mission, and no one makes the confession that he is the Son of God until the centurion’s declaration only after Jesus has died upon the cross (15:39). No one except for the narrator, God the Father, the unclean spirits (see 1:24; 3:11; and 5:7), Jesus himself, and finally the centurion at the cross appear to understand who Jesus is. Not even Jesus’s disciples appear to get it.⁴

What is more, in spite of his divinity, Jesus is also depicted as being a human being, sometimes even as a frail human. Note how Jesus sleeps through a storm on the sea (4:38), is unable to do many miracles in his hometown of Nazareth because of the people’s unbelief (6:5), and finally how he is subject to crucifixion and death. What is more, according to Voelz, Jesus is also depicted in Mark as a person who on occasions appears noticeably odd, strange, and even frightening.⁵ Note, for instance, how in Mark 11 Jesus seeks figs from a fig tree *even though it is not the season for figs* (11:13), and then he curses and destroys this fig tree when he fails to find any fruit on it. Such behavior might strike someone as being very strange. *Perhaps the author actually intended that the narrative affect the reader in this way.* Voelz argues that one effect of such a depiction of Jesus is to prevent the readers from entertaining any thought that it would have been more desirable for them to have witnessed Jesus’s ministry with their own eyes; no, things were strange and likely they would not have understood any better than the disciples.⁶

Then perhaps most troublesome in this narrative is that the author does not

say that Jesus appeared to his disciples after the resurrection. Yet one point of this ending—and the depiction of Jesus throughout the Gospel—is that the reader is left only with Jesus’s word and promise. But, since Jesus’s word remains authoritative and true, his word is sufficient for the reader! Jesus is an authoritative teacher throughout this narrative (e.g., 1:22; 27). Jesus predicted how the disciples would find the donkey for his entrance into Jerusalem (11:2–4). Jesus predicted how the disciples would find the room where he would celebrate the Passover with them (14:13–16). And, most important, he predicted his own suffering, death, and resurrection (8:31–32; 9:31; 10:33). *Everything came about just as he said.* Thus we should expect that the promised reunion with the disciples (14:28; 16:7) would have also taken place, even if this is suspended from the narrative (if the story ends at 16:8). Thus in Mark, seeing is not believing. *Rather believing in Jesus’s word and promise becomes seeing.*⁷

The readers of Mark thus occupy a privileged position: They do not need to have been present in the past to witness Jesus’s ministry or even to have seen his resurrected body. It is enough that they have Jesus’s word and promise. In fact, they can stake their very lives on Jesus’s word and promise.

One of the implications of this theme for preaching the Gospel of Mark is that the preacher should, of course, emphasize the reliability of Jesus’s word and promise throughout the year. Yet at the same time, the preacher must not ignore the troublesome nature or somewhat “harder” readings presented in some of the pericopes. For instance, when preaching Easter 1 (Mark 16:1–8), the preacher should avoid defaulting to Matthew or Luke to speak about how Jesus appeared first to the woman and then later to his disciples. Indeed, this pericope especially calls for the preacher *not to make such a move*. Rather here the preacher has an opportunity to unpack the central theme: The words of the young man at the tomb (16:6–7), especially the promise that Jesus’s disciples would see him in Galilee, recall Jesus’s *own words and promise* from earlier in the narrative (14:28). Thus, as Mark tells the story, the readers do not need to see Jesus appear to his disciples in the narrative. The readers are left instead with the word and promise of Jesus himself. If the preacher solves the “troublesome” nature of this pericope by referencing the other Gospels, the very effect intended by the author of Mark is ruined.

According to Voelz, the second important theme is that Jesus has triumphed in his ministry through service and suffering.⁸ Jesus has come not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (10:45). As his disciples, then, we too are called to follow him. In this we are called to be willing to suffer for the sake of Jesus *and his words/the Gospel* (see 8:38 and 10:29). In this we are also called to serve one another (10:42–45).

One implication of this second theme for preaching Mark will be evident when dealing with the pericopes where Jesus explicitly teaches the disciples regarding discipleship. Consider Jesus’s words in 8:34–38 (from the pericope for Lent 2), 9:33–50 (from the pericopes for Proper 20 and Proper 21), and 10:42–45 (from the

pericope for Lent 5). In these pericopes the pattern that Jesus has set in his own life and ministry does have implications for how we live as his disciples today.

What, then, is the overall message of Mark's Gospel?⁹ Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, has indeed initiated God's reign of salvation, and he has done this in power. *Witness the miracles in which Jesus casts out unclean spirits, heals the sick, purifies the unclean, controls nature itself, and even raises the dead.* This message is indeed the very "gospel of God" proclaimed by Jesus in 1:14–15: God's reign has come in Jesus! It is in his Son Jesus that God is reconciling Israel, all of humanity, and, indeed, the whole of creation to himself. *The reader is called to trust in this proclamation.*

Yet the reign of God in Jesus's ministry was also hidden in humility and lowliness as ultimately revealed in Jesus's service and suffering. Until Jesus returns, his disciples will also experience the reign of God in this same way: It is here, yet it continues to be hidden in humility and lowliness. Nevertheless, because Jesus's words and promises are reliable, we can faithfully await the full revelation of God's reign when Jesus returns in glory. Then we will see the resurrected Jesus—even as this is promised to the disciples by both Jesus (14:28) and the young man at the tomb (16:7). We will then fully participate in his resurrection and glory even as we now experience the saving reign of God in principal. In the meantime, however, we live by and rely on Jesus's reliable word, for his word is true.

The "Bookends" of Mark's Gospel and Preaching in Lent and Easter

In Mark, the story of Jesus's ministry is framed by an interesting *inclusio* (literary "bookends") where Jesus's death on the cross is seen as parallel to his baptism. At the baptism of Jesus (1:9–11) three things occur: (1) The Holy Spirit comes "into him" (εἰς αὐτόν); (2) The heavens are torn apart (the verb used is σχίζω); (3) The voice of God from heaven identifies Jesus as the Son of God. At Jesus's death (15:37–39) there are parallel *events and vocabulary*. (1) When Jesus dies Mark uses the verb ἐκπνεύω (Jesus "spirits out"—note the contrast of the prepositions εἰς and ἐκ). (2) The curtain in the sanctuary is torn apart (again, the verb used is σχίζω). (3) The centurion—confessing, in a sense, upward from earth—identifies Jesus as the Son of God. And, again, this confession by the centurion is notable in that he is the only human character in Mark's Gospel who identifies Jesus with this title.

Thus, the overall story of Jesus's ministry is framed by his baptism and his death. One might then argue that the true climax of this narrative is, in fact, Jesus's death upon the cross where the centurion repeats God's word spoken at the beginning of the narrative at Jesus's baptism. The reader of Mark ultimately discovers, with the centurion, that Jesus's identity as the Son of God is ultimately demonstrated at the cross. It is there that Jesus proves that he is faithful to his Father's will—faithful unto death, even death on the cross.

Note how this bookend in Mark is reflected during the season of Lent in Series B: Mark 1:9–15 is the pericope for Lent 1. This includes not only the temptation

account, but also the account of Jesus's baptism and so God's identification of Jesus as his Son. The pericope concludes with Jesus openly announcing that the reign of God has come. That it has come "in power" is demonstrated as the narrative continues in 1:16ff. Yet in the passion narrative (Mk 14–15) read on the Sunday of the Passion/Lent 6, the reader hears that ultimately Jesus's ministry concludes with suffering and service. The words of the centurion recall what God has said about Jesus, and the reader learns that it is at the cross that Jesus ultimately shows himself to be the Son of God.

The account of the empty tomb (16:1–8) on Easter 1, then, might actually function more as an epilogue or denouement to the main narrative. Note especially how the young man at the tomb in 16:6 identifies Jesus as "He who (has been and as a result) *is* crucified" or, more simply, "the crucified one." The readers are thus reminded of "the main event" of Jesus's death on the cross—the place where God's reign truly is hidden in humility, lowliness, suffering, and service. And, as noted above, the young man's words in 16:7 also recall the overall theme of the narrative by pointing the reader back to Jesus's word and promise (here, Jesus's word in 14:28).

Conclusion

Series B provides an opportunity for some challenging and, I would argue, exciting opportunities for proclaiming God's word as it is found in the Gospel of Mark. Again, I would advise that the preacher resist any temptation to leave behind even what may appear to be "incomplete" or "troubling" narratives from Mark for the "fuller" or "less troublesome" parallels in Matthew or Luke. There is much more that could be said about preaching throughout Series B, yet I pray that the thoughts I have offered here may provide guidance over the weeks ahead.

Endnotes

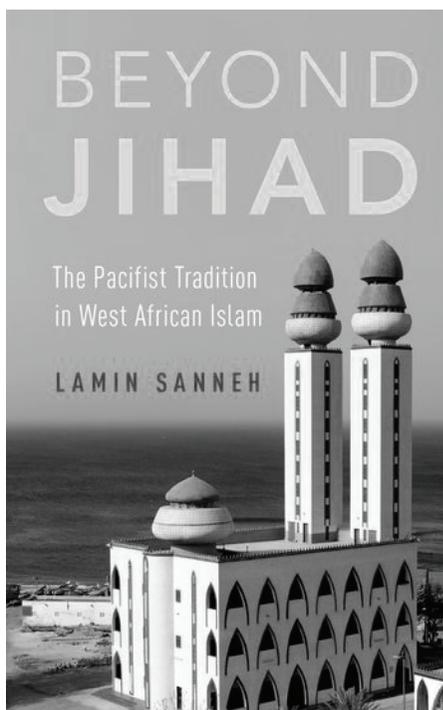
- 1 James W. Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26* (Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 51, 493.
- 2 Among this group of scholars, however, there is still a variance of opinion of just how good Mark is, from "better than people thought before" to "an excellently crafted narrative account."
- 3 Voelz, 54–55.
- 4 Note, however, that the readers of Mark are in a privileged position as they are privy to Jesus's true identity from the very beginning of the narrative (if one reads $\nu\iota\omicron\upsilon\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ in Mark 1:1).
- 5 Voelz, 54.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 55 and 61.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 55.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 54. Voelz notes that according to many other interpretations of Mark's this is often said to be the first and most central theme of this Gospel. Voelz, however, argues that this is the "penultimate theme" when compared to Mark's emphasis on the authority and reliability of Jesus and his word.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 61.

Reviews

BEYOND JIHAD: The Pacifist Tradition in West African Islam. By Lamin Sanneh. Oxford University Press, 2016. 352 pages. Hardcover. \$34.95.

“Pacifist” and “Islam” are not two words we often see in the same sentence. The standard and dominant narrative coming from groups like Boko Haram or ISIS is that jihad (i.e., conversion by military conquest) has been the standard operating procedure for Islamic expansion for the last 1400 years. Lamin Sanneh, D. Willis James Professor of Mission and World Christianity and Professor of History at Yale, offers an alternative narrative that focuses on the clerics and scholars of West Africa who spread Islam largely through non-coercion. Their evangelism was not programmatic but vocational. The clerics and scholars followed the trade routes that took them throughout northern and western Africa in order to teach and live the Qur’an. This proved attractive to many Africans who saw in Islam a religion of the book that provided stability and legitimacy in contrast to the oral tradition of what Sanneh refers to as the pagan religions (he uses the term in a non-pejorative sense) that focused largely on animistic practices. Even more, Islam offered a disciplined way of life that offered wisdom and council for the average African trying to make sense of the world. The clerics, by and large, proposed Sharia (Islamic law) as an overall way of life rather than the more restrictive and oftentimes harsh legal code promoted among the more radical groups in Islam today.

But is there such a thing as African



Islam? The academy has often portrayed a “gulf . . . between the history of Islam and the history of Africa” (ix). As Sanneh notes, “Studies of Islam and of Africa form a divided picture. Studies of Islam tend to view the religion as an intellectual, Arab civilization remote from Africa—a view that oversimplifies the complex, layered nature of Arab religion. Studies of Africa cast Islam as foreign and marginal, relegating it to its local function (of dysfunction) on the grounds that Islam’s intellectual heritage has no place in Africa’s unwritten past” (ix). As with any other religion on the continent of Africa, including Christianity, Islam engaged in a delicate dance with local traditional religions. On the one hand, it condemned syncretism and ensured a

strong demarcation with the local religions, while also negotiating with them and finding overlaps and parallels that could be exploited. This encounter was fueled largely by the intellectual tradition upon which the scholars and clerics relied for their engagement with the pagan religions of the continent. For instance, the Qur'an assured success in various aspects of life while also offering protection against the evil eye—a grave concern among many Africans (14). The Muslim clerics in West Africa were benign teachers seeking to establish a community based on the Qur'an not a caliphate.

Caliphates seek to establish a religious leader as leader of the political state as well. And so, on the one hand, the fact that there have been caliphates in Islam's history would seem to support the predominantly Western view of Islam that sees a mixing of religion and politics, church and state, in Islam's relationship to governmental structures. *Beyond Jihad* challenges this view. Sanneh notes that the caliphates throughout Islam's history have been relatively short-lived and “never succeeded completely in taking over the religion and legal jurisdiction of Islam” (16). This is not to deny that militancy has had a role in advancing Islam in parts of Africa and elsewhere, he allows. It is simply to say that militant Islam is only one narrative for accounting for the spread of Islam—and not necessarily the dominant narrative in its history taken as a whole. His contention is that it was not through jihad that Islam spread. It was through the patient teaching and example of the clerics and scholars who emphasized not coercion

but invitation, not legalism but freedom of conscience, not power and authority, but submission and worship.

To prove his point, Sanneh conducted extensive field studies on the soil of Africa. He carefully, almost painstakingly, documents the spread of Islam in West Africa, consulting the sources, whether they are written or oral, colonial or native. He leaves no stone unturned in his quest for a historical, rather than ideological accounting of Islam's spread on the continent. Throughout the book, he provides example after example of how the secular leader's aspirations were ultimately subordinated to the moral authority of religion. The majority of clerics and the scholars had little to no ambition in aspiring towards secular governing authority. The higher calling was clearly spiritual jihad, if we can use that term, with an emphasis on spiritual rather than political power as a tool to aid society and foster religious sensibilities. A “potent Qur'an” was considered more powerful than any secular or military power (147–148). “Jihad seeks Islamization of the state; pacifist teaching . . . seeks Islamization of society” (149).

Lutherans will find fascinating parallels in this study on the relationship between church and state—or turban and state, shall we say, in the case of Islam. In many ways, what Sanneh outlines in the cleric's relationship to the state is quite similar to what Lutherans hold in their doctrine of the two realms. Each realm has a definite role in public life that should not transgress on the other. There is a separation between the two, the “secular” from the “sacred” a separa-

tion “between the cleric and the prince” (148) in order to ensure that one does not corrupt or co-opt the other. But this does not mean there is no interaction between the two. As Sanneh notes, religious institutions provide a fence for the state, circumscribing its boundaries. Religion also provides instruction for the conscience of its leaders. Secularism cannot provide a guide for right and wrong, no matter how much it may insist that it can. It can only provide utilitarian guidelines—nor moral direction. On more than one occasion when traveling with Professor Sanneh in Africa, I heard him tell young African scholars who might think that government is the solution to all society’s ills: “Governments cannot love.” The church’s moral and religious instruction is not an add-on to our public life together. As he notes in *Beyond Jihad*, “Laws exist to protect the safety and security we require as political entities, but without moral conscience, our political nature will cause us to manipulate and corrupt the laws we make” (265).

When the state tried to control or manipulate the clerics in Africa for state purposes, as happened often during the colonial period of Africa’s history (nineteenth and twentieth centuries), the cleric either passively resisted, or he moved on. There was no question of using military or political force, which more than one cleric found to be directly opposed to the teaching of the Qur’an. Neither the clerics nor the scholars allowed themselves to be co-opted by the politicians or the jihadists. Sanneh provides documentation from personal conversations with clerics as well as written sources as to

how instances of jihad as a movement of violence brought with it corruption and the pursuit of power, often at the expense of spilled Muslim blood. The jihadists, of course, would assert that those Muslims who were killed were not really Muslims at all—at least by their definition. Sanneh exposes the folly of such an assertion with facts and concrete evidence to the contrary about those Muslim victims of jihad. His counter assertion is that the assumption of contemporary jihadists about Islam’s past violent expansion and glory days is just that—assumption, with little basis in fact. And he again provides concrete historical detail. But he also acknowledges that it is much harder for understated clerics to get the same attention as the dramatic war hero gets in history books (235).

The reader gets the impression that this book was written primarily for the Muslim academic community in the guilds. The novice reader might be bogged down in much technical language and detailed chronologies. Many of the names chronicled will be unfamiliar to most—precisely for the reasons listed above about the “understated clerics.” There is a helpful timeline and glossary to help orient the reader to the subject matter, however, which this reviewer very much appreciated. The extensive notes and bibliography ensure room for further study as well as establishing this book as a tour de force to counter balance the jihadist narrative.

Beyond Jihad teaches us the importance of supporting scholars, clerics, and governments who want to promote the pacifist agenda, such as, for instance

Indonesian or Senegalese Muslims with their roots in Sufism. Many in the West assume, and want to assume, that Islam is violent by nature due to its bloody beginnings. It makes for an easily identifiable enemy. Sanneh encourages a more nuanced approach. Although he is a devout Christian himself, Sanneh does not seek to promote Christianity in this book. His task is historical, not theological. Any Muslim reading this book would be hard pressed to find any Christian bias. In fact, one gets the impression, after reading *Beyond Jihad*, that any open-minded Muslim scholar or cleric will have to admit that this Yale historian has made a convincing case: pacifist Islam is not only a possibility but the path that is most true to the Qur'an and to Islam's history taken as a whole.

After reading this book and being confronted with the facts of the case, the Christian scholar, cleric, or layperson has two options. We can continue to paint Islam as a religion of the sword that can easily be dismissed for its violent tendencies. History would back us up in this, to a certain degree. But this is also more of a political answer to the challenge of Islam than a theological one. There are theological objections to Islam that are substantive and convincing. The other option is that we Christians take up Sanneh's call to promote the pacifist side of Islam. We do so not in order to paint Islam as some idealistic religion that offers a peaceful solution to the problems of the world. Rather, we do so in order to support and encourage those within Islam who are offering this alternative pacifist voice, but who are also looking

for support from outside Islam.

There is always the danger, whatever one's religion, to gravitate towards the use of force and power. *Beyond Jihad* encourages Muslims, but perhaps also Christians, to look beyond the allure of power to the much more potent possibilities of service and submission to God and our neighbor.

Joel C. Elowsky

BECOMING FRIENDS OF TIME: Disability, Timefulness, and Gentle Discipleship. By John Swinton. Baylor University Press, 2016. 245 pages. Hardcover. \$39.95.

Pastor Chris Eldridge suggested that the *Concordia Journal* look at the work of John Swinton, a registered mental nurse and a registered nurse for people with learning disabilities who is also a professor in practical theology and pastoral care at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. This is his latest book (another on my reading list is his *Dementia: Living in the Memories of God*, published by Eerdmans in 2012) and the *Concordia Journal* took Pastor Eldridge up on his suggestion. Am I ever glad they did!

The book is creative, thoughtful, and convicting. Church workers really ought to read this book, not because they will fall into lock-step agreement with Swinton but rather because of the challenges he brings to our tables.

Swinton reflects: "Time has become a commodity to be bought and sold rather than a gift to be received, cherished, and valued. It has come to be valued for its own sake rather than for

the sake of love. Within such a temporal context, those who cannot keep up with the demands of time become vulnerable” (14). “Time comes into existence when God creates the world. . . . The gift of time is in fact a gift of love . . . however, time has fallen. The abusive and oppressive nature of time is indicative of its status as a fallen creature. Time requires redemption. In Christ the redemption of time has been initiated” (15).

Swinton does a relatively quick set of moves through history of the marking of time, beginning with Benedictine time in which regular periods are marked for the worship of God. But when hour hands, minute hands, and second hands came into use, and the marking of time moved from the monastery to the town square, “gone were its spiritual roots and values. Now, time was perceived fully in the service of human beings” (29). Efficiency and productivity become normative for the use of time (we do say that time is money, do we not?). In order for capitalism to flourish, time must become the servant of the economy and of the evolution of society. Therefore, any person who cannot contribute to productivity and economic growth is devalued. “Those unlucky enough to be able to compete effectively in the race were considered to be ‘handicapped in the race for life’” and the word “handicapped” begins to be used in connection with disabilities (41).

From there Swinton paints an impressive picture and makes a solid case: “The church needs to move away from framing the lives of people with profound and complex intellectual disabili-

ties in terms of charity and pastoral care and begin to attend to issues of theology, discipleship and vocation. What might the church look like if people with profound and complex intellectual disabilities were conceived of *as disciples with a distinct vocation—a calling given to them by Jesus?*” (90). Swinton maintains that this shift can happen only when we re-think our understanding of time. This is done by developing a theology of time, which he does.

Swinton also adds to his case by focusing on a sense of vocation: “All people have been given a place, a station, as Luther puts it, within God’s providential narrative, and each vocation is intended as a locus for the dissemination of God’s providential and graceful love” (119). Vocation is participation in the community, “in the body of Jesus and the mission of God. Each vocation is necessary for the upbuilding of the Body, but none are definitive of the Body” (120). This is more controversial than it might look! If the purpose of vocation is “fulfilling Christ’s injunction to love one’s neighbor” (120) quoting Gene Edward Vieth, and if each vocation is necessary and if no single vocation is *the* definitive vocation, then there is no normal or abnormal or abled or disabled, nor is there a valuing of time from a profit or capitalistic perspective in the body of Christ. This is a perspective rarely (at least in my experience) discussed.

I will let Swinton speak for himself here: “In a world where some desire to kill people with disabilities or prevent their coming into existence, gently, hospitable, vocational discipleship that is

open to the possibility that each one of us is the unexpected guest at the banquet of life offers both a counter to oppressive cultural norms, and a beautiful, neatly fitting key that opens a door into a whole new world of time, grace, and being. In that place Jesus waits for us” (129). A whole new world indeed! “What would it be like to be a guest in the life of a person with profound intellectual disability?” (128).

If one wishes to be challenged to think and feel outside of our usual normative cultural and even theological categories, this book will do it. Time, as a gift, is no longer equated with money, and all, as Saint Benedict once said, are to be treated as Christ.

That does bring me to the personal conviction. My spouse’s youngest sister lives in an out-of-town group home for those who are not as intellectually gifted as the normative society wishes them to be. (Note I have abandoned “developmentally disabled.”) Over the years we visit and, among other things, we take her out for dinner. I recognize that I get impatient with her use of and sense of time. In her world, my concern about being “on time” is not a value. And, besides, she moves slowly in putting on her coat and getting ready to go. I need her to enter my world as my guest. I have never considered what it might be like to enter hers as her guest. Our next visit we will see, I pray, as the Spirit leads.

This book needs to be read with an open mind with as few of the usual normative critiques that might be natural for an LCMS pastor or church worker. Try it. You may not like it, but I think

you will, as I was and continue to be, enriched—profoundly.

Bruce M. Hartung

FROM TABOO TO DELIGHT: Ethics of Sex. Edited by Gifford Grobien. Concordia Publishing House, 2017. 224 pages. Paper. \$16.99.

From Taboo to Delight: Ethics of Sex is a collection of essays based upon presentations made in 2015 at the National LCMS Campus Ministry Conference. But don’t let the title of the book mislead you. The book’s title does not do justice to the theological depth and practical application on the topic of sexuality.

My principal criticism is the book’s title. Sexual activity between a husband and wife was never taboo. God created Adam and Eve to live an intimate life together, which included sex (Gn 2:24). This one-flesh relationship is God’s delight and our delight. The problem is that this delight, that which gives God glory, has been corrupted by sin. Therefore, the linear progression in the book’s title should not be from taboo to delight but from delight to taboo.

In addition we should be careful about using the word taboo. Gifford Grobien, the general editor, suggests that a more appropriate word would be sin. And he goes on to make the case that “sexual fulfillment is not merely or ultimately about achieving sexual pleasure and hyper levels of it. To approach sex in this way is highly reductionist—not only of sexual fulfillment itself, but of those who participate in such sexual activity. It is to reduce the body—whether of one-

self or of others—to an object of sexual desire” (215).

Well said. Yet, the book’s title seems to suggest something else. The problem with sexuality is that we have taken what God has delighted in, and turned it into something that does not give him glory. The goal of godly sexuality is not primarily delight or selfish pleasure. The goal is to think, speak, and behave in ways that give glory to God (1 Cor 10:31). And that is the contextual goal of this book. The various authors address contemporary topics of sexuality from a theological perspective that helps the reader to think, speak, and behave in ways that will give God glory.

I want to highlight three areas that demonstrate the book’s theological depth and application. First, the discussion of Christian sex education by Matthew Rueger. He addresses the challenges that face us due to the humanistic ideology of “value free” sex education. Rueger says that “the goal of Christian sex education actually has less to do with sex than it does with salvation in Christ” (138). Second, Robert Weise describes how the New Gnosticism has influenced the transgender community. He states that the fundamental problem is that they see “God outside the biblical, authoritative texts of the Old and New Testaments” (191). Which means you can worship anything you want, you can turn anything into a god, you can define god according to your own standards. And that leads to—idol worship. David Kind’s discussion of polygamy makes the case that even “Moses was not interested in giving an exhaustive genealogy, but



rather in portraying the idolatry of man, showing mankind’s sin and rebellion in the form of human accomplishment apart from faith in God” (62).

More than anything else, the contributing authors firmly stand upon the solid foundation of Christ as they address the various issues relating to sexuality. Therefore, I suggest a more appropriate title for the book: *Human Sexuality: To the Glory of God*.

Mark Rockenbach

PATRON SAINT AND PROPHET: Jan Hus in the Bohemian and German Reformations. By Phillip N. Haberkern. *Oxford Studies in Historical Theology*. Oxford University Press, 2016. 352 pages. Hardcover. \$74.00.

The study of monuments erected to past events and persons has come into vogue. Such literary and artistic monuments usually say more about the creator's time and interest than about the subject's time and interest. That is true of the dramatic figure of the late-fourteenth, early-fifteenth century Bohemian reformer Jan Hus, who constructed a program of preaching reform from earlier Bohemian streams of thought that highlighted the Lord's Supper and called for restoration of the chalice to the laity along with the reform proposals initiated a generation earlier by the Englishman John Wyclif.

Haber Kern sketches Hus's own life and execution for heresy at the Council of Constance in 1415 with a finely honed examination of the sources. He then embarks on an exploration of the emphases of elements of his teaching and particularly his death as a martyr of the Roman antichrist in the creation and development of the several wings of the Bohemian Reformation in the course of the fifteenth century. Another chapter in the reception and use of Hus's biography and teaching opened in 1519 at the Leipzig Disputation in which Johann Eck accused his archrival Martin Luther of being a Hussite. Luther's initial antipathy turned to admiration and a recognition of what Hus's teaching had in common with his own, as well as an acknowledgment of where they differed. Hus became the archetype of reform aimed at ending the domination of Western Christendom by the papacy.

Haber Kern continues by opening up a little known aspect of the reception of Hus. Another of Luther's sharpest critics

in the Roman Catholic camp, Johannes Cochlaeus, turned from using Hus as the basis of a condemnation of Luther for heresy to citing the Hussite Compacta of 1436 as a basis for recognizing that Hus had little to do with Luther and that Hus could be used as a weapon against Luther. Cochlaeus developed his new thesis in a critique against Luther's student Johann Agricola, who had furthered the Wittenberg interpretation of Hus as a reformer and critic of the Roman antichrist. Haber Kern concludes by analyzing Matthias Flacius Illyricus's development of the same theme in several of his historical works.

This volume is a welcome contribution to the historiography of the calls for and approaches to reform in the late middle ages and the onset of the early modern period. Haber Kern assesses the image of Hus in written manuscripts and books, songs, and visual representations, so that readers have access to the broader field of propagating ideas in this time. This book is a most welcome broadening of our perspective on an important figure of the Reformation era and the manner in which the interpretations of his thought and life story served following generations as they saw in their image of Hus helpful aid for conveying their own ideas.

Robert Kolb

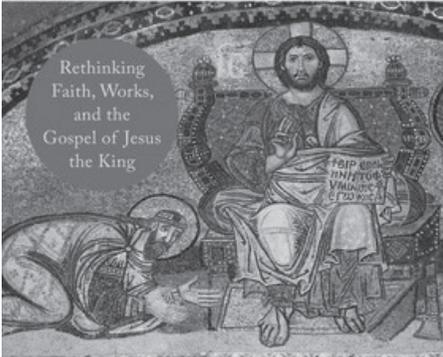
**SALVATION BY ALLEGIANCE
ALONE: Rethinking Faith, Works,
and the Gospel of Jesus the King.**

By Matthew W. Bates. Baker Academic, 2017. 234 pages. Paper. \$24.99.

In this book, Bates tackles the issue of faith from a biblical perspective, espe-

MATTHEW W. BATES
Foreword by Scot McKnight

SALVATION BY ALLEGIANCE ALONE



cially its place in salvation. Bates's book both assumes and argues that salvation is by faith alone. But how should such saving faith be understood? *Faith* and *belief* in English, he argues, both encapsulate the fundamental dimensions of faith as trust and assent to God's truth, but on the whole are potentially "misleading" (3)—especially since in modern parlance *having faith* often means mere intellectual assent or a nameless optimism. One recalls the story of the tightrope walker suspended several stories above the ground with no net. He walks it several times, the crowds cheering below. Then he walks it with a wheelbarrow balanced on the tightrope. He asks if the crowd believes he can walk it with the wheelbarrow full, and they enthusiastically shout, "Yes, we believe!" But then he asks if any of them will come sit in the wheelbarrow while he

walks it across. Bates's argument is that saving faith, according to Scripture, is faith that gets into the wheelbarrow.

Lexically, Bates proffers that Greek *pistis* ("faith") does mean belief in something as true as well as trust, but also has a wider range of meanings like fidelity, loyalty, or *allegiance*—especially where the question is *who* is Lord/Ruler or when one is called to follow one ruler to the exclusion of others. Biblically, he argues, the gospel is the news that the preexistent Son became man, died as a substitutionary atonement for our sins, was buried, resurrected, appeared to many, is enthroned at God's right hand, and will return for the day of judgment (esp. 27–75). Adjacent to this, Bates argues that, while faith has many aspects in the intellect and confidence, the faith that receives this full gospel is best summarized as allegiance. "The gospel reaches its zenith with Jesus's installation and sovereign rule as the Christ, the king. As such, *faith* in Jesus is best described as *allegiance* to him as king" (77). This language of description is key: Bates does not dispute that faith involves the intellect or confident trust in God's promise. His argument is that faith in Jesus as Lord—or at least the kind that Scripture describes as salvific—is "embodied" and "enacted" (86 and others) in siding with and following this Lord against other lords. He does not argue that salvation requires "faith plus something," but that saving faith is necessarily embodied and enacted in fidelity.

This has a potentially helpful effect on relating *faith* alone to the NT's warnings, commands, and future judgment

according to works. To summarize Bates's arguments by extending his analogy: in a war between kings, there are many imperfect and bungling citizens/servants of the king who nevertheless remain his people because they are on his side and he is on theirs; and they will receive the benefits of his kingship and his victory over the enemy despite their continued failings (i.e., sins) if they remain in his camp. Those who defect to the enemy camp (i.e., apostasy) will, however, be destroyed with that enemy if they do not return to ally again with their king before the final day of conflict. In this framework, the "works" according to which one is judged have more to do with one's relationship of fidelity to the person of Jesus than one's measuring up to any particular code of law. The benefits of Christ are either had or lost by virtue of being joined to him in faith and life. Indeed, Bates refuses to separate moral from ceremonial law in the OT or to sift out a *nova lex* from the NT as a definitive eschatological checklist: the judgment will determine through the shape of our lives (i.e., works) in Christ where our true allegiance lies. He also holds that allegiance means that works are not counted atomistically, thus eschewing concerns of whether I have done "enough" and merely calling for continued repentance in allegiance to Christ.

Much here is reminiscent of Melancthon's concern (Ap IV, 48–60) that we not allow saving faith to mean mere intellectual assent (cf. Jas 2:19); Bates is trying to address similar issues from another angle. Indeed, he could have deepened his description of faith as allegiance in some places. His distinction between *disloyalty* (sinning as one of Christ's people) and *treason* (apostasy from Christ) mentions 1 John 1:8–10. But confession and forgiveness fits on the same metaphor: for when we confess sin we are taking God's side against ourselves by acknowledging that our actions are wrong and laying them at the mercy of the God we own as true even when we stand in the wrong. In this way, confessing our own disloyalties is itself an enacted form of faith.

Bates's argument is engagingly written, biblically grounded, and its tone is ecumenically friendly—though his view requires him to reject some tenets of classic Calvinism. His angle on the matter is very fruitful, and—even where one disagrees—stimulates conversation on a topic that is perennially important not just for interdenominational dialogue but for the life of all the Lord's people as we seek to be faithful in our time and place.

James B. Prothro
Trinity Lutheran Church,
Park Hills, Missouri

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